

Blind Guardian

With a steady evolution from their early days as a speed metal band to their current, renowned musical alchemy of glory, drama, and grandiosity, Germany's BLIND GUARDIAN have long since made their mark as the world's definitive melodic/progressive rock band.

For many, they need no introduction, as the band possesses a track record and back catalogue of classic staples that perhaps only Iron Maiden can match. Called everything from heavy metal bards to modern day minstrels, BLIND GUARDIAN possess the ability to transport their legions of fans to new landscapes with their majestic songwriting, fantastically themed lyrics, and their meticulous, emotion-packed music.

The Early Years

Battalions of Fear, Follow The Blind, Tales From The Twilight World

Founded under the name Lucifer's Heritage in Krefeld, Germany by vocalist & bassist Hansi Kürsch, lead guitarist André Olbrich, rhythm guitarist Marcus Dork, and drummer Thomen Stauch, the band released only two demos – 1985's *Symphonies Of Doom* and 1986's *Battalions Of Fear* - before landing a record deal with Remorse Records.

Inspired by the Fates Warning album, *Awaken The Guardian*, band members decided to change their name to BLIND GUARDIAN and soon acquired new rhythm guitarist Marcus Siepen. Produced by Kalle Trapp (Saxon, Grave Digger), their 1988 debut album, *Battalions Of Fear*, showed a heavy influence by Iron Maiden and Helloween.

On 1989's *Follow The Blind* (also produced by Trapp), they leaned toward Testament's musical direction, but also experimented with orchestral parts for the first time. More significantly, the album served as their introduction to the Japanese market where they ranked high on the import charts for half a year, poising them for a possible breakthrough with their third release.

The band's reputation continued to grow via word-of-mouth, and when *Tales From The Twilight World* sold 30,000 copies in their home country alone, BLIND GUARDIAN reached the critical juncture in their career they had hoped for. Not only did they feel they had become better musicians and songwriters; they also penned a very distinct sound in the process, and record labels across Europe began courting them. Signing with Virgin Records in 1992, they were one of the very few metal bands to be signed on a major label.

Virgin Records

Somewhere Far Beyond, Tokyo Tales, Imaginations From The Other Side

Their Virgin debut, *Somewhere Far Beyond*, sold over 130,000 copies. After entering the international charts, BLIND GUARDIAN took their first trip to Japan to record their first live album, *Tokyo Tales*. Playing two sold-out audiences to over 4,000 enthused fans, the show captured how strong, special, and symbiotic the relationship between artist and audience can be.

The summer of 1994 had BLIND GUARDIAN traveling to Sweet Silence Studios in Denmark to work with Flemming Rasmussen (Metallica) on the *Imaginations From The Other Side* album. After its release, they toured throughout Europe and secured themselves a very special international honor: they became the third-ever heavy metal band (after Metallica and Bon Jovi) to play in Thailand and received a heroes' welcome into the country.

The Forgotten Tales, Nightfall In Middle-Earth

At this point in their career and with six successful albums in their discography, BLIND GUARDIAN opted not to release a standard “Best Of” compilation. Instead, to give their fans something truly special, they assembled *The Forgotten Tales* in 1996, a collection of a few cover songs (*Surfin’ USA*, *Barbara Ann*, and *Long Tall Sally*), a live version of the fan favorite *The Bard’s Song* plus four acoustic versions and one orchestral arrangement of previously released BLIND GUARDIAN songs.

Self-professed perfectionists, BLIND GUARDIAN were becoming known for making fans wait a few years for a new album. Honing their creative talents with the production assistance of Rasmussen and drawing major inspiration from J.R.R. Tolkien’s book *The Silmarillion*, 1998’s *Nightfall In Middle-Earth* quickly became regarded as a pinnacle achievement in the band’s career. This carefully constructed collection of twenty-two tracks harnessed not only power and speed, but opulent orchestral arrangements, renaissance-styled acoustic sequences, spoken word, and flute & violin passages, all complemented by the jovial stroke of a traveling troubadour’s effervescent spirit.

