

# APOPTYGMA BERZERK



## ROCKET SCIENCE 2009

You have probably heard the answer “it’s not rocket science”, but what was the question? In this case, it might offer a clue to the essence of Apoptygma Berzerk itself, to the force that drives the man who personifies the band, Stephan Groth.

“If I had studied mathematics or engineering for the same amount of time that I’ve been “studying” music and working with Apoptygma, I would probably have been a rocket scientist by now. That’s part of where “Rocket Science” comes from. I’m doing the only thing I know how to do. Apop has been my life since the age of 18.”

Groth and his group are as inseparable as Norway and the fjords. With another vibrant album to add to the Apop canon, this seems like an appropriate moment to talk to the songwriter himself in his home town of Fredrikstad. Time to add some depth to the impressive statistics (a discography numbering more than a dozen albums, over 30 releases if we count singles and EPs as well - and a band history spanning almost twenty years, touring some 15 countries, with more to follow). “Rocket Science” is studio album number six, if you are counting, by the way.

The intrepid polar adventurer Roald Amundsen may have hailed from here, but can Fredrikstad, a picture postcard of tranquility, really be the furnace in which the Apop sound is smelted?

“Well I’m only one hour from Oslo so I can head there anytime I need more rock’n’roll! It is very peaceful here, which is good for getting down to work in the studio.”

The longevity of the Apoptygma Berzerk legend in an increasingly fickle music scene is a tribute to Groth’s singular determination, and the relatively remote base from which he works has proved to be beneficial. Nevertheless, he is quick to acknowledge that the process of coming up with each successive album presents an ever increasing challenge. One way to counter this is by introducing new blood into the mix. Good Charlotte supremo Benji Madden

# APOPTYGMA BERZERK

guests on “Apollo“, for example, and Emil Nikolaisen from fellow Norwegian rockers Serena Maneesh makes various contributions to the “Rocket Science“ LP.

“Although we come from the same school musically and loved the same bands, like The Velvet Underground, Jesus & Mary Chain, he has gone into a completely different field with Serena Maneesh. So when I invited Emil to my studio to play guitar and bass on the track “Right →“ I was able to let him experiment and said to him just play whatever you want. In fact, he ended up mixing one track (Pitch Black / Heat Death) and added his signature sound to several other songs as well“. The masterful Jon Schumann (Kent, Mew, Kashmir, Carpark North) also mixed some of the songs on “Rocket Science“, as did Bob Kraushaar (famed for his work with the Pet Shop Boys, Erasure, Human League and a-ha).

The Mary Chain reference, meanwhile, crops up more than once, and a classic JAMC beat can indeed be detected on one track in particular, entitled “Butterfly Defect“.

“Well they were really my favourite band, it was them who got me into music. “Happy When It Rains“ was the first song I learned how to play on the guitar.“

One of the endearing features of Apoptygma Berzerk has always been the open enthusiasm with which they embrace their influences – going so far as to record an entire album of cover versions (the 2006 “Sonic Diary“), reaching back as far as Nico and as far forward as Keane. Their version of House of Love’s “Shine On“ was a hit in its own right.

The Apop sound, meanwhile – typified by Groth’s vocal delivery – is instantly recognizable and could never be reduced to the sum of its parts. Compulsive genre seekers tend to lock them in a box labelled synthpop, but this fails to do justice to their broader appeal across electronic and rock boundaries.

“You know, in the past you could always tell when rock bands introduced electronic elements, the electronic stuff really wasn’t all that good. And when synth bands brought in guitars it was the same thing. Going back ten years back or so, it was virtually illegal for synthesizer based bands to introduce rock guitars! It wasn’t until Depeche Mode brought them in that it became almost ok, and when Martin Gore said he actually composed on the guitar I realized that I could also write songs on the instrument. I’m a lousy guitar player, but hey there’s something special about playing an acoustic guitar, and that is how I wrote the last couple of albums.“

So what can we expect from “Rocket Science“? Are we revisiting the electronics lab or getting high on rocket fuel?

“In one way, the strategy is a continuation, picking up where we left off with the last record, “You and Me Against the World“ which had a stronger rock flavour. But in another sense, we wanted to take one step back towards a more electronic sound, which is where we come from – and had the most success with on “Welcome to Earth“, which spawned classics like „Starsign“ and “Eclipse“. Then again, the

attitude feels rockier, it has probably turned out more rock than anything we’ve done before – so it should be something which will appeal to our longstanding fans and to our newer fans.“

There is an infectious assurance in the voice of Stephan Groth as he scans the Apop blueprint. From the phase one electropop and EBM of “Soli Deo Gloria“ and “7“ through the indie pop feel of the 2005 LP “You and Me Against the World“, he has arrived at a sound infused with its past history and sufficiently energized to push onward into new territory. This is not a band who will ever be content making the same record twice.

