

THE INSIDE TRACK

MANY OF HORROR

Hell hath no fury like **LINGUA IGNOTA**. As a survivor of harrowing domestic abuse, **KRISTIN HAYTER** has weaponised profane noise and sacred melodies into an awe-inspiring force that refuses to be silenced...

WORDS: JAMES MACKINNON

LINGUA IGNOTA, known to her friends as Kristin Hayter, is a beacon of light, noise and righteous ferocity in the gloom. It is July 2018 and Kristin stands in the centre of a huddle of bodies in New York's darkened Saint Vitus Bar.

No lights shine except for the portable stage lamp she wields as she stalks the crowd, whipping at the cables which drape her shoulders as a distraught scream rips from her being. The dry-heaving industrial squelch of WOE TO ALL (ON THE DAY OF MY WRATH) – the imposing all-caps a stylistic insistence – thunders throughout the room. Bystanders look on in awe, queasy, or rooted to the spot in terror. Then Kristin lays down her light, kills the retching sample and plays a plaintive, sweet keyboard progression that welcomes a song entitled HOLY IS THE NAME (OF MY RUTHLESS AXE). Though near breathless, Kristin sings in a bell-like soprano as if singing a church cantor. 'Holy is the name of my gleaming scythe', she keens,

'All my rapists lay beside me / All my rapists, cold and grey.'

It is a raw and arresting display of personal power, equal parts pain and beauty, vulnerability and defiance, unspeakable injury and retribution of biblical proportions. It also stems from a very real place. Kristin is a survivor of several relationships that were fraught with physical, psychological and sexual violence.

"For me, finding that I could not get justice or respite – from the criminal justice system, from my community, from my school, from most things I reached out to – this music has been the only source of 'healing' I've had," the 33-year-old says today, from her current home in San Diego, California, while discussing CALIGULA, her astonishing second album. She explains that, in her view, the accepted models of therapy that encourage "civility and forgiveness towards others" do not work for processing her trauma and rage. "I don't feel gentle. I don't feel like I want to love myself or anyone else. I felt like I wanted

Kristin Hayter AKA LINGUA IGNOTA: an artist unlike any other



to burn everything down. So that's what I made the music do."

Born in 1986 to a Catholic family, Kristin grew up in the San Diego suburb of Del Mar, California, a sunburned daydream of beach bods, organic produce stores and stultifying boredom. Fiercely intelligent and self-analytical to extremes, she speaks today with conviction in her thoughts, but also laughs often with SoCal breeziness as she describes herself as "the anxious, pasty one among my beautiful, tanned peers".

In Catholic school her teachers noticed her natural aptitude for singing, leading her to be selected as a choir soloist and church cantor, leading songs as devotees accepted the Eucharist. It honed her singing talents, but Kristin describes her relationship with the church now as "complex" and "mostly aesthetic at this point". An education in extreme music came through San Diego's burgeoning grindcore scene, as well as a teenage obsession with the Hydra Head Records roster and Nine Inch Nails' *The Downward Spiral*. Meanwhile, watching Converge's Jacob Bannon hang from the rafters of inveterate punk establishment Ché Café gave her a taste of the wanton abandon and visceral energy that courses through her live shows today.

It is not difficult to draw a line from LINGUA IGNOTA's lexicon of beauty and brutality to this clash of finesse and raw aggression in the music of Kristin's youth. Yet it was a fascination with radical classical composers like Igor Stravinsky that led her to embrace experimental compositions and attend the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She then moved to Providence – Rhode Island's state capital and a nexus for extreme noise rock – to undertake a graduate arts course at Brown University. It was during this five-year period, though, that Kristin endured "the primary abusive relationship" of her life.

During that dark period, her violent partner's jealousy, emotional manipulation and incommensurable rage isolated Kristin from family, friends and any potential outside source of support. Even attending classes, she says, could incur dire consequences. "I remember when he was initially arrested feeling completely ashamed, ashamed because my neighbours would know," she says haltingly, recalling the flash of red and blue lights coming through the bedroom window. She had called the cops herself after the latest in a long line of violent outbursts. "He's calm and collected and I'm in the bedroom, sobbing, and [the police] saw that I was injured and took him."

That should have been the end of it. Instead, Kristin found pursuing justice through the legal system to be dehumanising.

"It's a system that is completely broken," she sighs. "There's a whole bunch of doubt; people



Kristin: do not mess

"I WAS LIVING IN A SHED IN THE WOODS, PRAYING TO DIE"

KRISTIN HAYTER

think you're fucking lying and there's no-one to help you. It feels very re-traumatising and you have no agency."