International Success, A Night At The Opera, And Then There Was Silence

In Europe, BLIND GUARDIAN toured more than ever before, and performed for the first time in new territories such as México, Brazil, and Argentina. While the band was on the road gathering momentum and adding to their ever-expanding fan base, the demand for BLIND GUARDIAN’s music in new markets continued to grow. Thanks to a licensing deal with Century Media Records, *Nightfall* became the band’s first official release in North America and landed on the Billboard charts. *Nightfall* went on to sell over 300,000 copies worldwide. Securing a loyal international audience and increasing their album sales over ten times with six studio albums, BLIND GUARDIAN’s obviously lively combination of talent, drive, and unified vision helped them earn their laurels of success and granted them a much-revered reputation in the power metal realm that continues to this day.

Making good on a promise made in the spring of 1997, vocalist Hansi Kürsch flew over to the U.S. in June of 1999 to team up with Iced Earth songwriter & guitarist and long-time friend Jon Schaffer on the *Demons & Wizards* project (the two first met while on tour together in Europe and began a lasting friendship). After the self-titled album was released in early 2000 and following a short European D&W summer tour, BLIND GUARDIAN began to resume work on their seventh studio album, *A Night At The Opera*.

With the amount of work ahead of them due to their extensive tracking and the epic nature of the band’s musical orchestrations, the album took nearly seventeen months to complete. Teaming up with producer Charlie Bauerfeind (Helloween, Gamma Ray, Angra) at the band’s own Twilight Hall Studios in Greifrath-Oedt, Germany, the new material showcased a more aggressive version of Kürsch’s strongly emotive vocals, and cleaner, down-tuned guitar sounds. While the storytelling aspect of the band and the epic & grandiose studio performances remained intact, noticeably absent were the Tolkien-themed lyrics, but that would prove to be no hindrance to the success that waited them.

The band’s first-ever North American single, *And Then There Was Silence*, (which clocked in at over fourteen minutes, featured fifty vocal tracks, thirty guitar tracks, and took over four months to record) debuted on Billboard’s Top 200 Singles chart with no radio airplay.

Metal Maniacs hailed BLIND GUARDIAN as “one of the few bands that consistently create 10-plus minute epics that never bore.” *A Night At The Opera* went on to debut at #37 on the Billboard Top Independent Albums chart, secured the #1 album position in Greece, #5 in Germany, #8 in Spain, and entered the Top 100 charts in Sweden, Italy, Austria, and France. Scoring a 9.5 out of 10 review and called “a pervasive and perennial slice of metal’s past, present, and future” by Brave Words and Bloody Knuckles Magazine, it went on to receive universal praise as one of the best albums in its genre.

Even Billboard Magazine praised the band’s “larger-than-life sound, which incorporates the harmonies and drama of Queen with an aggressive, modern sensibility.” The success of the album brought BLIND GUARDIAN over to North America for the first time, launched with an appearance at Atlanta, Georgia’s sold-out ProgPower III festival plus additional sold-out shows in major cities.

Live, Imaginations Through The Looking Glass

Sparked by the avid interest of their fervent, ever-growing fan base to see the band perform in a live setting (laying credence to Metal Edge’s claim that the band has “reinvented classic metal for a younger audience”), BLIND GUARDIAN released a 2-CD live album, *Live*, in 2003 and a double-disc DVD, *Imaginations Through The Looking Glass*, in 2004.

Of note is that the latter was filmed at the first-ever, two-day BLIND GUARDIAN Open Air Festival in Coburg, Germany with the career-spanning set list voted upon entirely by fans before the festival, which ultimately translated into a truly vociferous crowd of over 6,000 on both days.

Signing to Nuclear Blast Records, A Twist In The Myth, World Tour

Early 2005 brought along several significant changes for BLIND GUARDIAN. In addition to signing with Nuclear Blast Records, the band - who managed to keep the same line-up for almost two decades - welcomed new drummer Fredrik Ehmke into the fold following the departure of Thomen Stauch. Once again joined by producer Charlie Bauerfeind at Twilight Hall Studios and diving into production for their eighth studio album, the band set out to create another album’s worth of grandeur.

