

# DEEP IMAGINATION



Interview with Thorsten Sudler-Mainz (Deep Imagination) by Stephan Schelle | EMPIRE No. 05/2023

*It's been a good six months since the music project Deep Imagination released the wonderful album "The Children of the Moon". The mastermind behind the project is Thorsten Sudler-Mainz. Reason enough to talk to him about the background to the album, the change in sound, the collaboration with his former musical partner Achim von Raesfeld and his plans for the future. Stephan Schelle contacted Thorsten for this reason.*

Thorsten, we've known each other for 20 years now. Back then you were involved in projects with Art Of Infinity and from 2005 onwards with Deep Imagination, which were initially more focused on traditional electronic music. But before that you played in a dark wave gothic band with Achim von Raesfeld in the 80s. Tell us a bit about this early phase and your influences back then.

*First of all, thank you for inviting me to the interview. I started making music in 1982, but before that I had of course already absorbed the musicians of the 70s, especially Pink Floyd, into my musical DAN. I started on the drums and played in a progressive rock band and Neue Deutsche Welle band at the same time. I met Achim von Raesfeld, who played guitar and liked and listened to the same music as me. At first, we jammed with guitar and drum set, but later I also started playing guitar and we formed our first band together. The music was influenced by post-punk bands of the time like The Chameleons, The Sisters Of Mercy or The Cure. It was a time for new things and it was our time. We also saw many of these bands at the Batschkapp in Frankfurt back then. Also, the wonderful Dead Can Dance, whose album "Within a Realm of a Dying Sun" I would now describe as one of my most important influences.*

With the 2005 album "Scapes", the debut of Deep Imagination, which you recorded together with Thorsten Rentsch on guitar and Stefan Höllering on electronic saxophone, you created more ambient, electronic soundscapes. How did the switch to this type of music come about?

*At the end of the 80s, I had enough of music that was too dark and built my first own 8-track recording studio at the beginning of the 90s, in which I recorded complete productions myself. It was still one hundred percent analog, I was somehow still searching and the music was a kind of independent folk-pop-rock. Then in 1996 I bought a Kurzweil K2000 workstation and that was my entry into electronic music. But more in the sense of Richard Wright than classical EM. I've always found the combination of keyboards and guitars and subtle vocals fascinating. In the same year, I founded the progressive-ambient project Art Of Infinity with Thorsten Rentsch, with whom we released four large-scale albums on BSC Music/Prudence in the noughties that were elaborately produced with guest musicians. Back then, we worked in large Cologne recording studios such as Sound Studio N and I was able to fully incorporate my Floydian influences into Art Of Infinity.*

**Was it a natural process for you to go back to more rock sounds and now back to gothic or dark wave, or did it come gradually?**

*Yes really, it came gradually. In 2005, I founded my solo project Deep Imagination parallel to Art Of Infinity, with which I produced three instrumental ambient albums. After Art Of Infinity went dormant in 2012, I transferred the rather bombastic concept to Deep Imagination and released three more albums in the decade, but this time with vocals and guitars. For the album "My Silent Celebration" in 2020, I also invited my old friend and guitarist Achim von Raesfeld into my studio. We never lost sight of each other and I really wanted him to play on this album, as I also had a track on it called "Coming From The Cold", which was very much in the style of Dead Can Dance. That rekindled the old fire in both of us and Achim strapped on his guitar again after more than 20 years. Working with him and making this music made me want to do nothing else after this album but write a dark wave album.*

**You've usually worked with guest singers or the vocals of your wife - who can also be heard on the current album. But your dark voice fits perfectly with the gothic sound. Was that clear to you from the outset or what was the reason for you taking on the vocals yourself?**

*Wow, thank you very much for the compliment. It was as if the time was ripe for something that I hadn't dared to do before. The lead vocal thing matured in me, when you compose and produce over the years, you get better and better in all disciplines. I just did it and it wasn't difficult, also because I still had that spirit from the 80s in me. This gothic band from the 80s, in which I was also the singer, went nowhere back then without a single noteworthy recording and I felt that I wanted to finish something. Namely a production that would be something to be proud of. We were greenhorns back then, but there was a spirit, an attitude that we expressed through our dark music. I realized that deep down, Achim and I are still those young guys. The music on the new album "The Children Of The Moon" represents exactly that, we've brought that back to ourselves now and we enjoy it. It's something you can't buy, it's like a treasure that has always belonged to you. Ann Kareen's vocals may have taken a back seat on the new album, but they are crucial to the dynamics and the choruses. I love the combination with female vocals and Ann Kareen just has a great voice.*

**How did it feel to work on an album with your old buddy Achim von Raesfeld again?**

Working with Achim is wonderful. He's just totally cool. There was a moment during recording in the studio when I thought, this is exactly how it has to be now, that this is Achim I'm recording. We have a non-verbal musical communication, it's somehow all very natural and totally harmonious.

