

SikTh

BIOGRAPHY

words: Amit Sharma

When you think about the Great British pioneers that have shaped heavy music over the years, SikTh is a name that sits proudly within the list. Having met in 1999 and cemented their lineup by 2001, the Watford mathcore sextet stumbled upon a sound unexplored, devising their own Morse code of metal – one that mushroomed into labyrinthine detours and tangents, ultimately leading to the birth of the djent metal almost a decade later. Listening back to debut EP *Let The Transmitting Begin* or debut full-length *The Trees Are Dead & Dried Out Wait for Something Wild* – and it's more clear than its ever been: they were way ahead of their time.

"We first got together in 1999 and solidified around 2001, though it feels like a different lifetime," reflects frontman Mikee W Goodman *"When I read certain lyrics from the early days, I feel so far away from the dude that wrote those lyrics. I guess I started off as a shock lyricist, who then developed into a poet. I really started to feel appreciated as a lyricist when over in America last year, it was amazing how many people wanted to go into my conceptual meanings and metaphors. Felt so uplifted over there."*

Those poetic leanings were just one of many things that made SikTh a breath of air most fresh indeed – in a scene full of imitators, they were the innovators – taking the artistic facet of metal to its furthest reaches. It wasn't the easy route, nor would they have done it any other way...

"In SikTh we have always wanted to push the boundaries. I think we do that in every way possible." Mikee continues. *"You're always going to criticism when you stand up against the grain. A lot of people want to stay safe, searching for acceptance in whatever musical genre that may be. That attitude makes non memorable and empty music. We always strive to go to the next level within ourselves and push more and more."*

With second full-length *Death Of A Dead Day*, the quintet trapped lightning in a bottle once more. A career-defining set on Download Festival 2006's second stage made it look like the new kings of British hard rock/heavy metal were here. They had legions loyal to their cause, an American record label, videos topping MTV playlists, but it was not meant to be – they disbanded just a few years after... Little did they know how prophetic their musings would prove to be: in the years that followed, the djent revolution would reinvigorate tech-metal – with many of its key practitioners citing SikTh as a primary influence. By the end of 2013, it was time for the next chapter. They would return to Download 2014 and make good on that promise they made all those years ago. The headline set on that Saturday 14th June remains one of the most emotionally-charged performances by any British band on those sacred grounds in recent memory. Magic was in the air.

"It was insane, I've never known a gig like that," grins Mikee. *"By the third song, I couldn't speak because I was about to cry. I had thought maybe it had passed us by and it all came rushing back! In SikTh there are a lot of creative's pushing us in different directions. As hard as it is to be in a band with such strong and contrasting personalities, what comes out musically is really interesting. A lot of the best bands over the years have been like that. No matter how hard it might get, you stick with it for a reason."*

The six-track *Opacities* EP would serve as our introduction to this new era for the band, released just before an arena tour with metal giants Slipknot, followed by their first full North American tour as main support to Periphery. By this point, the wind was in their sails. From America to India, they'd headlined festivals and played to rooms of people who never thought they'd get the opportunity to witness SikTh with their own eyes. It had never been more evident – the world needed this band. Now they're back with their first album in 11 years – *The Future In Whose Eyes?* – which sees Aliases' Joe Rosser replace Justin Hill as co-vocalist.

"I wrote 100% of the lyrics and vocals on this record, so I wrote some specifically for Joe," reveals Mikee. "I think he did really well, especially on the more extreme sections – his sense of rhythm is spot-on. Since working with [Iron Maiden guitarist] Adrian [Smith] in Primal Rock Rebellion, I've started leaning towards catchier hooks. Our earlier songs wouldn't have had anything repeating – Adrian's influenced me more than anyone and given me a lot of confidence melodically. There are a fair few psychedelic sections too, which I don't feel like we've done before."

The Future Is Whose Eyes? certainly is a bold title, but if you're wondering whether it follows any narrative or story arc, the answer is almost...

"It's not really a concept album, even though certain ideas run through the songs," admits the frontman, "The title comes from this idea that even though it looks like we're evolving, we seem to be devolving at the same time – sedating ourselves with our mobile technology, making ourselves less creative. We're self-destructive by nature. Similarly, 'Golden Cufflinks' is about gentrification, things being bought up by the rich who decide how things are going to be. Money rules this world; people have stopped caring about culture. Live music venues being replaced with skyscrapers... bland street bloom."

For Mikee, that sense of blandness extends to the level of art being created. When there seems to be no shortage of trends and formulas for bands to jump on to, it's a disconcertingly minute percentage choosing to do things the hard way. Instead of pandering to whatever's the newest fad trending, art should be forcing people out of their comfort zones to process new trains of thought...

"There's definitely a lack of experimentation in heavy music," says the singer. "That's what I was going on about on 'Philistine Philosophies' off the EP and some of this album too. People's minds are so set on the fame, gloss and glamour. There's so much pressure to be accepted and on magazine covers, artists don't focus on the better buzz of creating something original and finding themselves through that. I'm trying to remind people, but honestly it feels like no one listens!"

Out of the select few that are doing brilliant things in rock/metal, Mikee counts Periphery as one of the forward-thinking, evolutionary bands. Singer Spencer Sotelo guests on 'Cracks Of Light', while bassist/super producer Adam 'Nolly' Getgood lent an ear for mixing. It must feel pretty good to see the biggest band in the scene you accidentally created doff their caps with such high praise, saying there would be no Periphery without SikTh...

"They're really nice people, everyone on that US tour felt it was the best one they'd been on," smiles Mikee. "I really like Periphery and especially love Spencer's voice – he's not like some of the geeky djent singers (laughs)! We actually got him down to R&R Studios in Uxbridge where we made the album, which is owned by Adrian."

It's this point where you wonder where a band goes after changing the face of heavy metal, breaking up, coming back with an album more than worthy of its legacy... what comes next? How do these heroes ride off into the sunset?

"The hope is to pick up where we left off and head to America again," admits Mikee. "We'd love to go to Australia, also back to Japan, Nepal, India, USA. So we'll see where it goes after the European summer festivals. ? I'd love SikTh to be headlining Brixton Academy one day in the not-too-distant future."

With one of the finest albums of 2017 now under their belt, you get the feeling it won't be long at all... The kings have returned.