The invigorating music on *A Twist In The Myth* satisfied on all counts, as demonstrated by the success of the Fly single, which debuted at very impressive international chart positions: #1 in Japan; #4 in Spain & Hungary; #29 in Sweden; #32 in Germany; #52 in Austria; and #94 in Switzerland. Debuting at #21 on the Billboard Top Independent Albums and #288 on the Top Albums charts, *A Twist In The Myth* was fueled by lyrics created from Kürsch’s love of reading and showcased the band’s drive to explore new musical terrain.

Not only did BLIND GUARDIAN become the only band to play on all continents during the 2006/2007 touring season, but their audience attendance figures reached all-time highs.

Sacred 2: Fallen Angel

In 2008, the band crossed-over into the gaming world when they composed an exclusive song for the role-playing computer game *Sacred 2: Fallen Angel* and performed “on stage” as animated characters. This experience added extra creative fuel for what was to come as the band returned to their beloved Twilight Hall Studios in Germany.

At The Edge Of Time

Four years in the making, the shining master work that is *At The Edge Of Time* proves yet again how BLIND GUARDIAN's faith in their craft never wavers or falters. The focus on BLIND GUARDIAN's signature multi-track orchestral compositions (which do not need any synthetic enhancements) has remained intact and combines song writing excellence, distinct character, and the highest collaboration & levels of musicianship into one.

The opening hymn and emotional chorus of *Sacred Worlds*, the regal vocals in *Tanelorn (Into The Void)*, the melancholy construction and huge choirs in *Road Of No Release*, the 210 bpm of the hyperfast *Ride Into Obsession*, the beautiful string and flute arrangements in the folk-flaired *Curse My Name*, the anthemic thrust of *Valkyries*, the majestic elements of *Control The Divine*, the somber piano sequences and message in *War Of The Thrones*, the velocity that drives *A Voice In The Dark*, and the multi-instrumentations in *Wheel Of Time* all find perfect balance within the artful grandeur of each song's composition, the massively meticulous orchestrations, and the full, expressive range of Hansi Kürsch's inimitable voice.

"With every release, we want to define ourselves on a new level", asserts Kürsch, and his words proved prophetic.

At The Edge Of Time attained the highest chart entry in the United States in the history of the band's existence, securing the #1 position on the Billboard Heatseekers chart and debuting at #108 on the Billboard Top 200 chart.

In Canada, the album debuted at #18 on the Top Hard Music Albums chart and #108 on the Top 200 chart. Musically, only those with a solid sense of self and an insatiable curiosity to discover new aspects of themselves can initiate journeys of exploration.

After all the worlds BLIND GUARDIAN have taken us to since 1988, few would believe there are still new lands to discover in their music. Thankfully, *At The Edge Of Time* frees us all from the concept of "terra firma" and transports us into the dimension of time, where imagination knows no limits, where all worlds exist at once, and where all existence is drenched in song for all time.

Beyond The Red Mirror and Life Beyond The Spheres

Beyond The Red Mirror is a great clash of epochs, on which BLIND GUARDIAN masterfully unite their past, present and future with renewed vigor and an unquenchable thirst for all things monumental. Both in the enchanted tales they tell as in intensity and complexity, the album rises to the occasion, becoming the logical successor to their groundbreaking *Imaginations From The Other Side*. With enchanted references to *Nightfall In Middle-Earth* alongside first traces of the orchestral opus magnum that was to become *Legacy Of The Dark Lands*, BLIND GUARDIAN endow their tenth record with everything they've accomplished in the past 30 years – an appropriate larger-than-life finale to their third and most recent era, beloved by fans of their earliest works and new followers alike. And the story ends? Far from it. We are just about to witness a new beginning.

Regarding live renditions of BLIND GUARDIAN's impressive back catalogue, it has in recent years become quite the challenge to convincingly bring all the different eras under one roof. After more than 30 years it's increasingly obvious that songs from the eighties and early nineties sound considerably different from the colossal anthems the bards blessed their fans with on 2015's ambitious and breathtaking *Beyond The Red Mirror*. The tour promoting the album is living proof of that intense tightrope walk and at the same time a brilliant solution to

this conundrum. Even more so than on their previous live records, *Live Beyond The Spheres* is all about embracing versatility and staging the band as a many-headed hydra pulling off their latest works with the same intensity and youthful vigour as their ever radiating smashers *Banish From Sanctuary*, *Lost In The Twilight Hall* or the rarely played and all the more cherished *The Last Candle*. Recorded on their extensive European tour in 2015, this live album is all the evidence you need for the fact that a band is only as strong as their fans. Which in this case means absolutely unbeatable.

