

Interview With Pena Hughes-John

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Lethia's Natorium is a new project by singer/songwriter Pena Hughes-John, she will be dropping a new record this year and so far, two singles were out "Lullaby" and "Inner Child" and today, we're gonna get to know more about it.

1. Listening to your music, I can hear a diverse sound that mixes a lot of sounds, can you tell us more about your influences? And how did you decide to turn them into inspirations and start your own journey?

I always had a bit of a rebellious streak growing up in terms of image and music and my music was very eclectic as a result of it. During my teenage years, I was very heavily into 2-tone mainly Madness, The Specials, The

Selector. On the other end of the music spectrum was my punk/gothic side (I was a goth in my late teens) where I'd listen to Siouxsie & the Banshees, Blondie and Toyah. Being different, being rebellious against the mainstream was what attracted me and I also found songs that are guitar-led to be full of life and enjoy.

Having recorded many songs and albums throughout the years, I struggled as to what was my musical identity. I did not want to down the 'safe' RnB route – besides, my vocals are not RnB vocals. From the bands that I used to be in, one of the first bands I joined was a band called Wild AD, which fused punk with reggae and as the main vocalist, thoroughly enjoyed screaming, yelling and oozing pure aggression with the songs we did.

I wanted to be free to express myself musically and not be told by people that because of the way I look I need to 'sound like' Whitney Houston, 'sound like' Mariah Carey, 'sound like' Beyonce. As Toyah sang once: "I want to free" is my exact mindset.

Fed up with the constant pigeonholing and underlying racism in music (in terms of genre), prior to 'Lethia's Natorium', I created a studio project called: 'The Angry Ukulele Lady' (I play the Ukulele btw) and with my identity hidden, recorded songs that were guitar-driven tracks, melodic vocals and (of course to add to the mix) the Ukulele. In comparison to my solo work, where people knew my identity and was not RnB, found that 'The Angry Ukulele Lady' achieved a more favourable response of the songs played regularly on internet radio. There I had my answer! Those who knew me wanted me to go out on the road as 'The Angry Ukulele Lady' but I kindly declined as wanted to keep it a studio project only.

'Lethia's Natorium' is the visual version of 'The Angry Ukulele Lady' but this time as a band setup. I no longer wanted to hide my music passion in terms of the way I sing, the songs I write nor the music that accompanies them.

2. How do you describe the sound of *Lethia's Natorium*?

Lethia's Natorium is Progressive Symphonic Goth Punk Rock with a tiny slice of reggae-fusion for good measure.

3. Can you tell us more about your upcoming album? How did its writing process go? What's its main concept/story?

I have been notorious for writing very long songs and with Lethia's Natorium, I made the decision that no song should be no longer than 5 minutes with under minutes being the goal for each track. By keeping the songs short, would make them more 'radio friendly'. Unlike my solo work in the past which was more mellow, many of them breakup songs, I wanted 'Lethia's Natorium' to be different.

There's no love song on this album for instance. I was aiming for my upbeat toe-tapping/guitar led sound covering different topics, politics, the weather, climate change, narcissism (through the of the person going through it as well as from the narcissist's perspective), empowerment and theme park rides. The songs that made up the album flowed. In the past I'd struggle to complete an album but this time the problem I faced was deciding which songs had to be put aside for the 'follow-up' album (yes, I've already started writing and putting together the songs together for 'Lethia's Natorium' second album).

4. With the singles "Lullaby" and "Inner Child" being out and they sound different, how would you describe the album's sound?

I'd describe it as a dark album, not dark as depressing but dark as to the sound. I would describe this as my night time album in terms of the album's sound. I treated this album like bookends, with the songs in between serving as its pages. Apart from the spoken lyrics, 'Lullaby' has the strings and soft guitar. The final song, though not a dream feel as 'Lullaby' is much mellower in sound.

