





SEAN REINERT

FINALLY ENJOYING
SUCCESS OF THE
CYNIC

Story by Waleed Rashidi
Photos by Alex Solca

Second chances in the music industry are incredibly rare. The opportunities afforded to reinvent a band and reintroduce the music to an entirely new audience are almost never available. However, such can't be said for progressive metal legends Cynic. The Florida-based hybrid act had a brief career, yet made a long-lasting impression in the early '90s.

Raised from the underground death and thrash scenes that proliferated heavy music circles in the state, Cynic had broken through with its debut album (and only full-length in its career up to that point), *Focus*. The band took the muscular leanings of metal, propelled by a young drummer named Sean Reinert, and merged it with the technicality of progressive rock, jazz, and myriad outside influences. The combination resulted in a truly unique product that shattered all expectations in a decidedly homogenous metal scene. But Cynic didn't last long, breaking up after the release of *Focus*.

Reinert had already been moonlighting in the band **Death**, an immensely popular and influential death metal band from which he gained even more popularity—performing on the band's *Human* album and touring with them.

Reinert went on to try his hand at a wider variety of styles, recording with everyone from the acoustic-based indie musician Mia Doi Todd to the textural, melodic duo Aeon Spoke, not to mention composing material for television programs and films.

However, opportunity came knocking once again a couple of years ago. Cynic re-formed, and after over a dozen years of performing in other capacities, Reinert was back in the band, performing at large festivals throughout Europe. Once again audiences were treated to Reinert's signature fast, fluid, and intelligent playing, primarily on the band's older material, but also on a few new songs. And many agreed that the sheer musical magic and footprint that had left such an indelible impression over a decade earlier was still there. "The response was insane and the energy was so great," Reinert says.

This energy was downright inspirational, and within months Cynic had several new songs in the can, with the

intention of releasing the long-delayed follow-up to *Focus*. Reinert demoed three songs with the band, cutting the drums at Joey Heredia's studio in Los Angeles. The group then shopped the demos, garnering a massive response, and eventually signed in early 2008. By the summer of last year, Cynic was in the studio recording their second album, *Traced In Air*, which finally saw the light of day in late 2008, some fifteen years after their debut full-length.

"It's a trip on all levels," says Reinert. "But in a weird way, it's a second chance to relive or to get a different side of the Cynic experience. There's an audience now. The scene has grown so much since 1993, when you wouldn't be considered death metal if you didn't have an aggressive vocal part throughout your song. You can be on [radio station] KROQ now because you've got these Orange County bands that go from screaming to these melodic verses and choruses. I don't think it's perceived as being as extreme as it was in the past. I think the audience is a little smarter as far as the technicality of the music. I think that the production qualities have gotten much better as well. So right now the musical environment is very fertile for the stuff that we're doing."



MD: After so many years, there's a new Cynic album available. What are your thoughts on that?

Sean: For many years people asked, "Are you ever going to re-form and put out an album?" I always doubted that it would happen, because Jason [Gobel], Paul [Masvidal], and me—the core of the

we've got to make sure this is right if we do this. There's this kind of legacy, amazingly enough, and we don't want to tarnish it. So to come back and have this new-found enthusiasm, and hear people talking about *Focus* as this landmark record, is such a trip.

MD: Did you understand how important

recent session for *Traced In Air* feel from the *Focus* sessions? Is this a continuation from where you left off, or is this a whole new Cynic?

Sean: There's no way it could be the same Cynic, and there's no way it couldn't have certain trace elements, even if it was a completely different

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group—all went in different directions when we broke up. So I never saw that aligning again, and certainly not for all the right reasons. Cynic had so much integrity that we would never want to re-form any other reasons than it just being right—wanting to play music and explore, and having something to say. So, yeah, it's a trip. Even thinking about doing the reunion, it was like, Wow, you know,

Focus was before you re-formed?

Sean: Well, we always believed in it. But I never imagined that—as I found out when I talked to kids at shows—they'd be so moved by the music and had tried to play it. They seem to get so much out of it, which to me is the most humbling experience—and that's the best payback, too. It's like, it wasn't all for nothing.

