

When did you first develop the idea about what Liturgy should be musically and ideologically, and when did your ideas first begin to come into fruition?

I began recording black metal on a four track in 2003 when I was 18. I had a short lived project called The Return with a friend who did the vocals. We made a few demos and parted ways. I then made a tape, called The Paranoiac Miracle, on my own, under the name Liturgy. I circulated it to friends, but that was it. But the real Aha moment came later, when I suddenly decided to make a kind of black metal that conveyed a vibe that was ecstatic rather than grim, and when I came up with the accelerating blast beat that I named "burst beat" to replace the ordinary blast. That was I guess my sophomore year in college, in 2005. I made a recording - this time using an MBox and laptop rather than a cassette 4-track - and called it Immortal Life. It felt very significant to be at the time, but I had no friends and didn't really show it to anyone. For a long time this project was a secret, almost. All the material for Renihilation was composed long before Immortal Life was even finally released, in 2008. In a way, the much bigger struggle for this project was working up the courage to show it to people and get a band to play the music.

Initially, Liturgy was set up as a one man band but has since expanded into a four-piece. Why did you decide to change the band dynamic? Were there things you wanted to achieve that could only be done utilising a full line-up, or simply the fact that you wanted to perform your music live?

I actually performed live as a solo project, and even did a tour in the southwest in 2007 with the bands of a few friends. But the music was much different from what was on the record. I'd use a lot of the same motifs, but then loop them and chant over them. It was all quasi-improvised. Sometimes I'd perform with a drum machine, sometimes just guitar, voice and loop pedal. At a certain point I knew it was time to pull together a full band. I wanted to be able to play the actual music that I'd composed.

Aesthetically, Liturgy are vastly different from the usual black metal affair of forests, corpsepaint, spikes, inverted crosses, nuns frigging themselves etc. Was this done on purpose to further distance yourselves from the clichéd black metal pack?

No, it's the opposite. It's not like we're dressing up as a non-black-metal band. It just never occurred to us to dress as one because we just aren't like that. It does take some courage to play metal shows and have such a stripped down look, but I couldn't really imagine doing the alternative.

You have tagged Liturgy's sound as "Pure Transcendental Black Metal", which I think you'll agree is nothing new in terms of how a lot of black metal bands tend to market themselves. What exactly are you trying to communicate with this tag?

One day I found a beautiful picture of some clouds on the internet, and then I thought I'd run it through photoshop and type PURE TRANSCENDENTAL BLACK

METAL over it. It looked wonderful and I was very happy with it. I can give all different kinds of commentary on what it means, and I enjoy giving them, but there's no ultimate meaning to pin down. It just strikes me as right. I agree with you that the phrase is really nothing new. Other people say differently, but you're right. I've seen Burzum described as "transcendental black metal".

Your music is very different in feel to the majority of bands within this genre where instead of invoking visions of forests, mountains etc, invokes the sinister sprawl of an urban city environment; of industry, of the extreme depravity of human nature found in so many cities around the world. Is this something that you were going for when writing the material for "Renihilation", or have I missed the point completely?

I can't say I was going for an invocation of urban life, though that may soak into the music naturally through where it's made. And I've long been a fan of the sort of "chaotic beautiful noise" vibe you find in a band like Lightning Bolt, though I'd never cite them directly as an influence exactly. We just want to invoke a sort of ecstatic frenzy that's very spiritual in its own way. And I certainly think that the imagery and affect of traditional black metal has been driven into the ground, used up to the point of being a cliché. I'd like to think that we're touching the essence of something that Euronymous or Fenriz may have felt and producing something directly from that, in the way appropriate for us and our surroundings, rather than imitating a prefabricated aesthetic.

Can you tell me something about the lyrical concept behind "Renihilation"? What is it that you are trying to convey?

Renihilation is the annihilation of an annihilation.

Do you think that concept is equally as important as music in black metal?

Yes. I think black metal is a genre for which the culture is just as important as the music. And that this is true more so for black metal than perhaps for any other genre. Or at least most other genres. There are other American bands who are only interested in the music, who are also doing interesting things. But they don't always see that what makes black metal the global phenomenon that it is, the reason that it resonates with a wider culture more so than most extreme music, is because there's some question mark hidden in the culture of it. And that shouldn't be ignored; on the contrary it stands in need of deeper exploration.

Although your music is fast, furious and dark for the most part, it is often interspersed with moments of glimmering light. How important is this contrast of light and dark for Liturgy? Is this where the 'Transcendental' tag comes in? Does it represent something beyond just music?

For me it represents an attitude towards life. To me, my music represents a baseline of nihilism and despair together with a resolution to rise above it and face life honestly. Ultimately hatred, misanthropy, self-destruction and suicide

aren't good. Insofar as black metal represents these things, I consider Liturgy to be a break with black metal. Our music represents an affirmation of life and refusal to remain addicted to neurosis or to hide behind either nostalgia or any kind of generally pissed off attitude.

Production-wise “Renihilation” reminds me of classic albums like “A Blaze in the Northern Sky” and “Nattens Madrigal”, was this something that you were looking for from the start? What is it about this style of production you like so much?

When Colin recorded us, I asked him to make it sound like a cross between Nattens Madrigal and Jane Doe. He said that would be hard since they're recorded and mixed in opposite ways. But that was the template, and after trying out a few things that didn't work, we found a way to make it work. I love how the production came out.

Rhythmically Liturgy sound totally different to just about every single band out there. Can you explain the concept behind what you have coined the ‘burst beat’ and how it differs from the blast beat?

the burst beat is a sort of super-blast beat. It stands to the blast beat as calculus stands to algebra. There are accelerations, decelerations, and what I call ruptures or phase transitions; moments where the tempo abruptly changes. So it's not holding down the tempo of the song, but is actually following the harmonies. If a certain chord calls for an acceleration, I tell Greg to accelerate there, etc. The accelerations and decelerations are composed through listening to the harmonies. So the beat expresses a level of intensity, rather than just holding down the tempo. To me it's a logical progression from the blast beat. A sort of resurrection if you will - the blast beat is so static and anemic, it's like death. The burst beat uses the same material but is very alive, painful and also joyful.

Alongside your studio output Liturgy are no strangers to the live arena. You have described your live assaults as “primordial collective joy”, so can you explain what it is you personally get out of playing this music to an audience?

I think that's the most that a performance can be. Entrancing enough that everyone involved is totally immersed in the present. There's something really healthy about that - for a time, letting go of your individuality, your worries, plans for the future, etc, and just being overwhelmed by the passing of time. I like to think we draw attention to time.

What is it, then, that you want to achieve through the music of Liturgy? Is there a particular aim behind the music you create?

Yes, but I don't think we're achieving the aim. The aim would be to make music that has a directly ethical dimension - but not by conveying an important social message or by resisting bourgeois social conventions. I think the world has

come so complex that the relationship between music and society is very confusing. In my view somehow capitalism has manage to pre-empt, co-opt, wipe out music's potential to liberate by conveying messages or by ostentatious acts of defiance. Capitalism just soaks it up, sells it, and grows stronger. But somehow to be a force of Good or of Flourishing directly, through the sound itself... maybe there could be a real rupture there. Like I said, we aren't doing this, but that's sort of the urge. If I could find a way to do that, I would.