

Ensiferum - Two Paths (2017)

Written by bluesever

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01. *Ajattomasta Unesta* 02. *For Those About To Fight For Metal* 03. *Way Of The Warrior* 04. *Two Paths* 05. *King Of Storms* 06. *Feast With Valkyries* 07. *Don't You Say* 08. *I Will Never Kneel* 09. *God Is Dead* 10. *Hail To The Victor* 11. *Unettomaan Aikaan* 12. *God Is Dead (Alternative Version)* 13. *Don't You Say (Alternative Version)* Markus Toivonen - Guitars, Vocals (clean), Percussion, Bouzouki, Vocals (choirs) Sami Hinkka - Bass, Dulcimer, Percussion, Vocals (clean), Vocals (choirs) Petri Lindroos - Vocals (harsh), Guitars, Percussion Janne Parviainen - Drums Netta Skog - Accordion, Vocals (female), Vocals (choirs)

Surprise! After the disappointing *One Man Army*, Ensiferum delivers a quite entertaining and focused record. Instead of concentrating on a diversified and experimental songwriting that is all over the place, the band concentrates on fleshed-out and short tracks that mostly respect its original style. The few experimental tracks recall other successful folk metal bands without exactly copying them and expand Ensiferum's soundscapes in a respectable way. *Two Paths* is still far away from the band's genre-defining first two studio albums but it's clearly better than the last two efforts.

However, the album with the stunning artwork and the numerous limited editions with an acoustic show bonus disc, drinking horns, patch, photo cards, poster and wristband starts on a rather underwhelming note. Nobody is really going to miss Manowar that finally promised a farewell tour after having been a bad joke for at least a decade but Ensiferum somehow seems to try to keep that cringe-worthy metal spirit alive with the horrendous pseudo-epic "*For Those About to Fight for Metal*" that incorporates every stupid stereotype of this genre. The exchangeable up-tempo stomper "*Way of the Warrior*" isn't much of an improvement either but once you expect Ensiferum to turn into a comedic circus act, this album finally changes for the better.

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The band finally reconnects with its charismatic folk influences of yore in "Feast with Valkyries" that convinces with enchanting accordion melodies, majestic male choirs and variable female vocals. The track manages to both go back to Ensiferum's essence of the first two records and to try out something fresh with the female lead vocals. This song defines what Eluveitie should sound like instead of releasing a vapid acoustic record. "Don't You Say" keeps the uplifting folk melodies, showcases some simple but vividly rocking riffs and rhythms and throws in some melodic lead vocals that make this tune a joyful party anthem without sounding shallow. The rhythmic "God Is Dead" is quite similar in style and could also come from Alestorm or Turisas with its vivid, raw and charismatic male lead vocals.

Overall, the use of three completely different vocalists that complete one another perfectly, the focus on shorter and simpler songwriting and the return to the band's powerful folk elements of yore make for Ensiferum's greatest record since the first two studio outputs in my book. However, this opinion won't be unanimous because the record doesn't include one of the band's usual elaborate epics, limits the use of Petri Lindroos' harsh vocals and sounds at times close to folk bands with controversial reputations such as Alestorm, Eluveitie and Turisas. Personally, I think Two Paths is a dynamic record to listen to that finds the right balance between atmospheric parts and potential party anthems. Ensiferum embraces its past but still manages to experiment in a controlled way. If this mixture sounds intriguing to you, give this output a chance. --- kluseba, metal-archives.com

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