



## Interview: Unitary

Unitary's excellent second album, "Safe From Harm", has just been released. Despite having produced music for over a decade, Johan Hansson is still a relatively unknown quantity to most people in Scandinavia. For me it is always thrilling to discover high quality electronic acts from Sweden, and for those of you who have a preference for sincere melancholic synth music, Unitary will be a breath of fresh air. I contacted Johan to get acquainted with Unitary and his vision behind the project.

### **Unitary is the one-man project of Johan Hansson. How did Unitary get started?**

Unitary was formed about 10 years ago. I have a long interest in electronic music and had been following its success stories during the 90's. And, there was quite a bit of great music produced during that decade.

My first synthesizer was a Roland D-50 with which I experimented and starting learning the trade. Back then I focused on purely instrumental songs along the lines of ambient darkwave. Later I began developing chorus-driven music by adding vocals, which led to the forming of Unitary. My work has intensified over time and particularly around the recent release of "Safe From Harm".

### **How would you like to describe Unitary's music for a new listener?**

Someone has described Unitary's music as "true salvation for the broken spirit". I aim to express two sides with my music, hope and despair. During the work with the album I have been unbelievably inspired and I hope it is reflected in the result.

### **You seem to have a broad music taste considering that your debut album contains samplings from bands in the death- and black metal genre. What do you consider as your musical roots?**

Yes, you are right. I indulge everything from classical music to really heavy metal. My roots... musically I moved from my origin of metal to more electronic music several years ago. Today Unitary absorbs all my time, even though, I have contributed my voice to a couple of other projects, in more or less related genres.

**Your debut album *Second To None* was already released 2003. Now, almost eight years later you release album "*Safe From Harm*" hits the market. Why have you waited so long to follow up on your debut album?**

It takes time to compose material for a full-length album and it is a challenging process more difficult than maybe many people think. The reasons for my long silence are several, not least personal. Now the timing is spot on, fall is in the air and the album wouldn't have been the same if it had been released earlier.

**Is there something in particular that has inspired you during the making of *Safe From Harm*?**

Personal tragedies are an immense source of inspiration. My lyrics, as well as music, are probably perceived as melancholic throughout. For the observant listener though, there are a number of dimensions to explore. My ideas often arise suddenly and unexpected, in a range of situations and contexts. But there is an intentional trace of darkness and cold throughout the album.

**Personally I feel that *Safe From Harm*'s trademark is that it sounds familiar, with a somewhat moderate sound so that it never gets out of hand. Is it intentional that you have kept the sound somewhat moderate to avoid being lumped in with all sound-alike groups producing futurepop inspired synth?**

I will take that as a compliment, thank you! Since I work a little different than most others in this genre (i.e. that I exclude PC and Mac in my work) when I develop my music, it is unlikely that I get labeled among the sound-alikes. Sometimes Unitary is compared with other groups or vocalists I have never listened to or even heard about before. It is possible that these comparisons stem from the fact that other artists in the genre are inspired by the same esthetics as I am. However, I take pride in not being labeled as uninspiring and short of ideas. So far the album is getting accolades, which I am grateful for.

**Unitary is a one-man project. Are you 100% making all the determinations along the development of your music or are there people near you whose act as sounding boards throughout the process?**

There are a few people near me with whom I almost exclusively discuss drafts of new material for my music with. They tend to provide me with brutally honest feedback which brings me back to the drawing board with a production. At the same I have to admit that I am a little of a control freak and I do the original work for everything from lyrics, music, and the ideas for artwork.

**How do you value your music versus lyrics? Is it important not only to produce a great sound but also to have something to tell through your lyrics?**

Lyrics can make or break a song. So I am allergic to poorly developed lyrics. The difficult part seems to be to make a quality piece throughout. In other words, having strong tracks with interesting lyrics, presented in a tasteful way by a good vocalist. Far from all artists succeed in achieving this and keeping a consistent level. But my heart is in the music that is the center piece. The lyrics are secondary.

**You have a degree in International Political Science and Economics from Uppsala University. How much have your studies influenced your lyrics?**

My debut album included a bunch of lyrics critical of society. It is possible that this was influenced by my studies. My lyrics, in the case anybody would have missed it, never fictive but strictly personal. What I primarily write about is life. A not so simple story.

**You have recorded on two previous tracks with Frozen Plasma. What is the story here? Have you perhaps been considered as a vocalist for that group?**

I was offered a vocalist position with Frozen Plasma while the project was in its startup phase. But it was never an option to stop my work with Unitary, but rather taking on a vocalist role with Frozen Plasma as a side project. Vasi Vallis and I did two tracks together where I contributed as a vocalist and lyricist. The song "Protect My Ways" was released on Infacted Vol. 1, where Unitary also had a track with "Ebb And Flow". After some time Felix Marc took over as vocalist in Frozen Plasma, which has become a successful duo to say the least.

**How did you end up with the German record company Infacted?**

Torben at Infacted has been a great friend all along. We started the planning phase of this album as early as 2004 (!) So when I presented the pre master of "Safe From Harm" last winter he suggested that we would sign for at least one album. That is the path we are on.

**What are you planning to do when you play live? Do you a live set-up of Unitary for live performances and will you play live in Sweden in the near future?**

During live performances Daniel Söderberg will handle the electronics so that I can focus on the vocals. Next on the agenda is a live performance at a festival during the beginning of October. Naturally we will perform songs from "Safe From Harm" but some completely new material as well. To meet a live audience is something we are itching to do.

Thank you Benjamin for a pleasant interview. Be Safe From Harm.

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