Simone Simons

Vermillion

English bio

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*„I strive to become better with each art piece that I create. ‘Vermillion’ has broadened my musical horizon even further.”*

- Simone Simons

For more than 20 years, ever since she was a teenager, Simone Simons has been spearheading the world of symphonic metal. As a lead singer, icon, and role model for a whole generation of female metalheads, the Epica lead singer remains one of the most prominent key figures in all things metal. After eight albums and countless global tours with her band, Simone Simons finally found the time to release her first solo album – a moment 15 years in the making! Her breathtaking debut “Vermillion” is a stunning feat chronicling her storied past as well as her rise to fame, and showcasing her many different influences ranging from prog rock to film scores to metal to electronic elements.

Of the timing for her eagerly awaited foray into the realms of a solo career, the Dutch singer says with a disarming grin: Epica has my priority and I always have the liberty to do other musical projects besides my career in Epica. Yet, I never had the time to dive into a project to this extent.

Some endeavors require patience and time, and rightly so. Simone chose not to rush her solo project, opting instead to thoughtfully consider how she wanted to present herself. Enter stage right Arjen Lucassen (Ayreon). Her musical partner and longtime collaborator is no stranger to her soaring operatic voice. Together they have crafted a sonic universe that befits the influential figure she is. And while many would use their solo effort as a radical, even provocative departure from everything they stood for, Simone remains true to her love for epic melodies, huge choruses and monumental, intelligent music.

“Metal has my heart, and Arjen too”, Simone laughs. “I fell in love with Ayreon’s music when I was 16. It was always a dream of mine to work with Arjen. Many years and even more features in Ayreon later, I contacted Arjen saying that I would love to write a whole album with him. This must have been around five to six years ago. We talked to each other every once in a while but were both swamped and couldn’t commit to such a project. Now, the timing was right for both of us. Our busy schedules had an opening for this project to come to fruition. ‘Vermillion’ was born.”

However, one should not expect a mere fusion of Epica and Ayreon. Although echoes of both artists’ unique DNA resonate in the huge, powerful, cinematic songs, “Vermillion” stands as a unique showcase for this first-time collaboration of these two exceptional musical minds. “I am very grateful that I could work with such a talented and hard working musician”, Simone says. “You could say that Arjen and I both are ‘heartworking’ – everything we do comes from the heart. We share a strong connection and I think that you can hear that in the music.”

Even for a recording veteran like Arjen Lucassen, who has worked on 40 plus albums in his long career, this project was unique. “For me it was a real challenge to come up with material that Simone liked”, he says. “I have to say she’s very honest, she told me clearly when she didn’t like something! But I really feel that this pushed the best out of me and it made me work harder. Usually I’m my own boss and I just write for myself, but now I had to please someone else. I really love this pressure, it keeps me focussed! And it was also very comforting to know that she would always elevate the songs with her amazing delivery.” In a next step, Simone came up with the song titles, themes and lyrical fragments for the songs which were then written together with Arjen’s partner Lori Linstruth.

Simone's performance on the album is truly compelling and extremely versatile. She sings for her life, showcasing her vocal range and diversity like never before – from opera to symphonic metal, from atmospheric melodrama to alternative rock. Arjen: “From the beginning I knew I wanted to capture the many facets of Simone’s voice and her incredible range on this album: The soft seductive side, the classical opera style and also the high powerful belts. She can do it all, so let’s flaunt it by all means!” For Simone, this extraordinary feat was also accomplished by their fruitful partnership. “I love Arjen’s work, and he wrote the songs fitting to my voice,” she says. “He is a master of creating magical melodies. What always fascinated me, was how emotional and melancholic his music is. He pushed me to the next level with this album. I strive to become better with each art piece that I create.” The synergy of their collaboration resulted in an album that enriches the genre with its captivating and symphonic rock/metal essence.

Written and recorded in Arjen Lucassen’s home studio in the Netherlands over several sessions starting last summer, “Vermillion” slowly evolved into a towering, impressive, exhilarating body of music, united by the colour red as a common theme. “We wanted a good balance between heavy and atmospheric music”, Arjen says. “Bring in some industrial elements, as well as some progressive stuff. We wanted a big variety in the songs. But most important for me are the vocal melodies and chord progressions. And every song had to have a real cool groove!”

The lyrical content of this anticipated solo debut is as versatile as its musical composition, touching on contemporary issues like AI and environmental degradation, along with intimate glimpses into Simone's personal experiences and reflections. Chronicling relationships, life’s inescapable ups and downs, on every song “Vermillion” shows Simone Simons singing her heart out. “Music is therapy for the artist as well as for the listener,” she says. “We take what we can from it, we learn as grow older and wiser, we live through similar life situations, we breathe the same air. I am grateful that I can channel my love for life and art through music and make people feel something.”

One advantage of being Simone Simons, of course, is having an impressive list of guest musicians only a phone call away. Next to Arjen on a myriad of instruments, bassist Rob van der Loo on bass and Koen Herfst on drums, Alissa White-Gluz of Arch Enemy fame guests on “Cradle To The Grave”, Perttu Kivilaakso of Apocalyptica adds his signature cello wizardry to the closing monument “Dark Night of the Soul”, while her Epica confidante Mark Jansen performs his abyssal growls on “The Core” and “R.E.D.”. This menacing beast of a song is also enlivened by a powerful, riotous choir where Simone’s entire Epica team chants together with many other friends.

You could have expected many things from Simone Simons’ first solo effort. But “Vermillion” emerges as a gargantuan goose-bump generator, a universally touching, stellar tour de force. From the magnum opus “Aeterna” to the subtle Pink Floyd vibe of “In Love We Rust” to the heavy industrial edge of “Cradle To The Grave”, this album is an unforgettable, evocative, bedazzling journey more than anything else, a stunning jewel in Simone’s crown of achievements. “It is a very sincere and at times heart-wrenching album,” Simone nods. “I think that if we give people goosebumps, make them bang their heads and maybe shed a tear, we have succeeded. Arjen and I combined forces and brought out the best in both of each other.” We can thank Simone for taking her time to get to this point, because the long wait for this moment has truly been worthwhile.

Björn Springorum