

Uneath adept at converting haters into new fans

The thrash-metal band from Massachusetts is happy to ignore trends towards 'pretty choruses' in favour of dark, heavier sound

musicpreview

Uneath

With Darkest Hour, August Burns Red, and Suicide Silence
Thursday, 18 October at 8pm
Starlite Room

PAUL BLINOV
Arts & Entertainment Editor

"My real name is Paul, just so you know—[that's] my legal name, what the police call me. But my stage name, when I'm rocking, it's Buz."

Immediately following this statement, guitarist 'Buz' McGrath of thrash-happy metal act Uneath starts answering questions with more honesty than one might expect. Normally, hard rock and metal bands like to wrap themselves up in the serious, mysterious mythology of the image they create. But Uneath aren't trying to fool anyone with some imposed image: on their website, they call out likeminded bands who've replaced "metal breakdowns with pretty choruses."

"When we wrote our last record, it seemed like there was a wave of that particular style flooding that scene," McGrath explains, "Lots of bands would start out heavy and add ['pretty choruses']—either they were maturing as musicians,

or they wanted to cash in on a quick buck; we were really getting swamped by that type of stuff when we were writing our record—and making [ours] really extreme and thrash metal.

"We're not knocking that style of music; there's a lot of bands who do it awesome," he adds. "But at the time, it was just one after another. Now, I think some of the bands who were flooding the market have disappeared; the good bands who did it well stuck around."

Uneath formed in 1998, focusing their sound on heavy, rapid-fire guitar licks and everpresent drum rolls. For such a metal sound, their album cover is especially fitting: a medieval-looking coat of arms adorned with axes and a shield. It sums up their sound nicely—although, according to McGrath, that wasn't planned out.

"We'd never really thought about it; it kinda just happened like that," he says. "Trevor did the lyrics, and he came up with the name of the record. The artist took a lot of that into consideration, and then came up with the record cover, which we all were psyched on."

Decisions weren't always so unanimous, however. It was only after a few line-up shuffles that Uneath arrived at their current line-up:



McGrath and Ken Susi on guitar, vocalist Trevor Phipps, and bassist John Maggard. Despite currently lacking a full-time drummer—former member Mike Justain left earlier this year—Uneath had no trouble finding a few to tour with without putting a dent in their set, continuing to provide the particular brand of metal he says they would listen to.

"We're just playing what we want to hear; if you're into it, you're into it," McGrath notes. "There's a lot of fans out there who are diehards for their particular band; we've toured with Slayer, and obviously they have their dedicated fanbase, [who are] there for Slayer and don't want to hear anybody else."

But according to McGrath, the band actually enjoys it when there's a few

haters in the crowd—it gives him a chance to try and put on enough of a show to convert them into fans as Buz, not Paul.

"You'll get a couple of dudes hating on you in the front row, but that's to be expected at Slayer. To me, that's when I have the most fun. It's a challenge now: I've got to get this kid to understand that what we're doing is not shit."

Vimy retells the legendary battle through historically based characters

theatrepreview

Vimy

Running 20 October–11 November
Directed by James MacDonald
Starring Daniela Vaskalic, Mat Busby, Sheldon Elter, Vincent Hoss-Desmarais, Phil Fulton, and Billy MacLellan
Citadel Theatre

BRYAN SAUNDERS
Arts & Entertainment Staff

While James MacDonald may only be the Citadel's associate artistic director, he gets to take full directing charge of *Vimy*, a World War I drama written by Edmontonian and Citadel Playwright-in-Residence (and U of A grad) Vern Thiessen.

As MacDonald explained, he and many others at the Citadel are particularly excited about hosting this play's world premiere for a large number of reasons.

"We're pretty proud of producing this play here: it's a play written by an Edmontonian, being directed by an Edmontonian, telling a really important story," he says. "And it's hard to get a new play produced at the level of the larger theatres. So, I like to say that we're not

only telling a story of Canadian history, but we're also making Canadian history by producing this play for the first time."

The important story that MacDonald makes reference to is, of course, the Battle of Vimy Ridge, which sees its 90th anniversary this year. The play follows the experiences of five soldiers who fought in Vimy, as well as looking at those of a nurse working in a field hospital.

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JAMES MACDONALD
VIMY DIRECTOR

The action is non-linear, first examining the characters' lives and relationships before and after the battle, and then culminating by focusing on what took place during the battle itself. As with many good stories, some of the characters are based on actual people, MacDonald reveals.

"The nurse character, the central character that it revolves around, [is based on] a war

diary of a nurse who served over there that got Vern thinking about the experiences this woman had and the relationships that she had during the war," he explains.

"And there was a [soldier] who was a bit of a poet, so Vern based a character on him. Then, there's an aboriginal character, [who's] based very distinctly on a biography that was written about an Aboriginal soldier during the war."

There are also some action sequences in the play and particular staging elements that MacDonald hopes the audience will enjoy. But, he continues, *Vimy* won't necessarily be akin to the gory, blood-and-guts war movies that have been released in recent years.

"A movie can give you the special effects, the visceral feel of seeing a battle and being part

of [it in that way]," he explains. "But a theatre brings you into it in a more psychological way and plays on your emotions a little bit more, as opposed to your senses.

"I think that [with *Vimy*], people will [feel] the anticipation [leading up to] the battle," he continues.

"They'll get a sense of how scared [the soldiers] were in the battle, and they will get a sense of some of the things that they underwent in the battle. So, I think it's more of an emotional experience than it is [the] sensory experience [that] a movie would be, but I think it will reach people at a more human level," MacDonald explained.

That said, MacDonald emphasized that there's much more to the play than just the horrifying drama that unfolds.

"[The audience] won't just be sitting there, getting hammered away by awful images or awful things that happen," he says. "[The play] works on a whole bunch of different levels—like a play should, *Vimy* takes you on a rollercoaster of a journey. You'll be charmed. There are moments of humour; there are lots of moments of romance. There's a feeling of adventure about a lot of it.

"A good play is something that tells a good story and that makes you understand something about the world, and makes you understand something about people."

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