**Was Achim also involved in the compositions or how did he contribute to the songs?**

*The fact is that Achim has a keen sense for the right wave guitar licks. That was already the case in the 80s. We don't play complicated stuff; we can't do that. It's all about whether what you're playing serves the song. After I've composed a track on the keyboard and the vocal lines, I send it to Achim and he has all the freedom he needs to develop something on the guitar. Then he comes into the studio to record*

*it. I always tell him that we'll record whatever he wants to record. Later, I listen through the tracks and decide what to use. That's the crucial point, because as a producer there's nothing better than having a cornucopia of ideas. I take a similar approach when I add my share of the guitar work later on. In the end, you end up with that complementary something that fascinated us before when we were developing guitars together. And that's what you hear on "The Children Of The Moon".*

**The two guitars, the electronic sounds and the percussion have also given the work great volume and make it sound monumental. And "The Silence of Winterland" quickly sticks in the ear. It goes perfectly with the wonderful cover. Who created the great cover?**

*The CD cover is based on an idea by Achim von Raesfeld. He took a Deep Imagination photo taken in the mountains of Gran Canaria and incorporated it into a futuristic landscape. We all liked the idea so much that we ended up implementing and finalizing it with our record company BSC Music and NC FineDesign.*

**Many songs on the new album have rather dark titles such as "The Magic Moon", "Catching the Shadow", "The Silence of Winterland" or "No Words to Say". Is there a conceptual work behind the album? And if so, what is the connection between the songs?**

*The album title "The Children Of The Moon" doesn't really say anything other than that it describes us. It's a kind of romantic metaphor for what we've been creating with Deep Imagination since 2020. The dark titles all came to me on their own, I just had to do it, the lyrics are all about dark romantic moments and are made up of beautiful sounding words that you can sing well. Every syllable has to fit for me. I deliberately made an album that sounds compact and as if it's all of a piece. I've actually always used singing as a kind of instrument. Now singing my compositions myself is something wonderful for me. This is perhaps a point of maturity that I have reached after 40 years of making music. The difference to all other instruments is that singing comes directly from the soul.*

**In addition to the digital version, the album was also released as a limited-edition CD with a great A4-sized booklet containing lots of photos and the lyrics. Wasn't that a financial risk?**

*Not really, because the CD is still an important part of an album release for me. But of course, you have to put a bit of effort into it. But together with BSC Music, it works brilliantly.*

**In which edition was the limited version released and is it now sold out?**

*We made a mini-edition of 100 copies and all but a very few of them are now sold out.*

**You received a very positive response to the album from the press. Were the reactions from music lovers also so positive and did that surprise you?**

*Yes, the reviews are really good. What more could you want than to be given the feeling that you've been understood? But not everyone immediately took the music as dark wave or something like that, but also as art rock or ambient gothic. The reactions of my friends are that they see this new work as very authentic. One even said to me: "That's you"!*

**Do you have a favorite song on the album?**

*I once had the dream of releasing my own compositions. I've been living this dream since 2004, when we had our first release on BSC Music/Prudence. I think all seven tracks on the new album are equally strong. But if I had to name a favorite track, it would be "The Silence of Winterland". It's a darkly romantic love song. The lyrics are about the inevitable transience of love and about lovers reuniting at some point after death in a cold paradise, the Winterland.*

**You also made videos for some of the songs. How time-consuming was that and how was the response?**

*The videos are going down really well. Maybe it's because Achim and I appear in them ourselves and perform to the songs. The effort required for the videos is not small, but it's a wonderful stage to perform on. Of course, producing videos as a musician is not actually my primary goal, but it's simply part of the overall Deep Imagination package and we do everything ourselves. That's why I always put everything into it when we shoot the pictures and also when I edit the video at the end. Also, because it's a lot of fun and puts the spotlight on the respective song.*

**Has the dark wave gothic style now solidified in the music of Deep Imagination or will the music be more electronic again?**

*I think the new style of Deep Imagination is not something that will solidify, but something that will evolve. In principle, the basis has been an electronic-ambient approach for 25 years. I still work with pads and sequencers. The additional guitars and, above all, the vocal production is essential. That gives the whole substance. From instrumental ambient to the most elaborate productions with a number of guest musicians, I've already done a lot. That's good, but I don't necessarily want to repeat it, because the exciting thing about making music for me is and always has been the new territory that needs to be discovered.*

**Are you already working on new songs and will there be another collaboration on the next release?**

*Yes, both. We've just released "No Words to Say", the third video for the new album, and we're already working on the next clip, this time for "The Silence of Winterland". And new songs are already in the making.*

**What are your plans for the future in general? Will there be any live performances from you?**

*First of all, there will be a new single from Deep Imagination next year. In summer 2023, I played a few tracks live with Achim von Raesfeld at the CD release party for the new album. Incidentally, excerpts of this can also be seen in the form of two short live videos on YouTube. We would like to make more of it and maybe play at a suitable festival. At the moment, however, there are no concrete plans or offers, but this will certainly continue to mature.*

**What about the Art Of Infinity project that you had together with Thorsten Rentsch? Is that on hold for the time being (the last album came out in 2014) or are you planning another collaboration with Thorsten Rentsch?**

*Nothing has changed in the fact that we have not yet become active again with Art Of Infinity, but we have not disbanded either. There are no concrete plans at the moment, but Thorsten Rentsch and I don't want to rule out the possibility of something new from Art Of Infinity one day. The future will tell us.*

**Thank you very much for the detailed answers to my questions.**

*Thank you very much.*

*The interview was published by German 'EMPIRE' music magazine and 'Musikzirkus Magazin' December 2023*