



APOCALYPTICA

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Eicca Toppinen – cello
 Perttu Kivilaakso – cello
 Paavo Lötjönen – cello
 Mikko Sirén – drums

Since they formed in 1993, Finnish orchestral rock band **Apocalyptica** has released six studio albums featuring numerous cello-based instrumentals along with some vocal-based songs. Whatever styles they’ve explored – from atmospheric interludes to fast, battering rhythms -- their music has been gripping, dynamic and full of melody. But with their seventh album, **7th Symphony** the band has composed an album that not just symphonic, it’s practically a symphony.

“The instrumental stuff is more instrumental than anything we’ve done before,” says lead songwriter and cellist **Eicca Toppinen**. “For the previous albums, we sometimes had songs which had the potential for vocal tracks, but turned out to be instrumentals. This time, the instrumental tracks are pure instrumentals with long, progressive passages. We wanted to write instrumentals where nobody’s feeling ‘Oh, it’s great, but where are the vocals?’”

At the same time, **7th Symphony** contains songs that rock harder than anything they’ve done since 2001 when they released the epic, transfixing album **Cult**, their first album to contain mostly originals. In the same way that **Cult** caused fans to view **Apocalyptica** from a different perspective, **7th Symphony** is the next forward step in the group’s creative evolution. Most of the songs on the disc were produced by **Joe Barresi** (Queens of the Stone Age, Tool) and two of the four vocal numbers were produced by **Howard Benson** (My Chemical Romance, Papa Roach).

“Joe told us, ‘You know guys, this album will bring your metal fans back’” **Toppinen** says. “It’s heavier and more exciting. It has a very dramatic classical-metal mixture. And the hard stuff is really hard.”



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In addition to the six symphonic tracks, **7th Symphony** features four songs with vocals that were co-written with other established artists. The first single, **“End of Me”** was co-written with Johnny Andrews and Bush frontman **Gavin Rossdale**, who sings on the tune. “It’s definitely a cool rock song,” **Toppinen** says. “Gavin definitely had his own ideas and wanted to change some of the music and lyrics, but working with him was pretty easy. He’s a nice guy and he’s very professional.”

The other guest vocal performances are equally impressive. **Brent Smith** from Shinedown sings on **“Not Strong Enough,”** which was written by award-winning pop songstress **Diane Warren** (Aerosmith, Toni Braxton, LeAnn Rimes, Trisha Yearwood) and produced by Howard Benson (My Chemical Romance, Papa Roach). Benson also worked with Lacey from Flyleaf on the song **“Broken Pieces.”**

One of the heaviest songs on the album is **“Bring Them to Light,”** a collaboration with **Joe Duplantier**, of the French extreme experimental/progressive metal band Gojira. **Toppinen** was introduced to Duplantier by his music publisher in France, who also works for Gojira. “He had a feeling that we would get along well and he was right,” the cellist says. “The combination is great. It doesn’t sound like Gojira, it doesn’t sound too much like **Apocalyptica**. It’s symphonic thrash metal and Joe makes vocal patterns in a way that he’s never done with Gojira, which is very exciting.”

Working with Barresi as the main producer, was rewarding for **Apocalyptica** for a couple reasons. First, after years of flying around the world to record, they were able to work home in Helsinki. More importantly, they appreciated Barresi’s ear for detail and creative ideas. “We used much more effects than we usually do and got a different kind of sound experience than ever before, but still I think the album is very organic,” **Toppinen** says. “The drums area more natural and there’s not so much sampling or editing. When we were tracking, we just found great sounds and recorded them right there. We didn’t fix them in the mix with punch ins like people do nowadays.”

One of **Toppinen**’s favorite songs on **7th Symphony** is **“Beautiful.”** The all-orchestral number was recorded with three cellos and drummer **Mikko Sirén** on bass. “It was the first time Mikko played bass in his life,” Toppinen says. “It’s a beautiful acoustic song recorded in one take in the studio.”

If **“Beautiful”** sounds bare and vulnerable, it might have something to do with the way in which it was recorded. “We decided to play it naked,” **Toppinen** says. “It was a moment where there were four guys naked in the room just playing acoustic music. Being naked always brings good feelings. We tried with clothes on, and we were like, ‘Oh, something is missing.’ Mikko wanted to celebrate his bass playing by being naked, so he was already naked so we thought, ‘Okay, everybody else should get naked, too.’ Immediately, it was much more fun.”

