



**This interview was conducted by email over the course of March 2020.**

*Carcharodon (C): Thanks so much for agreeing to take part in this project of mine. Can I start by asking what's your background and what led you to set up a record label in the first place?*

**Robert Brockmann, [Naturmacht Productions](#) ([Bandcamp](#)) (RB):** My background was that I was a musician, who did not approve of the way many labels did their work, ripping off bands or giving less of the gain to them. I also had some savings and I was wondering what I wanted to do with them and my life in general. I wanted to do something lasting and build something up. So one day I had the idea to do a label myself. That's it.

*C: Did you have a mission statement or particular objective in mind at the start whereby, if you achieved x, you'd consider the whole thing a success?*

**RB:** My mission was to be fair, honest and authentic. I never really had any plans of doing it full time or to become big or the next Nuclear Blast (quite the opposite). All I wanted was to make the costs back. Well that worked after some years. And I still feel very fortunate that it is like that.

*C: What's the day-to-day of running a label like yours for a label boss like yourself?*

**RB:** A lot of email communication with bands, customers and plants. Social Media, photoshop, designing PR material and everything else connected to making a release (sometimes mastering, mixing and designing artworks). So 100% office work. Before I also did the whole shipping myself. But that is luckily over since November last year. I enjoyed it, but not if you hit a peak of hundreds of orders and four other release to prepare, as each day sadly has just 24 hours in it. Also accounting, that's another part of the day to day stuff.

*C: Do you interact at all with other labels?*

**RB:** Rarely, I did some co-productions and trades but I prefer to do stuff completely myself, because I have my own way of doing things. I am mostly a lone wolf kind of a guy anyway. Also I stopped trading, as it has become senseless in the times of the internet and took too much time and space. So now I do only wholesale deals with some labels. But you are in contact with other labels here and there, naturally. There are some cool label owner dudes out there, Nic [Fernandes-Skog of Hypnotic Dirge] is one of them and we are Facebook-friends!

*C: What do you look for in bands that you sign to the label and how do you go about finding them? Do you ever have to persuade bands to sign to you?*

**RB:** True and honest emotions and music. Best with a personal touch. But basically what I like myself. I could never release something I dislike. In the beginning, you are the one asking the bands, of course. So you check metal archives, YouTube (mostly there) and social media. Sometimes you randomly come across a band without a label. I still ask bands today but not that much. I have to be picky these days and I get A LOT of requests. And it's often great music, but a one man operation has its limits.

Also, I do not persuade bands. I show them my offer, we talk about it or not (because they do not respond). But if a band does not like the offer, I do not run after them. I respect it and that's it. There are enough great bands out there and I also treat all bands the same if possible. For my part, I also answer every serious request because I hate it when somebody doesn't even have the courtesy to answer with a short "no thanks," because they are too lazy or arrogant. So, as long as it's not a lazy copy & paste email sent to hundreds of labels or mails like "this is my new album" with a link and nothing more, I answer them all.

*C: What do you get out of running the label? I assume it's not just for the fame and wealth?"*

**RB:** For me it is about building something, and I love how it serves all my interests and hobbies, and I can use all my skills and live out my creativity. And for some years now, it is also my sole source of income. The downside is that your hobby becomes your work and loses its magic quite a bit, but it is still the best work for me right now.

*C: Given what you say about the conversations you have with bands when you sign them, I'd be really interested to hear what sort of relationship you have with bands once they're on Naturmacht?*

**RB:** Oh well, I always want to create a cooperation based on trust and, if possible, a friendship. So, my relationships are honest, easy going and without any bossing around. The bands are part of my team and equal partners. It works well with most people (even though it might be more complicated at times), but of course not all humans are great humans and it happens often enough, that people disappoint because they are lacking in honesty and/or loyalty. At that point, this way of doing things surely has its downsides because you are involved with the bands on a personal level. But you find idiots everywhere and I will try to maintain my idealism as long as possible. But nowadays I also understand why other labels keep it 100% professional and business. But if the day comes when I need to do that, I would rather change the branche and sell toilet paper or something (I would be rich right now, I guess, haha!).

*C: Do you get involved at all when 'your' bands are making new records or choosing artwork? Would you ever offer advice on that sort of thing?*

Oh, I get involved a lot. Many bands show me demos or I help them with mix, master, artwork. Often I mix/master or design the artworks myself (or at least the merch stuff). It is part of the deal I offer. My deal is best for people who don't have the money, time or skill to make it all themselves. Then I do it for free for them as part of the service that I provide. Here and there, I also contribute guest vocals or so. And I really love to participate because then I become part of the music and it's not just another album you put out and collect money for. There are bands who do everything themselves and that's no problem either but there is no release where I am not involved in some way.

*C: Given what we at AMG do, I have to ask: how much attention do you pay to reviews? How much of an effect do reviews - good and bad - have on sales etc.?*

**RB:** I personally read reviews very rarely and just from handpicked zines/blogs. AMG though is one of the few I really enjoy reading because it is certain that you guys put the effort in and that it is excellent writing. I did my time reviewing stuff at zines as well, so I know how much work it is and how inundated zines are with music, so I really appreciate that AMG takes my stuff and takes the time to review it properly.

