

Bio

*"Radiant collapse... Planetary scale... Our indecent errors paved the way
Truth long known before our last deeds... and the world we know will go down in flames..."*

Founded by guitarist and composer Robin Staps at the dawn of the millennium, **The Ocean** immediately stood apart. Coalescing around a shared vision of limitless sonic exploration and heaviness delivered straight from the gut, the German ensemble swiftly gained a formidable reputation as standard bearers for the nebulous but unstoppable post-metal movement.

Simultaneously revered as one of the most devastating live bands in modern heavy music, **The Ocean** became a regular fixture on the European festival circuit, appearing on metal festival bills of the likes of Hellfest, Wacken, Resurrection or Summer Breeze as much as on mainstream rock open airs like Roskilde, Dour or Pukkelpop, and tastemaker's indoor boutique festivals like Roadburn or Dunk! Over the course of their storied career, **The Ocean** have toured Europe and North America with iconic and influential artists such as **Opeth**, **Mastodon**, **Mono**, **Cult Of Luna**, **The Dillinger Escape Plan**, **Anathema**, **Between The Buried And Me** and **Devin Townsend**. The band's own **Pelagic Records** has become one of the world's leading labels for post-rock and post-metal, with a catalogue of 150 physical releases since 2009.

Over the last two decades, the band have been in a perpetual state of evolution, releasing a steady succession of groundbreaking and acclaimed albums that have all sought to push heavy music forward, embracing the cerebral, the primal and the inexplicable in equal measure. From the ominous power and thrumming potential of 2004 debut *Fluxion* and Metal Blade debut *Aeolian*, described as "*complex, overwhelming and mercilessly tight*" (Kerrang!), through to 2007 double concept album *Precambrian*, a "*Teutonic paeon to Earth's geology*" (Revolver) and the two-headed atheist's manifesto of *Heliocentric* and *Anthropocentric* (both 2010), Staps and a perennially fluid cast of musical characters have methodically built a unique musical legacy.

2013's seminal album *Pelagial*, described as "*A filmic ode to shifting moods, dichotomous influences and the musical personification of sinking towards the planet's deepest underwater points*" by Rock Sound, was another milestone for the band. Their most conceptual work to date, the album was ranked #3 on LoudWire's "Best Metal Albums Of 2013", #5 in About.com's "2013 Best Heavy Metal Albums" and recently appeared in LoudWire's "The Best 66 Metal Albums Of The Decade" list.

In the middle of the global pandemic, **The Ocean** are about to conclude their most ambitious, overarching and engrossing endeavour to date. In 2018, they released *Phanerozoic I: Palaeozoic* - the first half of a sprawling but superbly cohesive palaeontology concept album. The Phanerozoic eon is the current chapter in Earth's history; a chapter which began 541 million years ago, after the end of the Precambrian. The present tense is the Phanerozoic - we are living in it. During these 541 million years, the evolution and diversification of plant and animal life on Earth occurred, and the destruction of it in five mass extinction events.

Widely hailed as their finest work to date, *Phanerozoic I* brimmed with moments of wide-eyed melodic brilliance, alongside the expected warping and weaving of post-metal conventions. It entered the official German album charts at #41, while also scoring the band

their first significant chart positions in the US, too.

"Strangely enough, yes, the first part of Phanerozoic really is a 'no-regrets' album, which is quite rare," says Staps. "Maybe even the first time I can ever say that. I still think it sounds as good as it possibly could, and the material has not become boring during the 130+ shows we've played since the album release. It's pretty well live-tested now too."

In September 2020, **The Ocean** are poised to release the eagerly-awaited concluding parts of the Phanerozoic journey. Completing the album took longer than expected, because of the band's heavy touring schedule since the release of *Phanerozoic I*: impressions of these adventures through India, Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Georgia, Australia, New Zealand and Europe are documented in the 130-page Phanerozoic photo-book that will be released along with Part II. In contrast with compositional directness of *Phanerozoic I*, the new album - *Phanerozoic II: Mesozoic | Cenozoic* - is a vastly more progressive and perverse piece of work.

"Phanerozoic II is more experimental, more eclectic in musical style and direction, and more varied in terms of tempos, beats, guitar work and the use of electronics," notes Staps. "This was an intentional choice: we wanted Part I to feel rather streamlined and to have a strong cohesion between the individual songs. We wanted to create a certain vibe to linger from the first until the last note throughout the whole record. We kept the weirder, more daring and more progressive material for Part II. The outcome is a record that is a real journey. It starts in one place, and concludes in a totally different place. In a way, it relates to Pelagial, which was similar in that it was also a journey: but a more guided, focused and predictable one. Phanerozoic II on the other hand is closer to the experience of free fall."

