

Durante degli Alighieri, simply referred to as Dante (c. 1265–1321), was a major Italian poet of the Middle Ages. His *Divine Comedy*, originally called *Commedia* and later called *Divina* by Boccaccio, is widely considered the greatest literary work composed in the Italian language and a masterpiece of world literature. In Italy he is known as *il Sommo Poeta* ("the Supreme Poet") or just *il Poeta*. He, Petrarch and Boccaccio are also known as "the three fountains" or "the three crowns". Dante is also called the "Father of the Italian language".

# DANTE

N o v e m b e r R e d

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BY DANIEL KÄLLMALM

PHOTO: CHRISTINA BULKA UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED

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Dante is also a German metal band who have just recently released their third album called "November Red" an album preceded by the loss of founding member Markus Berger who pas-

sed away the fifth of January this year way too early due to a severe disease. The other of the two Markuses that founded the band, surname Maichel is still carrying the band's torch though and he spoke with us here at Hallo-wed about their new album and about Dante in general. Markus explains that Dante was started as a project by him and Markus

Berger in 2006.

- We just wanted to make music together again and also wanted to make the kind of music we were really into and could not make in our other bands. We wrote a few songs together, then asked our good friend Alex (Alexander Göhs) to replace my guide vocals so that we could get a better impression of how the songs would

sound.

When they kept using Alex to replace vocals it became clear that he was the guy to do the vocals for the project, but it didn't stop with a singer because more members were arriving.

- We found a great drummer in Chris who played all the drum parts, and with the addition of Dennis as our first bass player we

suddenly were a band!

Becoming a band gave them some obligations and one of those was of course getting a name for this entity and that name couldn't just be anything, explains Markus. There were several aspects that needed to be fulfilled for a good name for this new band.

- What we were looking for was a catchy name that was easy

to remember, that looked good on CD covers and ideally would also indicate a very sophisticated approach to our music (which we hoped we had). After some mediocre ideas it was Alex who suggested the name Dante - and we immediately liked it a lot. It just had all the things we were looking for covered.



### Inspirations and Styles

No music and no kind of artistic venture comes without some kind of inspiration, which of course is something that Dante also has, but what does inspire Markus in his music making?

- I think it is essential to listen to lots of really good musicians, lots of really good bands as this is what gives you inspiration. It's not so much what kind of music it is, it's more the quality of the players. I am not inspired by all this overproduced sterile chart music but I can get inspiration from listening to bands like Dream Theater or Tool as well as from listening to The Beatles or Led Zeppelin, from someone like Keith Jarrett or Chick Corea, or Aimee Mann, Amy Winehouse or Radiohead. So I think it is very important to really listen to good musicians and great artists and to always keep your ears and mind open.

So true what he says there Markus, so what does these inspirations mean for the music of Dante? According to Markus their music can be described as heavy,

lyrical progressive rock which is somewhat in line with what our reviewer said in the review. This first description by Markus was said in the past about the band's music but over the years this has changed a bit, gone in a heavier direction.

- I feel like our sound has become heavier and more "Metal", but it's still all about writing good songs, songs that take the time we feel they need, songs that are allowed to have more than just one good idea and one mood. If we feel a song needs to be 15 minutes long, it'll be 15 minutes - we don't have to fit into the radio format. But as I said, we do make a conscious effort to always write songs and we try to stay away from extending songs just for the sake of it and I feel that we usually get this right.

### November Red

The latest album of Dante is called "November Red" and it is their third album, and it is said to once again deliver the perfect combination of heaviness, musical ambition and emotionality. According to Markus it is an album that is a logical step for them seeing their overall progress since they started out in 2006.

- It certainly incorporates many of the things we have always done, it's definitely got that Dante-vibe to it. But I think it is more balanced, more of a unit. There is no single track really standing out above all others - as much as I love for example *Vanessa*, it naturally draws so much attention on it in the context of the whole album that the album will always sort of revolve around it. That just happens when there is that one huge track "November Red" just has this natural flow from start to finish, there are so many things going on that connect the songs, yet this all is quite subtle and, to me, does not feel like a

forced effort.

It is a logical follow up to their previous efforts according to Markus who thinks that their first two albums was like twin albums and rather connected and compared to those "November Red" stands more on it's own feet so to speak.

- It's more complex and demanding, yet more focused, and it feels very rounded and cohesive. We always try to offer a complete artistic package of strong music, good lyrics and a nice artwork, and I really think we have done this quite well with "November Red".

The album cover is certainly striking but often the bands does not have much influence in how their cover looks as it tends to be down to an artist to think out their ways and the band's influence are most often just to approve the cover. Dante however did have total control over the cover art as the artwork and booklet is something that is very important in their strive towards a complete artistic package.