Apocalyptica started writing **7th Symphony** last fall and **Sirén** flew to Los Angeles in January to record the drums. But as soon as he arrived, **Toppinen** had a sudden burst of creativity back home. “I wrote three more songs after that,” he says. “So I was just sending him demos and he was tracking the songs. Then we recorded all the other parts, and it was strange to go into a studio to record songs that we hadn’t fully rehearsed and that didn’t even have the final arrangements. A lot of stuff was missing. But it was exciting because it made us do things in a different way and be creative all the time. And it made things fresher because it wasn’t like we went, ‘Okay, we did five demo versions of the songs, let’s decide which way to go?’”



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7th Symphony is the musical culmination of 17 years of hard work. **Apocalyptica** started in 1993 as an outlet for **Toppinen** and three of his classically trained classmates at the prestigious Sibelius Academy. Three years later, they released their debut, **Apocalyptica Plays Metallica by Four Cellos**.

“When we made the first album, our expectations were, ‘Okay, if we sell 1,000 copies and get a few shows, that’s cool.’ Then, we got the requests to play a lot of shows after the first album and the sound changed totally. We realized, ‘Okay, the first album sounds horrible, so let’s make another one which is more exciting.’”

On 1998’s **Inquisition Symphony** **Apocalyptica** refined their approach and procured better production from Otto Donner and Hiili Hiilesmaa. Like their debut, the album featured Metallica songs, but it also included covers of songs by Faith No More, Sepultura, Pantera and three originals. “It was funny because after the first album everybody said, ‘Alright, this is cool for one time,’” **Toppinen** says. “And after the second album, people said, ‘Okay, now we have seen this thing. You can’t do anything next. **Apocalyptica**’s over.’ And still we are here.”

In order to remain relevant, **Apocalyptica** knew they had to make some changes. So, for their 2000 album **Cult** they only included three covers; the rest were **Toppinen** originals. Also, the band brought in vocalists Sandra Nasic and Matthias Sayer to sing on two of the songs. The album didn’t sit well with their record label, which wanted another full album of metal covers. Fortunately, **Apocalyptica**’s contract had expired and the label didn’t pick up their option in time.

“They wanted crazy cover versions of Motorhead and AC/DC, and we ended up ‘No, we don’t want to do that. The contract is over.’ And you can hear the emotion in the **Cult** album. That’s a passionate album. We were lucky that we got a new label in Germany and got the album released, but it wasn’t easy and it was a really important turning point. If we would have been following the guidance from record label to do a third cover album, I think that would have been the last album of **Apocalyptica**. That album created a new style.”

When **Apocalyptica** returned to the studio in 2003, they had a new direction and drive. They enjoyed the vocal tracks on **Cult** so much they asked pop star Nina Hagen to sing on a cover of Rammstein’s “*Seeman*” and Swedish celebrity Linda Sundblad to add vocals to “*Faraway, Vol 2.*” The follow up, 2005’s **Apocalyptica** was even more star-studded. “*Betrayal/Forgiveness*” featured guest playing by Slayer drummer Dave Lombardo, “*Bittersweet*” included vocal tracks by HIM’s Ville Valo and The Rasmus’ Lauri Ylönen, who also sang on “*Life Burns!*”

But it was 2007’s **Worlds Collide** that turned **Apocalyptica** into an international phenomenon. As with its predecessors, the disc featured numerous guest stars: Lombardo returned for “*Last Hope*,” Slipknot’s Corey Taylor appeared on “*I’m Not Jesus*,” Lacuna Coil’s Cristina Scabbia sang on “*S.O.S. (Anything But Love)*” Rammstein vocalist Till Lindemann performed on a cover of David Bowie and Brian Eno’s “*Helden*” and Three Days Grace singer Adam Gontier sang his heart out on “*I Don’t Care*.” Radio reacted and “*I Don’t Care*” launched the band to number 59 on the *Billboard* Hot 200 and number seven on the *Billboard* Top Independent Albums and Top Rock Albums charts.

“It was really strange to have that kind of success,” **Toppinen** says. “The Rammstein cover we did with Nina Hagen was really successful in Central Europe. And the song we did with Ville Valo was really successful in



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Europe. But we had never had any type of real success in America. Even when we wrote *'I Don't Care'* and the first demo was finished, I thought, 'Okay, this could be massive,' but I never expected it to be so big."

With a summer tour planned for the U.S. and Europe, the stage is set for **7th Symphony**, **Apocalyptica**'s most eclectic and inspired album to date, one that places equal emphasis on beautiful melodies and heavy, bombastic rhythms.

"We worked really hard on this record and had a lot of fun doing it," **Toppinen** says. "I think if you like instrumentals, you will like this the most and if you like the rock stuff you will also like this the most. This **Apocalyptica** album has something for everybody."

5/10

www.apocalyptica.com



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