Divided into two sections - Mesozoic and Cenozoic - *Phanerozoic II* once again showcases the detail and depth that have become two of **The Ocean**'s most enduring trademarks. While ostensibly delving into the extraordinary realities of the Earth's shifting temporal tides, Staps and his comrades have long drawn hazy parallels between their chosen subjects and the emotional experiences that their music strives to convey. *Phanerozoic II* is essentially an album about time, with some very poignant and pointed allusions to the modern world woven into the new music's spiritual fabric.

At the end of the Mesozoic era, an asteroid hit the Yucatan peninsula in what is nowadays Mexico and wiped out not only the dinosaurs, but most life on earth. The impact triggered forest fires of unfathomable dimensions, and the dust from the impact and the smoke from the fires clouded the sun for months. Photosynthesis eventually came to a halt on a global level, the oxygen level in the atmosphere plummeted, temperatures dropped. This historic apocalypse is the essence of the track *Jurassic | Cretaceous*, which **The Ocean** take to the human level by references to maverick movie director Lars Von Trier's masterpiece *Melancholia* and the various philosophical questions touched upon in that film. The current climate change debate, which was alluded to in *Permian: The Great Dying* on *Phanerozoic I*, recurs in the chorus hook-line of *Cretaceous*: *'We are just like reptiles, giant rulers of the world. Within the blink of an eye wiped off the face of the Earth.'*

"Though humanity is only a very recent phenomenon in the 541 million years history of the Phanerozoic eon, the lyrics are obviously written from a human perspective", Staps explains. "They are following Nietzsche's philosophical idea of amor fati in the light of the larger themes of Eternal Recurrence, and the inevitability of an imaginary impending collision on a

planetary scale, which are the two red threads that go through Phanerozoic I and II."

A profound cautionary tale, *Phanerozoic II* is underpinned by some of the most imaginative and challenging music that **The Ocean** - completed by drummer Paul Seidel, keyboard maestro Peter Voigtmann, bassist Mattias Hågerstrand and guitarist David Ramis Ahfeldt - have made yet. Tracked in Iceland, Spain and Germany and produced by esteemed studio guru Jens Bogren, the album is once again blessed with the presence of Jonas Renkse, whose peerless vocals find another sublime backdrop during the second half of mammoth epic *Jurassic / Cretaceous*.

Also making a return appearance on the new record is Tomas Liljedahl, best known as vocalist with iconic Swedish post-metal/sludge crew Breach. With cameos on *Aeolian*, *Precambrian* and *Pelagial*, Hallbom has already proved his kinship and chemistry with **The Ocean**, and Staps is thrilled to have had his involvement in the band's latest masterwork.

"Breach were one of the most important bands for me, not only with their milestone album Kollapse, which was basically the invention of what people refer to as post-metal nowadays long before this term was ever coined, but also It's Me God (1997) and especially Venom (1999) - they changed my view on music and guitar playing entirely. Breach were different from everything and everyone else around at that time and it's an honour to have Tomas continue the tradition to guest on our albums for the fourth time now."

The Ocean have long been known for their extensive, awe-inspiring album packaging, and their 10th album is no let-down: the *Phanerozoic* box set included an engraved slate rock plate next to vinyl records and/or CDs of both albums, and even authentic pre-historic fossils: a trilobite from the Palaeozoic, an ammonite from the Mesozoic and a petrified fish skeleton from the Cenozoic era. The band sourced these fossils over the period of several months with the help of a geological institute in Munich, and getting the quantities needed to fulfil 1,000 box set preorders was a great challenge: hundreds of Moroccan trilobites, 450 million (!) years of age, had to be sourced from global trade fairs.

Released into a world in turmoil, *Phanerozoic II* will provide fans of adventurous and fearless music with all the sonic and philosophical sustenance they have come to expect from this most intuitively progressive German/Swiss/Swedish musicians collective. Despite the current pausing of all live performances, **The Ocean** will be twitching in the starting blocks when the madness of the global pandemic has passed; primed and ready to take their new music out on the road, where it will doubtless mutate and grow into ever more extraordinary shapes. The band have always been professional escape artists from the modern world, playing in a many far-flung locations as possible, and Staps insists that **The Ocean** will roll on for the foreseeable future, as mighty and inexorable as time itself.

"We're always striving to get out as much as we can," Staps concludes. "And as far away as we can, to bring our music and our lives to the last frontiers which remain in a world where the last square inches of free spaces have been Google-mapped to a frightening high resolution and level of detail."