

After three years of steady progress, Linear Sphere officially launched themselves with their debut album, "Reality Dysfunction", last year. Band members Martin Goulding (guitars), Charlie Griffiths (guitars), Nick Lowczowski (drums), Dave Marks (bass – who's now left the band) and Dutch vocalist Jos Geron, merge technical ability and experience into a layered mix of progressive rock/metal, jazzy elements and an underlying dark thread.

Having been picked up in the car outside London's Ealing Broadway Station by Martin and Jos, it was back to Martin's West London home to find out some more background on the band's inception and plans for the immediate future. Tonight, Martin is taking time out from his busy guitar teaching schedule. As well as a private practice, both he and Charlie are tutors at the Guitar Institute just down the road from where we're travelling back to tonight, both teaching modern rock methods ("lots of twidly, twidly") on the recommendation of jazz/rock guitarist Shaun Baxter, who's a leading member of the institute, although Charlie does do more work writing for Total Guitar magazine where he records lessons and conducts interviews. So rather fine credentials, don't you think?

Martin takes up their story: "Charlie, Nick and I went to school together and throughout the years we've played in bands with different line-ups and styles of music, so we've had a long history of playing music together."

In fact, they've known each other around twenty years. Martin continues: "I met Jos in 1997 at a rock club and was quite surprised to see him down my road and found out he lived opposite! So we hung out for a few years until we decided to form Linear Sphere. We were just developing our music and friendship, hanging out together. I then introduced Jos to Charlie and we all had an informal agreement to write something and form a band, just for fun really. Charlie and I started sketching out pre-production and getting together a couple of times a week, programming the bass and drums and writing the guitar parts, layering it up on Logic software which I use. After preparing a sketch of a finished track more or less, Jos would then sit on the track, listen to it, write lyrics, then we'd record the lyrics over the music and it kind of went from there. About halfway through, we thought we were onto something quite different, mixing many elements not just, like, heavy metal. We were putting in some funk elements, jazzy changes and in the end we did it the wrong way around; rather than say to your mates 'let's form a band' and then it falling apart, we wanted to do a whole album. So after a year of writing we finished our pre-production draft complete with lyrics except for the fact the drums and bass were programmed. So we invited Nick and Dave along. It was the generation of friendship really."

For something that started out as a bit of fun, the band has had some rather decent reviews across Europe and beyond. "We've been lucky and had a lot of support," remarks Martin. "It all came in quite quick after the initial marketing campaign. It was encouraging to see."

As well as parts of the music, the lyrics are

edgy and aggressive. There's also some solid on the vocals. In my CD review last year, I mentioned a crisp, death metal abrade at times. And as Martin had touched on the subject of lyrics in an earlier telephone conversation we had, it was a question that needed expanding upon, to find out more about the underlying theme. Jos explains: "The mood of the music lands itself perfectly, of what's going on in this day and age, all the corruption. I work in the building trade and I've been ripped off myself to the point of it nearly destroying me. I've seen freemasonry at first hand. At the first draft stage, I was in such a state I wanted to write something about what is going on, not just depressive and write silly lyrics about being at the point of suicide. That's not what it's about; it's really about what is actually going on, who's pulling all the strings, who's fucking us up and making us think what to think. The masses don't question too much of what is going on. What about all the money that goes missing? Look at education. They're now taxing us for the Olympics. It's ridiculous. They do it so the little man is always paying for it. Look at the

way companies are set up and sold off to the pyramid within the freemasonic set up for next to nothing; they did it with trains. Look at all the profits of the banks..."

Martin adds, "So you could say the album is about the conditioning forces in society. Looking at society and how it manipulates and conditions... questioning the surface which is portrayed to us through various means like the media, y'know? Questioning things behind the scenes, the influence of secret societies. Encouraging people to look at bit deeper at what the facade is."

And with song titles/lyrics like "Father Pyramid" (Corporate predator/Co-ordinate editor/Stock market merger man/Fucks you up for all he can) and "Ceremony Master" (Public services being destroyed/ Justice system null and void/All the failures we inflicted/ You'll pay us undebated) you kind of get the picture.

On a lighter note, two of the tracks on the debut ("Life Of Gear" and "Marketing") are printed in the wrong order on the back of the CD booklet and the CD itself. "That's the limited edition one you've got," Martin

jokingly replies putting his finger to his lips. Owning up, he continues, "Unfortunately there was a slip in concentration. But the funny thing was a lot of reviewers showed they'd not listened to the album properly as they didn't realise, commenting on the lyrics. Well spotted!"