- The album artwork is always handled by our singer Alex, he's got so much talent! As I've said, we always strive towards achieving a great package and having a cool artwork and cover always has been a big concern for us. We want to make it a perfect fit for the music and the lyrics and over the years our fans have sort of grown used to us having extensive 20-page booklets. Fortunately, when we talked about that with our new label, Massacre Records, they could really relate to that and let us do it again.

Markus thinks that the best thing about "November Red" is it's cohesiveness and how well it flows despite all the things always going on in the album, and he thinks that all the tracks on the album is a favourite song of his but if the issue is forced and

he has to select a single song it would be the title track but he says there are so many great things about each and every song on the album.

### Reception and Touring

What about the reception of "November Red", what has been said about it? Has the reception been any good?

- So far reviews have been great and it has sold quite well in the first two weeks now, so yes the album has been very well received so far. We get so many compliments about it from completely different people and what makes it even nicer for me is that we get this without any kind of newcomer bonus, I mean people know it's our third album and they rate it with that in mind just like they would rate any other established Prog band and we really do stand our ground well. I guess maybe the biggest compliment is that even those reviews that are not overly excited say something like "good album, I'm just not that into it so much for some reason". Pretty good for a bad review I think!

For sure that seems like a good

reception but what about the band themselves? How would Markus and his mates rate their third album?

- In many ways this has been a very demanding album for us, the songwriting was more extensive than ever and we put so much more effort into the whole production. But the most demanding thing was the severe illness and the eventual death of Markus (Berger). This would obviously have been very tough without an album to finish but he had been a part of the band from day one and been completely involved in the songwriting process, and he so much wanted this album to happen while he was sick. This was so tough you know with Markus away from us, fighting this terrible disease and all the while wanting the album to see the light of the day, and us working so hard to make that happen without him around in the studio anymore. Until the very end he was with us and the album in his thoughts, and it's so sad that he died a few days before the release. But we know that he was very happy with the album, which was to become his musical legacy and that

certainly feels good.

We here at Hallowed of course share the band's pain of losing their bandmate and friend and if we are to be any judge of music I think he can be proud of this album wherever he is now. His legacy will always live on in

this album no matter what happens after death, and for the rest of us, like the band, life goes on and one thing that should await these guys are some live shows to promote the album. That is something they are working on right now and some stuff has al-

ready fallen into place.

- We have three dates in March already confirmed in Germany, in Munich, Rüsselsheim and Augsburg. Obviously, we'll focus on Germany, mostly the southern part. It's just a monetary issue if we have to travel to, say Ham-

burg, that's quite expensive with all the gear and it needs to be well thought out if we take the risk of traveling so far. Same goes for playing outside of Germany, but we are certainly trying to make that happen.

It is not really easy to be doing music today at least not from a financial standpoint and less easy if you are not a commercially viable band, which is the case with Dante as Markus explains.

- It is not always easy, and it is certainly a question of whether or not it can be financed. Let's face it, it's not like we're doing very commercial music, and unless you're like Dream Theater there are just not 2000 people coming to your concert wherever you play. But we'll sure tour with the album this year, it's just not quite clear how extensive that can be.



Dante Live, photo by Ben Rennen

### Final Words and Ending

With that we are running out of things to say and ask about Dante but before we leave you to look up these talented germans we look into the crystal ball to see if there are any future for them. Touring might be one, new album another and possibly something more, maybe a place to fill in the band or something like that, Markus explains how he looks at it.

- We actually have three main concerns at the moment: Of course we are preparing to promote "November Red" live, starting in March and are working hard to get as many concert spots as possible. Then of course we have just started to look for a Bass player to replace Markus and we'll have an audition soon and we really hope that we'll find a suitable replacement for him. The third concern is to write new material now that Markus is not around anymore. He and I have been the main songwriters in the band (with me always being something like the musical director of it all and writing most of the basic demos for the band), so obviously there will be quite a few changes to that process. I will take even more responsibility and prepare even more material, but of course the other guys will be much more integrated in the whole songwriting process. So far we are quite happy with the way we have handled that transition and we already have a bunch of cool new songs. No time to waste!

And with that we leave off with the final words in this article said by Markus who we extend a big thanks for taking the time to answer our questions and wish him and Dante the best of luck in their future endeavours.

- I really hope that people will enjoy listening to "November Red" as much as we did writing and producing it! It's just because of your passion and support that

we can do what we do with Dante, thanks so much for that! We hope to see you all on the road soon!

### Dante Links:

Our Review

<http://www.danteband.de>

<youtube.com/user/Danteprog>

[www.myspace.com/danteprog](http://www.myspace.com/danteprog)

Rest in peace Markus Berger

