

Independent Review: Thomas Stonewell Maps the Norse Cosmos Across Mystic Melodies Vol. 3 and Vol. 4

J. N. Quill, independent music critic, examines 21 tracks of German-language Norse metal, detailed source research and Stonewell's artistic growth.



Gyor, Gyor-Moson-Sopron Sep 1, 2026 ([Issuewire.com](https://www.issuewire.com)) - *Across 21 tracks, the Hungarian composer moves from a gallery of gods to a journey through the Nine Worlds—revealing serious engagement with the Eddas, a flexible command of modern metal, and a willingness to let myth become personal rather than merely picturesque.*

Halfway through *Mystic Melodies IV: Yggdrasil Brennt*, Thomas Stonewell pauses over a detail too specific to have come from a superhero film or a generic “Viking” mood board: Álfheim was given to Freyr as a tooth-gift. The image, preserved in stanza five of the Eddic poem *Grímnismál*, becomes the hidden hinge of “Weiss (Alfheim),” a song that looks past the realm’s radiance to ask whether perfection without shadow can become sterile.^[1] That choice tells us more about these records than any hammer, raven or drinking-hall chorus could.

Stonewell’s two predominantly German-language Norse-metal albums are interesting because the research does not remain decorative. It enters the sequencing, the points of view and, increasingly, the arrangements. *Vol. 3: Von Asgard* asks who these divine and monstrous figures are. *Vol. 4: Yggdrasil Brennt* asks how their worlds connect, what each realm costs, and how the entire structure can fail.

Release snapshot:

Mystic Melodies Vol. 3: Von Asgard

Release window: Late December 2025

Scope: 10 tracks; approximately 32 minutes

Language: Predominantly German; “Hel’s Lament” is in English*

Core form: Character portraits

Principal sound: Symphonic and power metal with melodic-death aggression

Mystic Melodies IV: Yggdrasil Brennt

Release window: Late February 2026

Scope: 11 tracks; 50:26

Language: German

Core form: Cosmological concept album

Principal sound: Symphonic metal broadened by industrial, folk and Neue Deutsche Härte-like weight

The streaming catalogs agree on each record’s track count, authorship and basic chronology, although they differ by two days on the exact release dates; the broader release windows above are therefore more defensible than false precision.* *Qobuz credits Stonewell as main artist, producer and composer on *Yggdrasil Brennt*, released through Stonewell Productions.* The public catalog credits do not supply a detailed session-personnel list or production account, so this review evaluates the released recordings and documented authorship rather than making assumptions about an undocumented workflow.

The artwork makes the conceptual growth visible. *Von Asgard* presents a dark, painterly group of mythic figures, with an aged, broad-hatted god at its center. *Yggdrasil Brennt* replaces that cast portrait with a parchment-colored world tree enclosing a distant landscape. The first cover introduces dramatis personae; the second proposes a map.*

A Composer Who Treats “Viking Metal” as a Language, Not a Costume

“Viking Metal” has never described one fixed sound as neatly as “thrash” or “doom.” Imke von Helden’s chapter in *The Cambridge Companion to Metal Music* defines it as one of metal’s unusual categories shaped more by **content and visual language** than by a single sonic grammar: a Viking Metal record may musically belong to folk, death or black metal while its lyrics and imagery establish the Norse frame.* Stonewell’s stylistic mobility makes sense in precisely those terms.

There is little attempt here to imitate reconstructed medieval Scandinavian music. Instead, choirs, orchestral keyboards, compressed guitars, rapid double-kick patterns, clean baritone lines, female symphonic vocals, gang chants and death-metal growls operate as a modern dramatic toolkit. The precedent is broad rather than prescriptive: Bathory’s *Hammerheart*, frequently treated as an archetypal Viking Metal album, established the value of literary ambition, choral scale and concept-album architecture without freezing the form forever.*

Stonewell also approaches the material from a distinctively Central European and German-language angle. “Wotans Zorn” uses **Wotan**, a recognized Germanic name-form of Odin, rather than treating “Odin” as the only authentic option.* The choice sounds natural beside the declamatory consonants and industrial march of tracks such as “Thor – Hammerherz” and “Das Werk (Svartalfheim).” This is not borrowed Nordic identity so much as transnational metal storytelling.

His biography offers useful context without providing an easy explanation. A 2026 profile in the Hungarian regional newspaper *Kisalföld* reports that Stonewell began on accordion, played organ and served as a parish cantor while still in secondary school, later formed a choir with care-home residents in the United Kingdom, and worked with music therapy before returning to Hungary and establishing a creative mentoring studio. It would be simplistic to claim that church music directly produced these albums, but the attraction to massed voices, ceremonial pacing and organ-like harmonic weight is difficult not to notice.

Vol. 3: Von Asgard — Ten Faces, Ten Compact Dramas

At roughly 32 minutes, *Von Asgard* is built as a row of mythic portraits. “Baldr” opens at speed, placing harsh vocals and melodic guitar work inside a compact symphonic attack. Its importance is narrative as much as musical: Baldr’s death is not treated as a closed tragedy but as the crack through which Ragnarök enters. The Eddic *Baldrs draumar* likewise ties Baldr’s fate to Hel, Loki’s eventual release and the coming catastrophe.