MD: How close or distant does this most

thing. Being so close to it, it's hard to make these sorts of judgments. It's definitely a more mature Cynic, definitely a more song-based Cynic, which I think is something we didn't have before. We were struggling as songwriters; we knew how to write parts and riffs, and we knew how to rip on our instruments. But as far as writing whole songs, I think we were in a learning process at the point

SEAN'S KIT

Drums: Sonor Delite, walnut finish

- A. 16x16 tom
- B. 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ x14 Artist Series brass snare
- C. 8x8 tom
- D. 10x10 tom
- E. 12x12 tom
- F. 14x14 tom
- G. 18x20 bass drum

Cymbals: Sabian

- 1. 14" HHX Stage hats
- 2. 16" HHX Medium crash
- 3. 21" HHX Legacy ride
- 4. 21" Jack DeJohnette Encore ride
- 5. 17" HHX Evolution crash
- 6. 13" HHX Evolution hats (mounted on X-Hat)
- 7. 18" HHX Legacy crash

Hardware: Sonor stands, Tama Iron Cobra Power Glide double pedal (springs set as tight as possible)

Heads: Evans G2 coated on snare batter, Hazy 300 snare-side (tuned open—not too tight), clear G2s on tom batters with clear G1s underneath (bottoms tuned higher than tops), EQ3 on bass drum batter, Vintage Logo Vivid head on bass drum front (tight batter, with foam inside for dampening)

Sticks: GrindStix 5B model, hickory with wood tip

Electronics: DrumKat 4.0, Roland SPD-S and V-Drums, various sound modules and gadgets



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when that first record was made.

As for the recording session for the new disc, since our musical skills, production skills, and recording skills are so much better than they were back then, there's a certain wide-eyed-ness that you don't have. But in the same respect, having this opportunity again, I'm enjoying it much more. I'm so thankful and blessed to be in this creative situation.

You learn after working with a lot of people that some of them don't deserve to be where they are, they don't have the skills. So when you have the chance to work where the music is great, the production is great, the studio is great, and the record company is great, it's like, Oh, *this* is what it's all about. So I've been enjoying it much more.

MD: You cut the pre-production at Joey Heredia's studio. But tell me about the actual album tracking sessions.

Sean: We mixed and tracked at a studio in Glendale called Broken Wave. They have a nice A room with an SSL board. And then we mixed in their B room, which has a Neve 88R. The guy we hired to mix and record was Warren Riker. He's an amazing engineer, a three-time Grammy winner with Lauryn Hill in the '90s. It's just crazy, old-school analog all the way. There were twenty-four inputs

for the drums. There were room mics he had hollowed out and caved out from behind my drumset. They were like

purest analog.

Warren also did some stuff with transient filters on my drums. We even set up different kits for certain sections of songs. We did a lot of other experimenting, like recording toms in the bathroom and getting these crazy slap-back echo effects for treatments and sections. He was kind of a mad scientist like that.

MD: How long did you spend tracking the album?

Sean: My parts took four days, and that includes comping the tracks. I'd do about five takes of the tune, and be like, "Wow, okay, that was a really good verse section," and just put them together. Getting sounds took the first day and a half. The miking technique was just insane...tenting off the floor toms with blankets to suck the low end in a certain direction. I was like, Well...all *right*. It doesn't look good, but it sounds awesome!

MD: How different was your approach to tracking a Cynic album this time around?

Sean: After Cynic, I got into a lot of pocket playing, really bare-bones kick, snare, hat, and ride, just locking it down. But for this, the Cynic hat came back out. I was just doing what I do. I think back then I might've said, "Oh, check out this cool Vinnie Colaiuta lick. I could throw this in here."

