

Are You Going?

NEW INTERVIEWS:

TOM SAVINI

(SAVINI SCHOOL)

FELISSA ROSE

(SLEEPAWAY CAMP)

KIM FOM

(SASCHA KONIETZKO)

BRUCE DICKINSON

(IRON MAIDEN)

**THE HORROR
OF**

DANTE TOMASELLI



The New Masters of Horror: Volume 2

DANTE TOMASELLI

BY CHRISTOPHER P. GARETANO

If you haven't seen one of Dante Tomaselli's films, you are missing a strong piece of vertebrae from the slowly regenerative backbone of horror filmmaking. This spine is comprised of disciplined educated filmmakers (at this time a small handful) who respect and suffer for their craft. When I first saw Dante's film *Desecration*, it reminded me of works from great Italian masters like Fulci, Argento, and Bava. I then had the privilege to view Dante's second film titled *Horror*. I say privilege because good horror films are few and far between. We live in a film society of "slap around Charleys," folks who feel like all you need is a video camera and some Halloween masks, and presto you have a horror film!

Tomaselli moves against the moronic Charley onslaught with a fresh approach to fresh material. Currently Dante is preparing to shoot his third fea-



ture, *Satan's Playground*.

AYG: What is the status of *Satan's Playground*?

DANTE: Well, right now, I'm about to go into pre-production. I should start shooting *Satan's Playground* around late October. I have a feeling I could finish it... photography, editing, sound, everything by February 2003. I'd love for it to be released within 2003, but it's an inde-



Don't ever let anyone tell you that it can't be done. If it's been your dream, your goal, never give up. You might think making a full-length horror movie is impossible. It isn't. But, if you think it's easy, you're wrong. The truth is, it takes some kind of obsession, some kind of itch that won't go away. You have to be relentless. It has to be all you care about. It's not about precision and skill, but attitude. The dark side is that it's too easy to become overly sensitive to criticism. And you can take yourself way too seriously. That's a trap. It's easy to become delusional when you're a filmmaker just starting out. And when you begin to go to film festivals you realize how haphazard and crushing this whole business can be... I'll never forget when I was 25, my 4-minute short film version of *DESECRATION* was accepted to the Chicago Underground Film Festival. It was my first festival. I flew from Jersey to Chicago and stayed at a hotel where they were screening the films. I was so excited and kept on fantasizing about its premiere. Well, when my big moment came, I couldn't believe it, but the lights were still on, the sound was barely audible and people were talking and walking in and out of the theater! And I was having dreams of cheering audiences and standing ovations....

You learn to expect nothing. You make mistakes, swallow your pride over and over, and hopefully grow. You just have to stick with it. I feel numb now when I watch my films with other people. I think the secret is to trust your interior dialogue and ignore all the voices saying you can't do it or you're doing it wrong.

-Dante Tomaselli

pendent film, so you never really know.

AYG: How does *Satan's Playground* differ from your previous projects?

DANTE: This is like a detour for me. My first two films were dreams and hallucinations. They were poems... I wasn't trying to please anyone but myself. *Satan's Playground* will be more straightforward, more realistic, a little less fantasy driven. It won't skip around between past, present, and future like *Desecration* and *Horror* did. Those films were time/space dislocations. I'm just going to try to entertain an audience with *Satan's Playground*

by making a stripped-down, no-frills monster movie. It's a survival tale, really. In a way, *Satan's Playground* is a little like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* in that there's a rural setting and evil backwoods characters. Also, like those films, there's a relentless feeling of being followed, of being watched... and chased. You get some of my usual images of family dysfunction, sleep paralysis, and Satanism, but all in all, it's a popcorn scare film... a spookshow. I just want to make it as frightening and engaging as possible. That's my goal.

AYG: Tell us a bit about your cast and why you chose them.