'Inner Child' captures the general mood of the album, guitar-led songs and vocals with attitude. Don't expect this to be an RnB album (hahaha)! Seriously though, 'Inner Child' is where I'm at in terms of my 'Lethia's Natorium' music journey. I refuse to conform to what is expected of me from the musical sense. I discovered my 'Inner Child' whilst writing this album. As the album progressed, the more freedom I felt in putting the songs together. I feel as if I'm in a much happier place from a personal perspective having a good group of musicians as part of my 'Lethia's Natorium' collaboration nucleus in terms of the overall sound.

5. Who was involved in the album's production? Are there any musical collaborations involved?



There were collaborations (both face-to-face and online) that contributed to the album which worked rather well. This album was different in terms of how the songs were put together and the process started like this:

I first do a rough recording of each song at home using my very basic home studio setup with just me and the Ukulele (didn't I mention I play the Ukulele?).

I then forwarded the song 'stems' over to Josh who owns JGE Studios in Dorset. By listening to the rough song sketches, Josh was able to capture each song's mood and found that he was very instrumental (excuse the pun) in the 'Lethia's Natorium' sound. I did not send him the lyrics to the songs but he automatically 'got it' in terms of the mood of each song. When I sent my rough recordings over, Josh knew as to the kind of sound each song would have and most of the guitars and bass you hear on the album were played by Josh.

After I have received the recordings from Josh, I bring these over to Max, my Producer at The Lodge Recording Studio in Northampton. This is where we build on what has been recorded so far. Parts of each song is tidied up and sometimes Max would add an additional guitar or keyboard. I then re-record the vocals and get each song as close to finished as possible.

In terms of the strings (in 'Lullaby'), I collaborated online with Peter, a violinist/viola player based overseas. I have worked with him the past and found him to produce such emotion in his playing that I had no hesitation in having his involvement with 'Lethia's Natorium'. Peter also adds the strings to a couple of other tracks on the album. I love working with Peter because he creates several violin parts to make the strings section sound full without being intrusive to the songs.

Finally, Karl (who I was introduced to by Max) comes into the studio to add his drum parts to each track. I worked with Karl in the past when he provided drums to some of the tracks from solo album and I was happy to be working with him on 'Lethia's Natorium'.

6. What's the highlight of your artistic career so far?

I think the highlight in my artistic career so far that compared to my solo work prior to 'Lethia's Natorium', noticed that 'Lethia's Natorium' is generating much more interest than my solo work. Not even my solo album produced such a positive vibe. Apart from 'Lethia's Natorium', the other work I did that had such a positive impact was 'The Angry Ukulele Lady'. A first for me are PR companies have expressed an interest in 'Lethia's Natorium' which I did not have with my previous music projects.

7. What are your plans for 2022/2023? Give us something exclusive

I always viewed 2022 as the year for me to put a lot of energy in promotion and publicity. Generating interest, gaining followers, drumming up interest are what I find are top priority for me right now. Performing at gigs and Festivals would be a big bonus, yes but one of the main questions that promoters generally ask is: "how many people are you bringing to this event?" Others mainly focus on how many streams you have on Spotify before even giving you the time of day in terms of offering a performance slot! 2022 for me? PR, PR, publicity and more PR plus of course releasing a single from the album every couple of months to help keep the promotion and interest momentum going. The winter months (post album release) up to the ending of the year will be when the creative music collaboration will start again, this time for 'Lethia's Natorium' follow-up album.

My plan for 2023 would be for 'Lethia's Natorium' to play at a few Festivals. The start would be focus on a handful of gigs in the diary and build from there.

8. Where are you planning to take *Lethia's Natorium* next?

After the album is released, I am also putting plans in place to do a full live stream of the entire album as well as getting a few videos done to showcase the songs. As this is 100% self-funded, money is always the big factor which has made progress in 'Lethia's Natorium' much slower than I'd liked to.

Thanks for your time, wishing you the best of luck. Cheers!



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