



# The Longest Day

**Katatonia's**  
journey through  
pressure yields  
the near-perfect  
*Night Is the New Day*

by ADRIEN BEGRAND

A

LITTLE OVER TWO YEARS AGO, yours truly spoke with Katatonia guitarist and founding member Anders Nyström during the band's victory lap tour of North America, and when asked if he ever felt any pressure writing and recording new material, he responded with a cool and confident "No." However, he also admitted that the resounding success of 2006's *The Great Cold*

*Distance* had him feeling just a little daunted for the first time in his career, as far as creating a follow-up was concerned.

Fast forward to the present day, and Nyström sounds absolutely frazzled when recounting the arduous, torturous years of writing—and months of recording—the 11 tracks that comprise the long-awaited *Night Is the New Day*. "I've never felt this much pressure from anyone—media, fans, even myself," he admits. "There were some times where I really wondered, 'Are we really going to be able to come out with a new album that's going to top the last one?' We were struggling with the writing of this album for two years, and there's been so much material tossed away, and that [was something] we didn't really do before. Before, we set up a deadline and just whipped out an album with 11 songs. This time we probably trashed 10 songs."

Painstakingly conceived, meticulously arranged and boasting production that can best be described as immaculate, Katatonia's ninth album is indeed the superior record, taking the atmospheric toyed with on *The Great Cold Distance* and the non-album track "Unfurl" to a new level for the band. While the foundation is similar to what we've heard from them throughout the past decade, Nyström's guitar work on the new disc is his subtlest and most expressive to date, while longtime bandmate Jonas Renkse's vocal performance is easily the most emotional and nuanced of his career, the entire package enhanced beautifully by new collaborator Frank Hult, who infuses that familiar sound with contemplative synth tones and electronic touches that greatly enhance the tunes.

"He's an old friend of David Castillo, the sound engineer that we have," says Renkse. "We met him through David, and that's how it came up, the cooperation with 'Unfurl,' and he was doing also a remix for 'My Twin.' We saw the qualities

in Frank, and we thought it was a good idea to use him for a whole album. He's very good with electronics like keyboards, textures, stuff like that. So, having someone professional to do all the keyboards and the arrangements of things like that, I think that helped a lot."

"I've always had a big interest in going into the electronic kind of world, but I'm not really talented with that sort of stuff," adds Nyström. "I've always been keen on the whole sound picture of electronica, so to speak. So, putting this guy into it, we could just throw ideas at each other and pretty much go as far as we wanted with that."

**We always look at the horizon. At the end of an album, we always already see something new there, and we feel, "Wow, let's go there." —Anders Nyström**

Although the album slowly, steadily came into shape—hunkered down for week upon week in a dingy little studio outside Stockholm that they disdainfully dubbed "The Rat Hole"—it wasn't until Renkse began the vocal tracks that the rest of the band truly started to get an inkling of *Night Is the New Day's* arresting quality. As for the reserved, affable Renkse, that's another story entirely. "I can't remember much of the vocal sessions that I did, because I was so determined to just get it out of the way,"

he laughs. "I rather remember other things, like doing the guitars or the drums, but the vocal time is just pretty much erased from my memory. I think it might have to do with we were working very long hours in the studio every day until we were finished with the vocals. We didn't have really a break. I think we did a couple of gigs, but that was the only break I had from doing vocals, and I was still doing vocals live."

"We were very, very tired at that point, and the vocal thing is really the crown of the whole album, so it was such a delicate moment," elaborates Nyström. "For Jonas, he was blocking that out. He still had to deliver and put so much emotion into it, so I think he just stepped into the zone, just to be the vocals. I don't think he could reflect on the whole thing, but I was there and it was magical. You could hear how much he improved as well, so much more confidence in his vocal takes this time, not having to re-do everything over and over again. Some of the takes are just perfect delivery from first takes. You can see the evolution and the progress, and that's also very comforting for us, to see the growth of Jonas as a vocalist in the band."

Unquestionably, all that work by these

perfectionists has paid off in resounding fashion, creating a stylish yet idiosyncratic sound that will leave listeners wondering just where Katatonia's unpredictable path will lead to next. "We never want to stagnate and appear in some dead alley and turn around," states Nyström. "We always look at the horizon. At the end of an album, we always already see something new there, and we feel, 'Wow, let's go there.' It feels like that's our calling. Just indulge, and let the inner demons tell you the way to go." [A]