REINERT ON RECORD

HIS BEST

Cynic Traced In Air // **Aeon Spoke** Above The Buried Cry // **Cynic** Focus // **Death** Human // **Aghora** Formless // **Gordian Knot** Gordian Knot // **Aghora** Aghora // **C-187** Collision

HIS FAVORITES

Allan Holdsworth Secrets (Vinnie Colaiuta) // **Chick Corea** Inside Out (Dave Weckl) // **Trilok Gurtu** Living Magic (Trilok Gurtu) // **Pat Metheny** Letter From Home (Paul Wertico) // **John Zorn** Naked City (Joey Baron) // **John Coltrane** The Complete Impulse Studio Recordings (Elvin Jones) // **Allan Holdsworth** Atavachron (Gary Husband) // **Tribal Tech** Tribal Tech (Joey Heredia)



walled off a low-end tunnel, and there were five inputs for the kick drum. I was like, really? But then he put it up and I was like, *Wow*, what a sound, and there's not one sample on that drum. It's the

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This time I was more like, If it calls for that, I'll play it. It's definitely more about serving the music versus serving my part or my fill.

I was a lot guiltier of overplaying when I was younger. That said, it's definitely about the energy and pumping it up with these big dynamic shifts. There's a little bit of restraint, but at the same time, it's about playing a bit more when the music calls for it.

MD: How did you get involved in the Florida metal drumming scene?

Sean: When I was ten I started with a good teacher, and I had an older sister who was into classic rock, so it was John Bonham and Alex Van Halen, playing along to their records.

Then, when I was twelve, it was the Rush phase. It was like Neil Peart *everything*. Then I started getting into Metallica, Megadeth, and Anthrax until I was about fourteen. But at the same time, I was still studying privately, and I was reading music. My teacher turned me on to Chick Corea, and I saw a Dave Weckl clinic when I was fifteen. I always seemed to have one foot in this fusion/electric jazz world and the other in the thrash metal and underground scene.

When I was thirteen, I met Paul Masvidal at my school. He was really the only guitar player there, and we formed a band when I was fourteen. We've been writing songs together since we were thirteen, which is pretty crazy.

When I was fifteen, I auditioned for a performing arts high school in Miami. I

was accepted, so half of my day was spent doing academics, while the other half was spent sight-reading and playing in wind ensemble and jazz band. It was two years of that, which got me onto the track of school.

At the same time, Paul and I were doing Cynic, and that kind of took off a little bit. After I graduated, I got hired by Chuck Schuldiner to do a record for the group Death. I was registered at Miami-Dade Community College, but I had to keep withdrawing to do a record or tour with Chuck. That went on for four or five years, which was odd considering it was only a two-year school. [laughs]

MD: Eventually you started doing Death full-time.

Sean: Yes. We did a couple of tours, including a big US tour.

MD: At the time Cynic was more on the darker tip, right?

Sean: Yeah, we were more of this power thrash band, because we never had the death metal vocal. Paul was screaming vocals by default because we couldn't find anybody who was good enough. And if you were going to be in Cynic, you had to play an instrument. We didn't consider the vocals an instrument. It was like, well, if we found somebody who totally ripped on something, and then could do vocals, then that would be great. Otherwise, vocals were a secondary thing to us.

Chuck was writing a lot of good music at the time, and Death was a lot of fun to work with. It was a win-win situation for

us. We knew it was going to take time away from Cynic. But in the end, we felt it was going to not only help our careers but help promote Cynic too.

MD: To a lot of people, you're still Sean from Death.

Sean: That's true more often than not. People think I've been out of the scene for a while, which is understandable, and so when I hear these people still talking about Death's *Human* record, I'm like, Wow, really? I can remember losing sleep at night, thinking, God, am I good enough to play on this record? It was my first real date. I'd been in studios before, but this was a *real* record. I just remember thinking, Oh my God, I hope I don't mess up. Thankfully things went very well. Those songs were all one take, and it was so much fun to record. I just remember thinking after it was all done, Why did I trip out about it? I was very thankful to Chuck for giving me the opportunity.

MD: Tell me about where you were at that point in your career.

