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## MUSIC: FEATURE

### Opeth



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Blowin' in the wind: Lindgren, third from left

### Metal for the masses

By [Omar Perez](#)

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To think that a death metal band like Opeth won a Grammy in its homeland of Sweden -- while a band like Tool is the most daring we can muster in America -- may come across as a bit of a surprise. That they were competing for their "Grammi" against bands like Entombed and Sahara Hotnights for the honor is more surprising still. Nonetheless, diehard metalheads shouldn't pack their bags right away and look for stardom in Europe.

"Every once in a while, you get a good band popping up, but in general, the Swedish Grammy awards are as crappy as any other national awards," says guitarist Peter Lindgren. "Even though we won a Grammy last year and we were nominated again this year, people still don't seem to recognize us in Sweden."

While its members may not have the on-the-street fame of the Swedish Bikini Team, Opeth (Lindgren, vocalist/guitarist Mikael Åkerfeldt, drummer Martin Lopez and bassist Martin Mendez), still demands plenty of respect, with intricate tech stylings and abrupt time changes fused with a hell-bound ferocity fueled by guitar-crunch carnage, a barrage of double drums and guttural growls that, on occasion, emerge to actual vocal status.

Formed by Åkerfeldt, the band's principal songwriter, and former vocalist David Isberg, whose duties Åkerfeldt took over when Isberg left in the early '90s, Opeth recorded its rehearsals and handed out copies to friends rather than make demos. One recording made its way to Candlelight Records' one-time head honcho Lee Barrett, who offered the young band a deal, releasing 1995's "Orchid," which offered a glimpse of the band's knack of merging death metal brutality with harmonic interludes. Having grown up on a diet of classic and death metal, the band leaned toward the darker side initially, although repeated listens to prog rock led to a combination of the two.

"It took us a couple of years to find a musical identity," Lindgren says. "Prog rock taught us that a song can be 15 minutes long and doesn't have to have a classical structure, and that it can be an adventure."

Subsequent releases "Morningrise" (1996) and 1998's "My Arms, Your Hearse" (the first on which both Martins appeared) established the band throughout Europe, as did opening stints with Cradle of Filth and Morbid Angel. 1999's "Still Life," the first Opeth title released in the United States, introduced the band to the American masses. The following year, the band played its first U. S. show at the Milwaukee Metal Fest.

"All of the sudden, the U.S. was our biggest market. I kind of liked the idea of going to the U.S. and you're bigger there than you are in Europe. In Sweden, we're guys from the corner who rehearsed where [Swedes] grew up, so they just look at us as being from the neighborhood.

"All of the Florida death metal bands are probably friends of yours, and we regard bands like Morbid Angel as legends," he continues. "I don't know if people from Tampa just regard them as local boys."

The year after 2001's "Blackwater Park," the band released two albums in one year, the gut-spewing "Deliverance" and the much lighter "Damnation," an acoustic set of songs in which the band dropped the distortion and Åkerfeldt exchanged his typical death growl with surprisingly airy melodies and lilting vocals that proved he could *really* sing. Lindgren's mother, he says, even liked the album.

"Maybe if our fans play "Damnation" to their friends who don't like death metal, then we might have an opportunity to find new fans. We don't actually reach out to more people than we did before, but the album has potential to do that."

The idea to release two albums simultaneously was not only because of the polar-opposite styles of each, but to prevent one of the albums from getting lost in the shuffle.

"We wanted both albums to be of equal importance. If you buy a double album, you listen to the first album over and over, and by the time you reach the other one, it's not brand new anymore."

The band's current tour, which is the foundation for its upcoming "Lamentations -- Live At Shepherd's Bush Empire" DVD, equally splits the mellow and the metal. Lindgren is hoping 2004 doesn't start the way 2003 ended, with problems ranging from cancelled shows due to Lopez' stress-related breakdown to the band's crew dropping out just before a scheduled show in Jordan after terrorism bombings in Turkey raised safety concerns.

"[Eventually] we managed to get one, but the same day we were going to leave, Martin [Lopez] crashed, so we had to cancel it anyway. There's always problems on tour, but it seems like we're stuck with bad luck," Lindgren says. "There's always something happening to us."