**CELESTE** have been breaking the outer boundaries of heavy music for over fifteen years, ever since they evolved out of Lyon’s celebrated hardcore punk scene. When they began, their music was absolutely brutal, a mission in search of the heaviest sound you could imagine. Despite the fact it harnessed the blistering power of black metal and post-hardcore, it was entirely its own beast, pushing way beyond the limits of those genres’ cliches and tropes to arrive at something entirely unique. Extremity on their own terms.

Although all their records are tied together by the stark monochrome photography of their album covers, each successive **CELESTE** album pushed that sound further than before. “For years we just wanted to get darker and more violent,” says drummer Antoine Royer. Their last LP, 2017’s Infidèle(s) saw the incorporation of a more melodic streak to go with that intensity. Their most focussed record yet, it was tremendously received, critically adored, and backed with the band’s biggest shows to date. This summer, they signed with the influential Nuclear Blast records for its follow-up.

Always forward-thinking, and this time emboldened even further by the huge success of Infidèle(s), that follow-up was always going to be something radical. Even by their own inordinately high standards, however, new record Assassine(s) is one hell of a step forward. Although it’s still an album of cyclonic walls of guitar, of battering relentless rhythm, and passages of blissful, rushing release, it’s also unlike anything the band have ever released. Embracing modern, forward-thinking production, it’s just as complex but more direct, diverse and accessible than ever before “Our leitmotif here was to open our minds,” says guitarist Sébastien Ducotté. “We made a real effort to think outside of our box. I don’t know if people will notice, but we’ve experimented with things here that we’ve never tried before. It feels like a breath of fresh air to us.”

One reason Assassine(s) feels quite so layered is the way in which it was written. With lockdown scuppering the band’s plans to hunker down for recording sessions in the USA, they were forced to entirely pick apart and rebuild their writing process. “It was painful, and stressful, but also invigorating,” says Guillaume. Whereas before, they’d hammer out songs collaboratively at their rehearsal space, writing as they go, “working from home is totally different,” Johan says. “The temptation is high to not only write the guitar riffs, but also to add drums and bass, then make the tweaks you would at the rehearsal.” When, eventually, the band could get together in the summer of 2020, the band were already armed with rich and complex home compositions to combine into a new record.

“The main difference between this album and the previous one is that it’s less teamwork,” Johan continues. “We each went further into our personal, inner views of what the songs were. The fact we could be alone and not worry about what the other guys in the band would think let us go much further. In the past you might be too shy to bring some really gamechanging stuff, this time it was ‘go straight to what you think is best, even if you think it’s silly compared to what we usually do.’” As a result, Assassine(s) is their most diverse sounding record to date. “Guillame got deeper into what he wanted to by himself, and I got deeper into what I wanted to do. My stuff is more the melodic side, a bit more experimental, while Guillame is more straightforward metal. At the end, we wouldn’t say any song is written just by him or just by me, but people can probably hear it’s much more diverse.”

For all its diversity, and the divergence of each member’s styles, however, Assassine(s) is a tight, comprehensive and consistent piece of work. For this, we have producer Chris Edrich to thank. “When we knew we wouldn’t be able to make it to the USA, he was the first name we thought about.” They’d got to know him over their time on the road, and were admirers of his previous work, so entered the studio together over winter. They were unprepared, however, for just how hard of a taskmaster he’d prove. “We were way too optimistic with the planning. We booked two weeks to record everything, but Chris is so picky that absolutely everything took us two or three times more time and energy than we were used to. The whole process was very hectic, the sessions were relentless and long, so we ended up exhausted, physically and mentally. There was no break in two weeks, and since it was winter, we didn’t see the sun at all during that time.” They ended up spending almost a month getting things right. “We had to book a second session in the end, we felt like we needed to record even more guitars and polish certain elements.”

The recording for Assassine(s) was so gruelling that it even threatened the fabric of the band itself. “Every night we were so tired that we didn’t enjoy being together as much as we’re used to.” Nevertheless, in the same way the hardships of isolation led to richer and more complex songwriting, it’s Edrich’s relentlessness we have to thank for the record’s razor-sharp edges. “We learnt how to get tighter, and to really focus on having perfect takes. In the past, since we have kind of a wall of instruments, we didn’t really care if something wasn’t perfect because it was blended with everything else. The philosophy this time was very different.”

Though **CELESTE** had an inhuman ability to use the challenges of the last year to their advantage, 2020 still took its toll. The band have not performed a proper live show since 2019, for instance. “90% of the fun and enjoyment in a band is the life on the road and the live shows,” says Antoine. “We feel pretty empty and frustrated now. We can’t wait to put our asses in the van.” **CELESTE**’s gigs are perhaps even more essential than their records. Performed entirely in darkness, red headlamps worn by the musicians the only light cutting through a heavy artificial fog, they’re unlike any other shows on earth. When it comes to live shows, too, the enforced break has been a chance for **CELESTE** to redouble their efforts. “Our goal is to get more professional live. We want to work on the consistency of the whole show. The transitions between the songs, to get people even more involved in our stuff. We really want to offer an experience, to tell a kind of story during our set. It will probably be a bit less savage and exhausting than before, but more interesting and easier to apprehend.”

Above all else, **CELESTE** are innovators. Whether by pioneering French avant-garde metal when they formed at the turn of the millennium, by making their boldest leaps despite being seven albums deep into their career, or using two years away from live shows to tightly finetune their stagecraft, they refuse at all costs to rest on their laurels. There can be consequences to this instinct – fans of the band’s older work might be thrown off by their constant shifts of pace – but they’re throwing caution to the wind. A bit of backlash “would be a good thing, because it would mean that we’ve really changed,” says Guillaume . “It’s not disrespectful, it’s just that we never made music to please people, but just to enjoy what we’re doing.” In the end, **CELESTE** are a band so forward-thinking that they can only be judged on the strength of their latest work. And when it comes to a record as bold as Assassine(s), they’ve hit a whole new peak entirely.