The next two tracks take an unexpectedly sympathetic detour into Hel’s interior life. “Hel’s Lament”—the one clearly English-language song across the pair—uses a clean female lead and a colder, more spacious symphonic frame. “Hel – Ewige Königin” returns to German and presents the ruler of the dead as both sovereign and prisoner. Repeating the character twice risks slowing an already short album, yet the doubling has purpose: Hel is first heard as lament, then as office.

“Loki – Fluch der Masken” is fast, theatrical power metal, while “Frigga – Die Stille Krone” is more revealing. Rather than reducing Frigg to Odin’s consort, it centers her foreknowledge, silence and grief. Snorri’s *Gylfaginning* explicitly describes Frigg as knowing human fates while not speaking of them. Stonewell converts that restrained attribute into a character study, one of the record’s strongest examples of research guiding emotional perspective.

The album’s middle-to-late sequence becomes increasingly physical. “Heimdall – Wächter der Brücke”

pairs harsh verses with a chantable choral hook, turning Bifröst and Gjallarhorn into musical signals. “Fenrir – Der Weltenwolf” strains against its rhythm like the wolf against Gleipnir. “Wotans Zorn” crowds ravens, the sacrificed eye, runes, Valhalla and the tree ordeal into a furious miniature. The latter is especially well grounded: *Hávamál* describes Odin hanging for nine nights, wounded by a spear and given “myself to myself,” before taking up the runes.

“Thor – Hammerherz” is the most immediately accessible anthem and also one of the most conventional. Its marching pulse and blunt hook do their job, but the writing rarely complicates Thor beyond strength, hammer and defense. The closing “Freya – Flamme und Fede” is far denser. In less than three minutes, it invokes Brisingamen, golden tears, battle and Freyja’s claim to half the slain—the last two details directly reflected in *Gylfaginning*.*

That density is both the album’s signature and its limit. Stonewell can place an impressive amount of lore inside concise verse-chorus forms, but the recurring combination of orchestral swell, fast drums and large refrain sometimes makes distinct gods occupy the same musical room. The listener remembers the attributes before always remembering the riffs.

Vol. 4: Yggdrasil Brennt — From Portrait Gallery to World System

The fourth volume is the more ambitious and more successful record because its 50-minute structure gives the research architectural force. The title track begins with the whole organism: roots, crown, Níðhögg and Ratatoskr. From there, the album moves through a sequence of named realms and locations, ending with two different approaches to Asgard. It plays less like a playlist of mythological subjects and more like a guided descent and ascent through a cosmology.

That map should not be mistaken for an uncontested medieval diagram. *Völuspá* invokes “nine worlds” without listing them, while other Eddic passages name places inconsistently; Arkadiusz Sołtysiak therefore warns that the sources do not preserve one homogeneous cosmological scheme.* Stonewell’s nine-stage route is best understood as an intelligently organized modern synthesis—and its clarity is an artistic achievement in its own right.

“Null Punkt (Niflheim)” is the first major proof. Its cold atmosphere and growled vocals do not merely signify “ice world”; the song reaches toward Hvergelmir and the Élivágar rivers. Those names appear in *Gylfaginning*, where Niflheim predates the making of the earth, and Hvergelmir feeds the primordial streams.* “Der Funke (Muspelheim)” answers with brighter, faster power metal, Surtr’s flaming sword and the destruction of Bifröst. The elemental opposition is obvious, but the sequence gives it narrative logic.

“Ein Auge (Jotunheim)” opens with an acoustic feint before becoming a harsh folk-symphonic drama about Odin’s eye at Mimir’s well. Stonewell understands that the story’s power lies not in the acquisition of wisdom alone but in its bodily price. The arrangement turns knowledge into a wound.

The album’s finest stretch begins with “Goldene Tränen (Vanaheim).” Over folk-colored symphonic metal and a measured clean vocal, the song moves through the Æsir–Vanir war, Njörðr and Freyr, the hostage exchange and Mimir’s severed head before returning to Freyja’s grief. The *Ynglinga saga* recounts the truce, the exchanged hostages, the Vanir’s beheading of Mimir and Odin’s preservation of the speaking head.* These are not the franchise-ready details of Norse mythology. Their inclusion demonstrates reading—or at minimum research—beyond the most circulated names.

“Weiss (Alfheim)” goes further by turning its source detail into an argument. Alternating harsh male and

clean female vocals, it presents light not simply as goodness but as a pressure toward spotless uniformity. The rare tooth-gift reference establishes the realm; the lyric then uses that world to question purity. This is where the project becomes more than illustrated mythology.

