

Sean Long from While She Sleeps in an interview: "Everyone has his own truth" - The "So What?" philosophy.

The British Metalcore quintet While She Sleeps will release their fourth studio album "So What?" next month. In conversation with guitarist Sean Long we learned details about the philosophy behind this kessen album title.

Before their show at Skater's Palace in Münster with support from Lvndmarks, Trash Boat and Stray From The Path, Sean Long, guitarist in While She Sleeps, took a short time to answer two handfuls of questions about the upcoming album. We sit over the bar and yell at each other over the soundcheck. But despite the adverse circumstances and the short time - we are given ten minutes of togetherness - I want to know what "So What?" is all about. Because While She Sleeps always have something to say. And above all, every band member has something to say. Music, texts and video ideas always emerge together and in mutual complementation. The band "lives", rehearses and writes in their own "Warehouse" in Sheffield. There is also its own studio. Impressions from this warehouse can also be found in the video of the new single "Haunt Me".

But if While She Sleeps always have something to say, what is it that they want to address with "So What? The title sounds unfamiliar snot-nosed, almost a bit hostile and scornful. But Sean Long explains: "The message is a collection of different things. That's why this 'So What?' can have different meanings for different people. My personal reading is that things change all the time. We all in this world have so different opinions, everywhere people look different and in the end my right and wrong is not like your right and wrong." And continues: "It is very difficult to find out where and whether there is objective truth in someone's opinion or belief. Suppose one person believes in God and another doesn't, tell me, who's right?"

In their video for "Haunt Me" the band shows exactly this problem and the difficulty of clearly separating and naming "good" and "bad". A statement in text form appears at the beginning of the clip. And because everyone is convinced that his personal thinking is right and his convictions are the only true ones, people are constantly clashing with each other and unfortunately it does not only come to argumentative-thought disputes. For Long, there's no ultimate truth. What comes closest is the collection of everything that people think and believe or are convinced of. "How can someone's opinion be wrong when there are so many different opinions," is a legitimate question Long asks. And that very question is the foundation of the "So What?" philosophy. "So what, if I see it that way, and so what, if you see it differently. Everyone has their own idea of the world - so what? What's the big deal? What does it matter?"

But can this laissez-faire attitude still be maintained by looking out the window in the present and quickly realizing that not only is everyone claiming their opinion for the only right one, but the right to freedom of opinion has recently been abused and extended to a right to truth? Long affirms this. "I think that's exactly the point," he says. "Everyone has his own truth. Take war, for example. There you have one side and the other side and the soldiers on both fronts are ready to die for their cause. And both sides think they're dying for the right thing. Who's right now?" While She Sleeps break with "So What?" so first and foremost a lance for the subjective truth. "Even if there should be an ultimate truth - I believe by having each his own perspective, it is very difficult to make anything a final truth." And the "So What?" attitude isn't just about attitudes. My counterpart applies this way of thinking very pictorially to everyday life. "So what, if I'm a billionaire. I have millions of Instagram followers - so what? I'm famous - so what? So what if I'm not!" And for thinking, as well as for succinct values like follower numbers, "let go of all those small things!"

The deliberately provocative association awakened by the cheeky title "So What?" and the significant big red question mark on the album cover does not come true. Really, While She Sleeps

wouldn't have suited that either. "It's not 'So what? I don't care!'" sums up Long. Instead, there is a deep and thoughtful philosophy of life and letting live behind it. "It's the same with the record as with the people," Long continues to teach me. "Don't judge a book by its cover, you have to look beneath the surface to see what's inside. You have to listen to the album to understand 'So What?' and you have to get to know a person to get to know their values and ways of thinking." And anyone who knows While She Sleeps knows what they stand for. Politically and musically.

With regard to the latter, "So What?" is even more brilliant than "You Are We". On their fourth album, the band once again manages to spice up their unrivalled sound. Always producing a mix of styles from the most diverse influences of the five members, "So What?" also features detailed electro sounds and almost rapped, vocal parts besides dominant elements of the metalcore. In "Silence Speaks" from the previous album this was also found. But in "Back Of My Mind" the band reaches a new level in this respect. Long laughs and says: "Yes, but these are actually guestvocals! This is the singer of Shvpes, a band from the United Kingdom." However, the band does not have any real influence on rap. "Sure, me and Matt listen to a lot of different stuff, but for example XXXTentacion, the rapper who got shot, I never listened to. It's not my type. But afterwards the album really got me and maybe that's one of the reasons why we put this part in. At Spotify the feature will also be mentioned, but not on the album artwork." So there is a feature on "So What?" like on the previous album with Oli Sykes. This underlines the spirit of collaborations in the sound. Especially, because the guest adds a foreign element and not just a known one like Sykes did.