The band is now involved with the Belgian-based Hardebaran agency but how do they fit into the picture? "They're a management agency," explains Martin. "When we tried to promote our album, we released it on our own label, Linear Sphere Records Ltd. Basically we took it upon ourselves to do the initial phase of marketing, emailing hundreds of people, telling them of our debut and our website and looking for feedback. Going to websites, fanzines that kind of thing, it resulted in a journalist forwarding the CD to Hardebaran and they subsequently offered us the opportunity to work together. So we looked at the business nitty gritty and in the end we were happy to take them up on their offer. They looked like a good company and are presently doing a great job, spreading the word around. Officially we've now been released in the UK, Benelux, and

France will follow in March, then Italy, maybe Germany. And see where we go from there."

Jos adds: "We're financing everything ourselves in a way. And as we're still set up as a record company everything is fed back to us. We can control our rights. So we work in an easy way."

So for live gigs, would promoters book through Hardebaran? "They're not really a booking agency anymore," states Martin, "but offering us direction and giving us the contacts we need. So everything is done through us. Hardebaran acts in a way like a super label and it's a management organisation for many bands and a lot are activity gigging. So it's a case of when we are ready to gig we let them know and see if they can organise us to play with some of the other bands. Other than that, we'll get gigs ourselves."

So when will they start playing live? "Hopefully summer," remarks Martin. "We're still in rehearsals. We've now got a new bass player called Steve Woodcock. Dave had to leave as he was committed with other projects and he left shortly after

actual recording. He was already with about four other bands so we never really discussed the commitment aspect with him. We were happy for him to do the album. At the time he was busy with Carl Palmer."

Although still in his early twenties, Dave has been a regular member of the Carl Palmer trio for a while now, playing in the UK and abroad. Martin continues: "Dave is one of those guys who's such a good musician. It was a shame 'cos we wanted him to play live but he's followed his own path and we still see each other as he also works at the Guitar Institute."

So Steve has now joined and his last band involvement was with Foe, who've supported the likes of Mastadon. According to Martin, they were quite technical. Reading up on the history of the Linear Sphere members, one of the bands Charlie, Nick and Martin were in together played cover versions of bands like Crimson Glory and King Diamond. Would they consider slipping a couple of covers into a Linear Sphere set? I think that would be quite interesting. Martin takes up another angle on the question: "Well that was kind of our

LINEAR SPHERE

Interview by Richard Thompson



influences really, when we were around seventeen or eighteen. Charlie, Nick and I formed a heavy metal band called Angel Storm and we covered the like of Malmsteen, Crimson Glory, Queensryche, those kind of bands, and it was really good fun. If you know your King Diamond intimately, and I'm a real fan, you can pick up the King Diamond influence really easily in the guitars, even some production elements. Funny thing is most people think the real influence is in the voice. Charlie, Nick and I love King Diamond, Jos doesn't really. It was part of us gaining our skills, the early influence of those kind of bands, playing riffs. We were always more attracted to the more technical side of heavy metal."

So is there a new album in the pipeline? "We're in the process of finalising a pre-production sketch which as I've explained before," says Martin, "it's programmed with the guitars done, the vocals done. Worth pointing out as Nick was not directly involved with the first album, now he just wants a rough guide and that way he gets to express himself, instead of being a session player if you like. In terms of the initial musical ideas go, the changes he would make to the programmed parts are very different. We start off very simple 'cos we know he just wants a rough guide and in that he gets to express himself. We've known each other a long time; he's the expert. In some cases he'll completely change and interpret the mood."

Nick has started teaching drums full time now, converting a room in Wimbledon and travelling from his home near Epsom. Nick who arrived as we were finishing the chat had been teaching and says that he has "done a lot of shitty jobs to get to this point."

The band is hopeful that the second album will come out this year but Martin explains it could take another six months to finish. Jos' building skills have come in handy as he's built a vocal booth at his house in Chiswick and will be recording the vocal parts there.

So by the end of this year, hopefully we'll see another UK band get recognition further afield. In the meantime log onto their website at www.linearsphere.com and check out their equipment and even the vocal booth. If you are looking for some expert tuition at a reasonable rate, why not get in touch with them too; I'm sure they wouldn't mind. The dedication and belief in their ability shines like a beacon. And that's the reality of it!