Sean: When I listen to Death's *Human* record and hear my playing on it, I'm reminded that I was in a different place, because my thought process was different. Back then I was thinking in notation, I could see the bars and the beats divide. I was thinking math. I would start fills like two bars before the downbeat, and I'd be like, Let's hope this thing lands! Now I'm more reactive to the music. I'm really into listening a lot more. I think I'm a little more sensitive and I'm not thinking, Well, I can fit a quintuplet here or a

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thirty-second double there. The brain's a little different. But the style, when I listen to it, is still there.

It's a good mix of the kind of double bass heavy metal stuff I'm known for, with some syncopated sophistication and some fusion-y stuff going on. That's what I was going for. It's a merging of those styles, the fusion and the metal.

There's a tune on the new record, "Evolutionary Sleeper," and the main groove, even though there's double bass on it, is reggaeton or Turkish dance music. I brought those kinds of elements to the music that you may not even realize, but when you break the rhythm down, it's like, Oh, how funny, that's just a 6/8 djembe vibe.

MD: Where does Aeon Spoke [Reinert's ethereal rock project with Paul Masvidal] fit into your musical continuum?

Sean: After Cynic broke up in late 1994, in 1996 Paul moved out to LA to go to GIT. I went to the University Of Miami to get my degree in composition and music theory. So I stayed there because I wanted to get into TV and film scoring; that was and still is my goal. After a year of that, and getting straight A's, I was like, I'm ready to do something, I don't want to be in school. I thought it was great. I could score for an orchestra, and I wrote for these chamber orchestras at school, but I was done with all my theory and my ear-training classes. It was costing my Mom ten grand a semester. I didn't care about having a diploma.

So I moved out to LA and took some classes at UCLA in the film-scoring program. And before I knew it, Paul and I were writing songs for Aeon Spoke. I got a job writing for the Discovery Channel, for an *Animal Rescue Kids* episode. Then I scored an animation short that won the Student Academy Awards in 2000. At the same time we were doing the Aeon Spoke thing, which started taking off. We got music placed in TV shows like *Smallville* and *One Tree Hill*, and we finally said okay, we're going to turn our attention to becoming an actual live band. Then in 2006, we did the debut of Aeon Spoke.

At that time, that was where I wanted to be as a drummer. In 1999 I was fed up not only with the music business, but with playing super-fast and aggressive. It just didn't interest me. So I went back to basics. I was listening to bands like Level 42 and to disco, funk, R&B—just pocket

playing, laying it down. With Aeon Spoke, that's kind of where it was. I could just lay down this nice pocket. And funny enough, it's been quite challenging. It's about making it feel good.

MD: You recently toured with Cynic using pre-recorded vocals. How does that change your drumming dynamic, if at all?

Sean: With the click, obviously, you're a slave to the tick-tock, which can be good and bad. You know you're going to be playing the same tempo, and that's great, but if you get off, oh boy.

MD: For a live situation, do you want to play to a click?

Sean: I prefer not to. I prefer to keep that push and pull; let the fast parts speed up a little bit, let the slow part slow down a little more. I'm all for that organic energy. For the faster songs, if I'm not warmed up, it's great to know I'm going to start at a certain tempo instead of letting my adrenaline dictate it. But no, I prefer to keep it live.

MD: You maintain a groove amidst the double bass kicking and the technical intricacies so well in Cynic. Tell me about finding that groove and really understanding what groove is in the first place.

Sean: Well, thanks. Again, it's a cliché, but it's true: It's about serving the music and keeping time. And if you're completely losing the time because you're playing this killer fill, that's going to take every other listener except another drummer away from the song. I reached a certain point where I got over the fact that I'm not the fastest drummer in the world. And I decided that I would play every kind of music that I could, and put myself into every kind of situation, regardless of whether or not I felt like I was able to do it as well as the guy before me. And you learn so much just by listening and playing in different situations. It allows you to know that if you do this here, it's going to get in a certain guy's way, and if you do this, it'll get in this other guy's way.

When you're sensitive to the people you're playing with and the environment in which you're creating, you can do what you do best, and that's driving the band and really leading the way. If you can get even quieter in that quiet part, then that loud part is going to be even more extreme and even bigger-sounding. Playing in different situations, listening, and using your ears is key.