Another song we have to talk about is the title track "So What". "*So what if I die young? So what if I live forever?*" and "*I wouldn't have to stab you in the back if you'd just turn and face me*" hit the nail on the head. The latter line contains accusation as well as request and corresponds to what Long says about the album: "The song should originally be called 'Did you know you never know'". This line can also be found in the song and complements the "So What?" picture with the provocative facet that there are a lot of things you don't know. But what you don't know doesn't make you hot. Yet While She Sleeps here try to arouse curiosity and promote dialogue and the joy of discovery. Because there are still many things in the world, places, people, ideas you don't know. "The reason why we didn't want to release the song before the album even though it hits the nail on the head is because the lyrics are so meaningful and we wanted to give the song its own legs to stand on. That's why it's the title track now."

But not only the track "So What" hits the mark. Beside "Haunt Me" the band also released a video for the single "Anti-Social". And with alarming precision social and political undesirable developments are shown here. The whole band had the ideas for this. Even the clichés of being a band and striking cool poses in music videos are de-romanticized here. So it happens that the band fills the whole picture at the beginning. But as soon as the camera moves back, however, you see how bare the hall is, where everything is actually happening, you see the spotlights illuminating the area between the amplifiers, you see the camera track and as Loz' Vocals kick in everything swings on the backstage, where Sean Long is still diligently painted before he gets beaten up in a minimalist scene on a bus while a couple films the whole thing. Later, a scene comes to the fore in which a human teacher teaches elementary school students, who only work on a smartphone, that 0 Likes corresponds to a sad smiley. "We deliberately put the band in the background and let the more important things come to the fore," says Long. Like "Haunt Me", the music video for "Anti-Social" begins with a highlighted line of text: "Do you want the truth or you wanna assume it?". With "the truth" here again the personal, subjective truth is meant and behind the provocative question is the hint to listen to the individual perspective of the other. At the same time, singer Lawrence 'Loz' Taylor criticises the lack of independence in forming opinions and the confused truths conveyed by the media. At the end of the song he sings "*so sick of the same sound syndrome, thank fuck for headphones*". Long understands by "same sound syndrome" the phenomenon "that you always hear the same thing when you are socially active and go out with friends, for example. I have the feeling

that many people pick up a few words from television and repeat them at every party." And sometimes you simply don't have the energy to deal with it again - hence the saving grip on the headphones. "It's really tiring to hear the same thing all the time!"

The videos for "Anti Social" and "The Guilty Party" were not edited by the band itself, but by Tom Welsh. But the third one to "Haunt Me" was edited by bass player Aaron McKenzie himself. While She Sleeps always try to do as much as possible on their own. In the already mentioned statement in the intro of the video "Haunt Me" the band invites the audience to join the "So What?" philosophy. Now, however, the foundation of one's own philosophy is a big undertaking. Long explains that 'philosophy' is a very broad term and you don't really have to join a philosophy. "It's more about encouraging people to look at things this way. So it is not a serious attempt to establish a philosophy and to missionize people. But it sounds good, because a philosophy is nothing you would expect from a band," he adds laughingly.

But Long is immediately taken seriously again and adds that "of course it is important how you say things, how you write music and melodies and all that. But for me personally, how you feel is much more important. And that can never simply be broken down to a few words that you then nail down on. When someone asks you to explain yourself, sometimes you sound just idiotic because you can't, because you can't find the right words or you can't get to the heart of the matter." That also applies when people ask him how he writes all these songs. "I don't know in the strict sense of the word how to do this. It just happens. It's like asking me how I breathe, how I sit, all those little things."

The use of a very frequently asked question, however, is particularly bitter for Long. "The question "How are you?" is always asked and I always answer it honestly. Then I just say directly 'I feel really shitty today' and people react with an 'Oh ah hmm.' and don't know what to say. This is also a small aspect of the anti-social idea. You must perform an act in order to be socially acceptable." This act would consist here in the dishonest but more easily digestible answer 'I'm good, thank you. Yourself?' or something. "Sometimes I just don't have the strength to perform this act and then nobody would talk to me because I'm actually quite quiet," continues Long.

"So What? is an album that invites you to deal with alternative thoughts, ideas or worldviews. At the same time, however, it also comes up against the idea of forming one's own image at all and not randomly copying what others present to one. The "So What?" philosophy proves to be thoughtful and profound, versatile and at home in the wake of the often quoted exclamation "Live and let live".