# APOPTYGMA BERZERK

"I think there are two kinds of bands, you have, let's say, AC/DC and The Ramones, you don't want them making synth pop records (although it could be interesting!), you just want them to be The Ramones, but then you have bands like Depeche Mode and U2 or, earlier, The Beatles, where every record has you in suspense, how is it going to sound?"

With "Rocket Science", Apoptygma Berzerk are staking their claim to enter the second category. Some discerning critics already see them there, as fellow musicians Good Charlotte recently pointed out:

"Apoptygma Berzerk is the best industrial outfit in the world, yes the entire world. Don't believe us? Go anywhere on the planet and ask anyone who Apoptygma Berzerk is, they will tell you Stephan is the John Lennon of industrial music."

As always with Apop, there is more to the new record than meets the eye, and launching into the lyrical content of the new album, one theme running through the tracks is the insistent ringing of a cerebral wake-up call.

Opening up with the mission statement "Pleased to meet you, we came to drop bombs on you" it becomes immediately apparent that this explosive album is no friend of passivity!

"Weight of the World", track one, suggests we may have left it too late to cut through the smokescreen obscuring the methods and motives of whoever may be steering our fate – "1984 is now!"

The Orwellian theme is underlined in the same song – "So no one told you, they've been lying to us all along – they thought control us", a reminder of Winston Smith's crime in Orwell's novel 1984 – he dared to pose the question "why?" – still hugely relevant today.

Groth himself "was shocked when realizing how I'd been lied to by the school system". The culture of disinformation does not stop there, however. "I realized that many of the so called 'conspiracy theories' are actually fact and not just theories."

"Asleep or Awake" highlights the erosion of critical faculties –

"they dumbed us down and slowly changed our thoughts – now we believe in nothing but never-ending wars".

Voices drift in and out of the album with an urgency to incentivize awareness of modern society and the power structures which govern it.

One such voice which can be heard on the record belongs to Chris White, the Nowhere To Run / Conspiracy Clothes theorist, truth investigator, broadcaster and ardent student of post 9/11 conundrums, a keen challenger of media propagated perceptions / misconceptions.

Perhaps this too can be related to the "Rocket Science" of the title...there was a "staged" quality to the Apollo landings as the live broadcast established itself as mass media spectacle. Rocket science itself has never a pure science, but has always been in the service of a specific agenda, hidden or otherwise. There are even some theorists who see a link between the NASA missions and the occult - Apollo is a variant of the name Lucifer, as found in the Bible. All may not be as it seems...or concealed in the open, right in front of our eyes.

"It's really about two different world views. If you look at the world you can either believe that everything happens by chance and coincidence or you can look at the world and think that everything here is a result of design. I'm not only talking about how the human race got here,

# APOPTYGMA BERZERK

but also the economic system and its ups and downs, wars, politics, health, environment..... everything. Of course I believe that some things happen by chance, but only minor things, all major things are designed in one way or another. There is always someone making decisions and deciding what is going to happen. Even something as simple as releasing a record is a result of design and strategy.“

It is a big ask of a rock'n'roll band to unravel the machinations of the world in which we live. Lines like “You poked out your eye and then you rose to fame“ hint at a ruthless streak on the one hand, self-sacrifice on the other. Questioning the bigger picture can begin by looking at the point at which two world views converge, where words and deeds coincide – or smoke and mirrors take their place. Groth poses the question – if conspiracy theories are, in some cases, more fact than theory, then what is their purpose?

There is much to be explored in the latest thought-provoking chapter of the Apoptygma Berzerk narrative. The lyrics will invite you deeper into the rabbit hole if you follow the trail. Asleep or awake, real or surreal, red pill or blue pill?

As the band cranks up the volume and moves into sonic overdrive, they leave us with one final question: if it's not rocket science, then what is it?

Think about it, because (and if you listen carefully, you might hear Amanda Palmer of The Dresden Dolls on this song):

“Running away at the speed of light won't keep us safe“ (“Black versus white“).



**Management and contact:**

**GREEN ENTERTAINMENT GmbH**

[www.green-entertainment.de](http://www.green-entertainment.de)

[www.theapboffice.com](http://www.theapboffice.com)

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

[www.apoptygmaberzerk.de](http://www.apoptygmaberzerk.de)