Regarding sales it also depends a lot on the zine. But mostly it has nearly no effect, I think. You can never really know why somebody buys your music but with YouTube and the streaming, people do not need others' opinions to make up their own mind. Or that's what it was like 5-10 years ago. Now with the music overload, people might get back to zines as some kind of filter but I had releases which had no reviews and sold out, and I had releases with a lot of high ratings and sold shitty. So, I would say it does not have the impact it used to have before the internet and streaming. But a review cannot have a negative impact, I think. Very bad ratings are often as good as very good ones!

*C: Given, the digital world we now live in - everyone has their entire music libraries on their phones - I find it super interesting the effort labels put into special edition CDs, vinyl etc - what trends are you seeing in sales? What are the drivers for this in your view?*

**RB:** Well, I for example do not have any digital metal collection, I only buy ambient and dungeon synth digitally. I think especially the generations who grew up with physical merch will always buy it (not all of course). But digital was new and it's practical but it's something different to own something physical, collecting it and browsing through it. And people (also younger ones) probably recognize more and more that something is missing when you only have digital music. Hence the vinyl hype. I think as long as there are people who do not only see music as a pleasant background noise (like pop music) there will be demand for a proper CD, Vinyl or Tape (and because of nostalgia, of course).

And for me personally it's always grown but it's harder for newcomers to sell CDs quickly because of the thousands of new bands and releases each month. But overall, the label has grown all the time. I started right when digital came up and pushed CD sales down, so I am used to it. You surely do not sell a thousand CDs for a no-name underground band anymore. But if you have a breakthrough, you can still sell a lot of stuff (plus the income from digital). So I don't think big labels really have a money problem these days as well, it just shifted as it always does and will.

*C: You've been running Naturmacht for a long time now - what changes have you seen over the years since you set it up?*

**RB:** The vinyl hype for one. First only CDs, then vinyl, now tapes are coming back. What also has changed is what bands and the fans expect. It has become rare that you only release one format and even debutants hope to get at least CD and vinyl. Often enough it has to be four formats in different colours with special editions and so on. This is not something I see as only a positive development because I feel that more and more people (bands/fans) are focusing on the superficial stuff and not on the art itself. I personally do not care on which paper something is printed; I buy a CD so I can enjoy the music. But I am quite the puritan in many things!

I do understand that people like to collect nice things but I sometimes have the feeling that some have forgotten what really matters: that it's well-made, honest and emotional music. And that's why I focus on that with the label, and not that a release has super professional sound, videos or 10 colours of vinyl. It has to be well made with good quality but I don't want to be a seller of luxury goods, which only 5% of metal heads could buy. I try to balance stuff out (good quality, good price in good amounts) and again try to stay as idealistic as possible. Otherwise all has become a lot more professional in these last 10 years. Especially regarding Black Metal. The overall quality of metal is top notch as well, which makes it very hard for newcomers. And the number of releases has grown aaaaaalloooott. I cannot keep up, even in the black metal genre.

*C: What new challenges and opportunities are you expecting over the next few years?*

**RB:** Puh hard to say. I hope not too many challenges, haha! The amount of releases might become a problem though because the number of listeners isn't really rising at the same rate. So I guess we will see labels and bands drop out, or at least that every release gets less and less listeners. But who knows. I think Asia and Africa are going to become the next continents (it has already started). So many more new listeners but also potential releases/bands. Lets see how it goes.

*C: With all the social media etc. nowadays, do bands need labels less than before? You look at bands like Wilderun who have made big waves without signing to anyone? [correct at the time the question was asked]*

**RB:** I asked that question to myself as well. But in that regard this whole overload of music just makes a label more important, because we are the first filters and people stick more to labels, because you can't stick with a million bands. So a label will always have a better reach than most bands could ever get themselves. And, what some might underestimate: it takes a lot more to really produce a release professionally than just uploading it with a cover to Bandcamp or Spotify. It's not just going to the studio, designing a cool artwork and then selling it. What is a good plant, what templates, what technical details are important, what can be problematic, how to promote it and where? What about taxes and

accounting once you start to sell more than just 10 CDs per year? What about shipping the stuff out? Many people cannot imagine, how it is to send hundreds of packages out. Normally, you have no clue about shipping material or custom regulations as well. Do you even have the time to do these things? Also do you even have the money?

So: you need certain skills, requirements and experience to make a good release, have a good reach and so on. So, I do not think that we will get obsolete (and every label gets a lot of signing requests every day). There are exceptions, like **Wilderun**, where it works because they either have the money to pay for all the stuff or you got all the skills/requirements in the band. But there are also thousands of projects who try it and fail, because it's simply not enough to put your music on Bandcamp and make a Facebook post, and I think you always have a higher chance of success with a good label.

*C: If I may, just one last question, which has only really arisen since we were last in touch ... Coronavirus. Obviously, it's affecting everything in our lives but, just sticking to the musical side of things: we've seen bands having to cancel shows, I read that Amazon and some other retailers aren't accepting vinyl / CD shipments anymore ... how has Naturmacht been affected by this and where do you see it going?*

**RB:** It has an impact that is for sure. Logistics are slower and rising prices, and there is huge uncertainty. I ship from Spain, so my shipping guy has to deal with the alerts and the Spanish post does not work completely normally, but it could be worse and metal heads/music lovers really stick together in this, it seems and sales have not been affected that much. For which I am very grateful! But of course, if the situation goes on for months, things will get more problematic, so let's hope, they can get back to normal in few weeks.