

## Side-Line - interview (English)

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Belgian artist Jef Janssen started with music when he was a kid, walking around in the backyard with his Fisher Price tape recorder machine. A bit later, he became a nine-year old boy with a big guitar on his back, that was forced to go to musical class, because it was part of his parents' 'educational plan'. It helped him a lot composing his own music. It's also the reason the Spanish guitar is very prominent in ART OF EMPATHY's music. So ART OF EMPATHY started with the guitar strums Jef collected on tape, of which he made songs, short after his studies. A few albums were released, but the new opus "End Of I" is the first new album in ten years. The work, released on Aenaos Records, is a true artistic piece mixing elements of Neo-Folk together with Cinematographic music.

**'IT'S ALL ABOUT THE AUDIO WAVES HITTING YOUR HEART AND SOUL'**

**Q: ART OF EMPATHY is already active for numerous years now, but the new album "End Of I" puts definitely you back on the map. What have been the main facts in the ART OF EMPATHY history so far?**

Jef: Actually, the greatest time to run this project was this startup-period, in the early 2000's. The internet was booming, but music was not yet streamable. It's a bit odd to say, but that means literally: it had more value, because in these days people were not yet overloaded by tremendous amounts of internet entertainment. Getting in touch with like minded people from all over the world (mostly through Myspace), was very exciting.

The following two full albums were, of course, two other main facts to mention here. Both of them are still exactly the result of what I was aiming for, regardless of the opinion of audience or critics.

Another fact might be the confirmation I got from several listeners that ART OF EMPATHY is an unique project with an unique feel and sound, apart from all labels and musical dogma's.

**Q: Your music has been introduced as a mix between Neo-Folk and Dark-Wave while I think "End Of I" clearly covers much more influences, revealing a truly eclectic style. How do you perceive your own composition and what do you consider as your own sources of inspiration?**

Jef: The music of ART OF EMPATHY is not created during trial and error jamming, but rather mentally planned. By the start-up of a new album, I mostly know exactly what I am working towards. So the music is already finished in my head, but it still needs a lot of work to translate it to audiowaves.

In the future, I might do things in a different way, because I'm curious what would come from collaboration or experimenting. Losing control would be new for me, but might be also exciting and fun.

Musically, at the start it was my goal to combine the sound of nature inspired Dark-Folk like Empyrium and Dark-Wave like Dargaard. The result, however, was of course influenced a lot by more than those styles. My all time favorite band, for instance, is Type O Negative. This band also had a true, unique sound. In terms of songwriting, they managed to find a nice balance in between catchy, pop-tunes and progressive songwriting, which I adore.

**Q: ART OF AMPATHY is a solo-project so how did the entire process from composition till recording and production happened? Do you follow an established pattern to compose your songs –including the lyrical content and recording/production of the vocals?**

Jef: The album concept is already roughly finished in my head at the startup. I think of it a lot in the months before the creation process. It is exciting to find lyrical ideas while reading, watching movies or documentaries (for the use of samples) that fit the puzzle I'm creating.

So piece by piece, it comes all together in this one concept (album) and, except for some adjustments here and there, I work towards a clear goal. The months in between the 'album in my head' and the 'album on the shelf' are quite heavy and intense. It takes a lot of time and effort to write lyrics, record, sing... For instance: every choral voice is individually recorded by myself.

It is not only very intense for myself, but also for my entourage. So a different approach imposes itself. What will happen might be more relaxing and fun.

**Q: I noticed "End Of I" is dealing about consciousness and in a way a critical reflection about the Western lifestyle. It makes me think to the themes evoked by Belgian psychiatrist Dirk De Wachter, but what are the lyrics all about and how do you transpose the ideas into sounds and songs?**

Jef: Consciousness might be indeed a key word in the "End Of I" album, and yes, I live in the 'West', so it is from the point of view of the Western lifestyle. On the one hand, I perceive the world with my senses and my guts are telling me things. I start to see dots and try to connect those.

Luckily, there are a some smart people walking this earth who see a lot more of these dots and help me with connecting them. So yes, people like Dirk De Wachter, Paul Verhaeghe, Rutger Bregman, Alain de Botton are a big help in finding a way throughout the chaos that surrounds us. More and more, I also get deeply touched by the wisdom from ancient philosophers or spiritual teachings of people like Eckhart Tolle.

**Q: The title of your album is however intriguing and interesting as it reflects to me 'individualism', a world where people are no longer connected with each other except by social media platforms. So this album can be seen as a soundtrack denouncing individualism... or a requiem for the fall of capitalism? I probably have to much imagination, but what did you really try to express and what did it say about your own perception of life?**

Jef: I really do not despise individualism or capitalism. It's only the fact that they have become so excessive that makes me believe that I might be time for a turning point.

Recently I read following quote: 'Freedom without discipline equals chaos. Discipline without freedom equals tyranny.' I guess, in the West, it has become more of a chaotic thing. Many people drift off and as a social mammal it might be a good thing to find a bit more connection with fellow humans or the world as a whole. The fact that this instability is used by some greedy psychopaths to feed their greed and ego is a thing I despise. That's also clearly translated into my music. But I don't want to spend much more time on that and rather choose to focus on the search for a new balance.

**Q: How do you as solo-artist transpose your music to the stage? And what might we expect from your live performances?**

Jef: I would love to do some live performances, but as I witnessed some nice shows from several (even huge) acts in the Dark-Folk or Ambient scene: I don't think I can put much effort in it. The input would be too big in comparison to the output. With Covid-19 on top of that, it is not the right time anyway. I always refer to a project like Summoning, who inspired and enlightened a lot of music lovers from all around the globe, without any live performance. It's all about the audio waves hitting your heart and soul.

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Stéphane Froidcoeur - [Side-Line](#)