“Das Werk (Svartalfheim)” achieves a similar effect musically. Its industrial pulse, metallic repetition and Neue Deutsche Härte-like vocal weight make the arrangement behave like a forge. Mjölñir, Gungnir, Draupnir and Skíðblaðnir arrive not as trivia dumped into a lyric sheet but as products moving through a sonic workshop. The exact relationship among dwarfs, dark elves, Svartálfaheimr and Niðavellir is not perfectly stable across the medieval sources and later systematizations, but the track’s central conceit is dramatically coherent.

“Midgard (Die Mitte)” restores human scale through Ask and Embla, Ymir’s eyebrows and Jörmungandr. “Kein Weg Zurück (Helheim)” then provides the album’s atmospheric high point: whispers, growls and operatic choral layers enter a geography of gates, halls, Garmr and Baldr. Crucially, the medieval account sends to Hel those who die of sickness or old age; the familiar modern equation of Hel with moral disgrace is an oversimplification. *Stonewell’s language occasionally inherits that later moral coloring, but the surrounding place-names show that the underlying research is considerably deeper.

The closing Asgard diptych is an intriguing excess. “Knie Nieder! Ich Bin Der Vater (Asgard)” begins with a whistled, almost Western-film gesture before moving into a sinister industrial march. Odin is not a gentle patriarch but a ruler demanding submission. “Knie Nieder – Asgard” restates the idea faster and more harshly. As a coda, the reprise intensifies the authoritarian portrait; as a separate eleventh track, it comes close to redundancy. The ambiguity feels appropriate for a god of kings, war, poetry, magic and deception.

Research, Reinvention and the Limits of Accuracy

These albums are **source-conscious, not source-bound**. That distinction matters. The title image “Yggdrasil burns” is a potent cinematic compression, but the central Ragnarök account in *Gylfaginning* says the world tree quivers while Surtr casts fire over the world.* One lyric in “Fenrir – Der Weltenwolf” also appears to substitute Týr’s heart for the hand Fenrir bites off in the standard story; if intentional, it is reinvention rather than textual fidelity. Jörmungandr surrounds Midgard and bites its own tail, but describing the serpent as literally holding the world together adds a modern symbolic function.*

Research test

Result

Uses details beyond Odin, Thor and Ragnarök

Decisively yes: Freyr’s tooth-gift, Hvergelmir, Élivágar, the hostage exchange and the dwarven artifacts are central examples

Distinguishes characters through perspective

Often: Frigg’s silence, Hel’s burden, Odin’s bodily sacrifices and Freyja’s grief receive individual treatment

Builds research into the music

Most successfully on Vol. 4: the Niflheim/Muspelheim contrast and the mechanical forge of “Das Werk” are structural, not merely lyrical

Maintains strict medieval-source accuracy

No—and does not need to: several images are compressed, moralized or reimagined for dramatic effect

Sustains musical variety across 21 tracks

Mostly: the palette broadens considerably on Vol. 4, though dense mastering and repeated epic-metal gestures reduce contrast

The factual verdict, then, is stronger than “Thomas Stonewell knows Norse mythology.” He knows enough to choose small, consequential details; enough to distinguish *Grímnismál*, *Hávamál*, Snorri’s cosmology and the *Ynglinga saga* tradition as reservoirs of different dramatic possibilities. He is also willing to depart from them. The research supplies load-bearing beams, not a museum display case.

The Verdict

Taken together, *Mystic Melodies Vol. 3: Von Asgard* and *Mystic Melodies IV: Yggdrasil Brennt* document a clear artistic expansion. The third volume is immediate, compact and character-driven. The fourth is longer, better paced and intellectually more adventurous, with its strongest songs discovering a sonic behavior for each realm rather than placing every myth inside the same epic-metal frame.

The production can be crowded, and several refrains depend on familiar symphonic-metal grandeur. Yet the pair’s most important achievement survives those limitations: Stonewell treats mythology as a network of memories, prices and conflicting viewpoints. His gods are not simply strong; they know, grieve, bargain, build, deceive and fail.

For a Hungarian composer writing primarily in German within a genre historically centered on Nordic cultural memory, that is the genuinely interesting result. These records do not claim bloodline ownership over the material. They demonstrate something more durable: **close attention, imaginative translation and the confidence to turn inherited myth into a personal metal cosmology.**

Listen to Links:

[Von Asgard on Spotify](#)

[Yggdrasil Brennt Spotify](#)

[Von Asgard YouTube Music](#)

[Yggdrasil Brennt Youtube Music](#)

* Sources:

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Deezer, *Mystic Melodies Vol3 Von Asgard* — catalog, credits and track durations

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Snorri Sturluson, *Gylfaginning*, in *World Mythology, Volume 1: Gods and Creation*

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Snorri Sturluson, *Ynglinga saga*, Chapter IV, Samuel Laing trans., Wikisource

Thomas Stonewell, “Hel’s Lament,” official YouTube Music recording

Gaana, *Mystic Melodies Vol3 Von Asgard* — release and catalog data

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Arkadiusz Sołtysiak, “The Number Nine in the Tradition of the Norsemen,” pp. 232–233



Media Contact

Stonewell Productions

*****@stonewellempire.com

<http://www.stonewellart.com>

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