



Bio information: **ANTISTATIC**
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No machines were harmed in the making of *Relics*, Antistatic’s first full-length release and Cuneiform Records debut. In fact, no machines were used, beyond those necessary to record this young Danish quartet’s music. The precision and intricacy of the band’s carefully stacked rhythms might suggest that loopers and drum machines played some part in *Relics*’ creation, and they did—but only as inspiration.

“Our music wouldn’t have been made if it hadn’t been for drum machines, or industrial machines in general,” says guitarist **Laust Moltesen Andreassen**, interviewed with his Copenhagen-based bandmates via Zoom.

“From time to time we’ve had some interest in post-industrial imagery, for example a factory being retaken by plants,” he continues. “So what we’re doing musically is like the human body claiming back repetition and what it does to the mind, as opposed to just giving that away as something that should only be done by electrically powered machines.”

“There’s also this medical/psychological thing that happens when you repeat the same thing so many times,” adds Andreassen’s fellow guitarist, **Mads Ulrich**. “To me, the act of physically repeating all of these parts and rhythms instead of using loopers or other sorts of machines is a sort of meditation. It’s keeping body and mind active enough that thoughts just kind of disappear... It’s about having time to enter a kind of meditative, trance-like state while playing.”

“We’re removing consciousness, in a way, with repetition and by playing music that is difficult enough that you have to really concentrate,” Andreassen concurs, “And you have to use your body all the time. It’s an exercise that gets the whole system synchronized, and I really enjoy being in that place. It’s very relaxing for me.”

Listeners may well find themselves both enchanted and energized by *Relics*, but Antistatic’s music is also as instructive as it is beguiling. In particular, the band’s chiseled constructions exemplify how artists can find “freedom within limits”.

“On a musical level, we all have a fondness for excluding certain elements in order to really focus on certain others,” explains Andreassen. “It’s very much the joy of minimalism, in a way. Like being able to zoom in on only using textures and non-pitched sound made us able to write in a language that was more specific to us.”

“We come from very different backgrounds, but we definitely have the same point of view in terms of how we like to approach music,” Ulrich, adds. “We like to challenge ourselves, and I guess it’s just a challenge in itself to play with people that have very different ways of working. Me and Søren [drummer **Søren Høi**] have worked together for many years in bands, but it was really nice for us to change that group dynamic with these two other guys.”

What you won’t hear on *Relics*, or in Antistatic’s live shows, are exactly the things that more conventional rock bands depend upon. Despite the presence of two very accomplished guitarists, there are no screaming solos: instead, Andreassen and Ulrich are hyper-intellectualized exponents of what Keith Richards once called “the ancient art of weaving”, bringing two-guitar interplay to new levels of complexity and sophistication. There are no lyrics, and consequently no vocals: the members of Antistatic don’t want to impose meaning on the listeners, and while their music is not lacking in emotion, their feelings are expressed subtly. There are also few defined roles. At times bassist **Janus Bagh** takes on the timekeeping duties of a bass drum or orchestral timpani, while Høi’s close-miked and carefully tuned drums embrace melody.

Ulrich has developed a very personal style of playing in which he often smacks the strings of his Gibson RD—a guitar favoured by doomcore and dark-metal guitarists—to elicit floating harmonic clouds. It’s a technique that other guitarists

have occasionally used for effect, but none have developed to such a high level. Andreassen, in turn, plays almost exclusively finger-style on his vintage Gretsch, using different muting techniques to get dry, percussive sounds that are reminiscent of the lutes and idiophones he encountered while studying and travelling in West Africa.

It's as if Antistatic is a rock band that's been repurposed as a percussion ensemble, an observation the musicians happily accept.

"Definitely," Andreassen says. "We talk about ourselves as a rock quartet turned inside out, where the stringed instruments are suddenly percussive and the drums are singing with feedback and stuff like that."

"We think we're creating a logic in a composition just by repeating stuff," Ulrich notes. "It's quite common throughout our songs—and that draws a thread back to the 'classical' vibe of composers like Steve Reich and compositions that are just purely about repetition, or about some kind of simple rhythm."

"For me, I am really into pieces like [Reich's] *Clapping Music*, which creates really spectacular textures with rhythm," Bagh adds. "That's what inspired me personally. And then we have combined that with a very collective process. We don't have any songs that are written 100 percent by any one member."

"We work a lot in the rehearsal space, trying to see what actually works for us," the bassist continues. "We'll often take one specific rhythmic cell and then sort of stretch it, or play it in other registers—spread it out and orchestrate it on different instruments, or play it with a lot of pauses in between, but still staying with that one initial kernel of rhythm."

On paper, Antistatic's approach sounds almost clinical, but on-stage or on record there's always room for magic.

"At live shows, people often describe how they can see everything we're playing, but they still find themselves looking around, searching for sounds that they can hear but can't see who's playing," Andreassen says. "They're looking at our hands, like 'Who's making that sound? I can't really tell. Is it the combination of the guitar and bass?' But it's the snare drum feeding back, or whatever. I don't know if it's that deliberate, but it's definitely fun when it's opaque in that way."

As the guitarist implies, some of these mind-blowing moments can be explained. But there are others that are due only to this particular combination of musicians, making music that is greater than the sum of its parts. Maybe it's a Danish thing. Is Antistatic an example of Scandinavian social-democratic alchemy at its finest?

"I think we all agree that we are not a political band at all, really," says Høi, adding that, nonetheless, he and his bandmates bring an awareness of social issues into their seemingly abstract sound. "We definitely think about what kind of themes our music could represent. For instance, I've been thinking a lot about the relationship between humans and machines, and how a human can imitate a machine. In my mind, I think that's what I'm doing when I'm drumming some of these parts. I'm trying to be as much of a machine as possible— but I would say that's more coming from being a fan of science fiction than from any political message that I want to spread."

"A lot of the time, our ideas just come from 'Wow, this feels good to play!'" Andreassen elaborates. But Ulrich doesn't completely dismiss the notion that Antistatic's music might be an outgrowth of its environment.

"People often say that Danes are very modest, and often way too modest," he observes. "We tend to talk ourselves down a bit. I've never thought of that in terms of our music, but it makes sense because we've formed a band where we are completely, sonically four equals. One musician never takes the lead and takes up all the space; it's like the lead is the collective way."

"Growing up in a welfare state," he adds, laughing, "we have learned to share, and to share the responsibility."

That is a beautiful thing in itself—and when it results in music as hypnotic and uncompromising as Antistatic's it's also quite extraordinary.