All that pain, disappointment and outrage found a voice through LINGUA IGNOTA. Her MFA thesis included a song-cycle that spawned 2017's *LET THE EVIL OF HIS OWN LIPS COVER HIM*, an EP that weaponised misogynistic porngrind lyrics and promised an Old Testament reckoning against abusive men. Debut album *ALL BITCHES DIE*, issued in the same year, screamed against the culture of silence and suspicion that herself and many other survivors have come up against.

"I'm trying to express something I can't with one language," Kristin says of her lyrical approach, which draws from personal experience, wrathful biblical psalms and her abuser's threats.

"On *CALIGULA*, in particular, there are a lot of voices that get fused. So I pull all these facets together and I try – and probably fail – to create a language that can finally express trauma, or gets close enough to that feeling, somehow."

Initially, Kristin found liberation and acceptance performing these songs and finding allies within Providence's extreme underground. But this was soon soured and complicated when she found herself in another abusive relationship, this time with "a powerful, well-loved musician within this small scene". Burned by her experiences with the justice department, this time Kristin tried to pursue accountability through the community, making a joint statement with previous partners of this musician that called out his behaviour. The silence that followed, Kristin says, was even more of a betrayal than the police.

"It was worse than the criminal justice system, partly because it was people who I thought were my friends either did not believe me or did not want to get involved. People said terrible things," she winces today. "Then [the abuser] tried to turn it around to make it seem like I was the one abusing him, which was insane. I would never do it again. I was living in a shed in the woods at this point and it was five months of pacing around, praying to die."

CALIGULA is a crucible that burns away that betrayal. *DO YOU DOUBT ME TRAITOR* is an epic spiral of fear, torment and revenge in miniature. Kristin implores Satan for help, since her prayers have landed on deaf ears. She wails, "I don't eat / I don't sleep / I let it consume me", before letting out a scream of indignation and desperation that left her physically collapsed on the floor of a closet when she recorded the vocal take. Finally, she surfaces from the ashes, rising up imperiously to command her enemy to "throw your body in the fucking river". Yet elsewhere there are moments of eerie convalescence, with Kristin paraphrasing American poet Frank O'Hara on the closing track *I AM THE BEAST*: "All I want is boundless love / All I know is violence".

"That's part of the dark complexity of abuse. It's not real love, or love with a threat, but I also have to acknowledge that I did love, at certain points, people that were cruel to me," she says with candour, aware how absurd that might sound to someone who hasn't experienced that situation. "I created a monster on this record, I think, and it's a monster that's both capable of great tenderness and great brutality."

Has creating music as LINGUA IGNOTA helped you process these traumatic experiences?

"I think it has," Kristin concludes after a long pause. "For a while I thought it wasn't at all, that this is painful and I'm conceptually re-enacting this horrible stuff that's happened to me. But I do feel in some ways lighter than I have in the past."

The awesome power and unique craft of *CALIGULA* speaks for itself, and its personal rewards have been hard earned. Yet the widespread praise it has received came as both a surprise and a source of great encouragement to its creator.

"Honestly, the positive response has made me feel very strong," Kristin says. "To actually feel heard, I think, is one of the largest difficulties that survivors face. As much as you scream about what you've been through, people don't pay attention – they ignore you, they forget about you or they blame you. I feel like I've been heard, at last." **K!**

CALIGULA IS AVAILABLE NOW ON PROFOUND LORE. LINGUA IGNOTA TOUR THE UK IN SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER – FOR MORE INFORMATION SEE THE GIG GUIDE

LIGHTS. CALIGULA. ACTION.

For KRISTIN, LINGUA IGNOTA playing live is as important as creating...

■ "The concept behind the lights in my show is I want to change the rules of the space and who is seen and not seen. It's not meant to be super confrontational, but I want everyone to be aware of themselves in the room rather than letting something just happen onstage.

"I'm just kind of there in a trance and it's an interesting, weird

relationship we develop in the room together. I often get tangled up in all of my stuff and all these cords. Sometimes my stuff comes unplugged, then



I have to figure out what to do in the moment, so it challenges me to ensure that I'm not doing the same thing every show.

"It definitely takes its toll, though. I've electrocuted myself a bunch of times. I get really bruised up on tour and I become a mess physically, and then I start to become a complete mess emotionally.

"The last time I was out

in Europe I gave myself a concussion and I'm still dealing with that. I've definitely accumulated some damage to my voice, to my brain and to my body, so I'm trying to be much more careful on this tour.

"I'm trying to examine now, in myself, why I do this, because it's mostly not intentional, but it's kind of inevitable. We'll see what happens."