Legacy Of The Dark Lands

Some things just need time. Rome, for example, wasn't built in a day. Also a certain professor Tolkien didn't write *The Lord Of The Rings* over a weekend in Oxford. BLIND GUARDIAN are very well aware of this fact. Known for their tendency to brood over their refined concept albums like a dragon over its treasure, they manage to surpass themselves in terms of bombast, depth and grandeur every single time. Thus, if such a fantasy metal icon is announcing a gargantuan project of unseen proportions, we had better be ready for a storm.

Finally, *Legacy Of The Dark Lands* has arrived, and is rendering the world utterly speechless. Recorded with the unleashed omnipotence of the soundtrack-experienced Prague Filmharmonic in Prague's Rudolfinum, BLIND GUARDIAN are raising a hurricane that does not need to shy away from fantasy's biggest soundtracks. Created and conceptualized with German fantasy overlord Markus Heitz, this album is the direct sequel to his bestselling novel *Die dunklen Lande (The Dark Lands)*, telling the story of an apocalyptic secret in the dark times of the Thirty Years' War. Monumental, saturnine, touching, full of anthems and unforgettable choruses: this is purely BLIND GUARDIAN, without any electric guitars.

The God Machine

In 1992, BLIND GUARDIAN released *Somewhere Far Beyond*, a legendary milestone of German speed metal. Three decades later, their latest offering, *The God Machine*, shows how to awaken the fury of youth to magical new life. As if they had paid a long overdue visit to the numerous highlights of their career, BLIND GUARDIAN appear to be in touch with the ghosts of their own past more than ever.

Seven years after *Beyond The Red Mirror* and almost three after the orchestral opus *BLIND GUARDIAN Twilight Orchestra: Legacy of the Dark Lands*, Hansi Kürsch (vocals), André Olbrich (lead guitar, acoustic guitar, rhythm guitar), Marcus Siepen (rhythm guitar and acoustic guitar) and Frederik Ehmke (drums) invite you to their personal twilight of the gods. In 2022, the opulent arrangements and powerful choirs still exist; yet they are used in a much more selective, focussed and resonant manner.

The God Machine fully embraces evolution while honouring the roots of a band that started humbly in Krefeld, Germany as speed metal act Lucifer's Heritage in 1984.

After renaming to BLIND GUARDIAN in 1987, they constantly kept honing their craft and released legit metal classics like *Tales From The Twilight World* (1990), *Somewhere Far Beyond* (1992), *Imaginations From The Other Side* (1995), and *Nightfall in Middle-Earth* (1998), albums that formed a strong bond between metal and fantasy literature that is second to none.

Even if Kürsch's lyrics are inspired by the fantasy works of Patrick Rothfuss or Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*, Brandon Sanderson's *Stormlight Archives*, *The Witcher* novels or even *Battlestar Galactica*: The backgrounds are clearly more real, and thus all the more ruthless. *The God Machine* deals with modern witch-hunts, paranoia, war or the death of Kürsch's

mother, and puts these grim themes into some of the fastest and heaviest BLIND GUARDIAN songs in years. *Violent Shadows* is an onslaught of thrash riffs and relentless drumming, *Architects Of Doom* pleasantly reminds of *Follow The Blind*, the sublime *Secrets Of The American Gods* is one of the most outstanding epics since *Nightfall In Middle Earth*, and the raging *Blood Of The Elves* is the galloping anthem that is destined to become a live staple.

The God Machine marks another pinnacle in BLIND GUARDIAN's impressive discography by not attempting to pretend it is still the nineties yet instead successfully relying on the muscle memory of this period. It is a gripping, addictive and brilliantly arranged album in the tradition of records with which BLIND GUARDIAN reached for the stars in the 90's; yet, by no means, is it a throwback. *The God Machine* represents the heart and soul of BLIND GUARDIAN's timeless metal in the here and now, unifying the bards' past, present and future secrets in one consistent, well thought out masterpiece.