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Drone Pioneer Dylan Carlson Heads to Moscow

By Timothy Misir

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Dylan Carlson, on the left, is the only original member of Earth, pioneers of the genre of drone metal.

Dylan Carlson is widely credited as pioneering the sub-genre of heavy metal known as drone metal, in which heaviness is achieved through the use of sustained or repeated notes and low frequencies.

His band Earth has been hugely influential to extreme music but never really got the credit they deserved in the 1990s, while his peers in the Seattle alternative music scene went on to international fame.

Those Seattle bands have now mostly faded into obscurity while Earth, known for its long, sludgy and brooding instrumental songs, has stood the test of time. A long overdue revival is now underway around the group's new album "Primitive and Deadly."

"It's our first time in Russia so I'm really excited," Carlson, the group's sole original member

and principal songwriter, told The Moscow Times in a telephone interview from his home in Washington, prior to embarking on a European tour that includes a stop in Moscow on Monday with ambient doom band Nadja.

The group's eighth studio album, released in September 2014, finally sees Earth rocking out again after several country-, blues- and folk-infused albums.

"I've always thought of Earth as a rock band, even if we're like a weird rock band" Carlson said. "I think a lot of the old hard rock and metal bands brought in a lot of influences into their music and I've always had that kind of attitude toward music."

Earth's debut album, "Earth 2: Special Low Frequency Version," (Sub Pop, 1993) took extreme music in a completely different direction and remains one of the genre's most influential records. Carlson however, left music in 1997 to deal with drug and legal problems and did not touch a guitar again until 2003, returning to music only after being prompted by musician Greg Anderson of Sunn O))) — a group that was formed as an Earth tribute band.

"I'm incredibly lucky in that not many people vanish for a few years and then have anyone care when they come back," Carlson said, recounting how he was discovered by Anderson while working in a framing shop in Seattle. "If it wasn't for the Earth fans, I wouldn't get to do this and wouldn't get to go to amazing places and play music for people. I'd probably be ... I don't know where I'd be, but probably somewhere not good."

"Primitive and Deadly" has been critically well received and outsold all the band's previous albums combined. It saw Earth enter the Billboard charts for the first time.

Carlson has been exploring English folk music in his personal work and expects to release a crowdfunded solo album this year. "I was, and still am, into English folk rock, but I wanted Earth to be free to do what it does."

Reflecting on the state of music today, the drone metal pioneer said, "A lot of the newer metal, it's like 'where's the riff?,' you know? I think that's the main thing. I still strongly believe in music having memorable riffs and melodies," he said, "I think you can still move forward and do something new with that. That's one of the main things I always try to do with Earth. I ask, 'Is this a riff that's trying to grab people?'"

Earth plays with Nadja and Cisfinitum on Monday at 8 p.m. Club Pipl. 22 Derbenevskaya Ulitsa, Bldg. 1. Metro Paveletskaya. ponominalu.ru*.*

Contact the author at artsreporter@imedia.ru

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