DANTE: Well, Felissa Rose, who was born in 1969, the same year I was born, was going to be in *Satan's Playground* no matter what. We loved working together on *Horror* and share a very deep connection. We can't wait for our *Satan's Playground* 'imagination sessions'. On set, she'll have to scream and cry and run over and over and over. It's going to be a very emotionally harrowing role and we plan on keeping the horror onscreen. I'm going to try to stay very steady, very calm, almost Zen-like, and so is Felissa. We like to keep a light set and try to bulldoze over conflicts with a stare and a smile. Damn the negative people, the Internet message board know-it-alls... screw them. I know we'll be making horror movies together for a long time.

I sought out Ellen Sandweiss for a role and she accepted. It really had a lot to do with the fact that *The Evil Dead* touched me so deeply, when it came out in 1983... I was thirteen. That movie was a staple of my youth. I must have watched it on tape a thousand times throughout the years. Ellen's sequence with the Book of the Dead coming alive and automatic writing really struck a nerve. There are so many other scenes, of course the vine-attack... Ellen's performance as Cheryl was raw, really fantastic. *The Evil Dead* rules. When I found out through Rue Morgue magazine that she was touring horror conventions with the other "Ladies of the Evil Dead," I thought, well, here's my chance. I sent her an introductory e-mail with a link to my site. After that, I mailed out *Desecration* and the trailer for *Horror*. We talked on the phone and hit it off. Then I mailed her a portion of the *Satan's Playground* script. She had good things to say about *Desecration* and the *Horror* trailer and dug what she read of the *Satan's Playground* script. She also agreed



Bloodthirsty Nun (Christie Sanford)



Dante's sense of style shows through in this odd-scene.



Original poster-art for Tomaselli's upcoming independent feature, *Horror* (illustrated by Brian A. Clark)

that she'd be perfect for the role I offered her to play, so it was a go... pure synergy. As a horror fan and a fan of *The Evil Dead*, I was psyched. I mailed her some *Horror* behind-the-scenes-footage, so she'd get a feel for how my productions run. I wanted to make her 100% comfortable. Of course, she hadn't done a movie since *The Evil Dead*. That made it even more potent. Just like Felissa Rose, it was an honor to have Ellen Sandweiss on board. These are two early 80's scream queens from cult horror classics.

Danny Lopes (*Desecration*, *Horror*), a very wild, psychedelic actor, will return in another role in one of my movies. This time, he'll play Sean, an autistic, telepathic teen. In the movie, you'll get the sense that he's like this because of some kind of childhood trauma. Sean is really Bobby and Luck, characters from my previous films, all rolled into one.



Dante isn't afraid to scare you with *Horror*

AYG: Where are you shooting? What's the location?

DANTE: Somewhere in Jersey. It hasn't been confirmed yet.

AYG: When should we expect to see *Horror* released on DVD?

DANTE: *Horror* will premiere at certain film festivals nationwide around Halloween 2002. Most independent films have to ride the festival circuit before they get a release. I'm thinking for sure in 2003. If it's not in some theaters, then on DVD and VHS.

AYG: The media seems to perpetually blame violent cinema. Have you ever felt that the violence in motion pictures could effect a person in a negative way?

DANTE: No, I think horror films are good for people. They provoke us and we get to go into some intense state of consciousness where all these pent up emotions reverberate... there are no bruises, slash marks. It's all fantasy. Horror can be cathartic... a release. Horror films allow us to appreciate how safe our lives are. I just don't think they're harmful in any way. Evil emotions come from within. The idea that they are stimulated by the media, by movies and music, is so overrated.



In-Laws-from-Hell (Irma St. Paule and Salvatore Paul Piro)

AYG: How do you feel about the "Big Budget" horror filmmakers and their inclusion of humor in terror films?

DANTE: I can't stand it. It's what has ruined horror films since the mid 1980's.

AYG: Will you be shooting *Satan's Playground* on super 16 mm?

DANTE: Yes, I love super 16 mm. It's better than regular 16 mm and less expensive than 35 mm film. With the right production values, super 16 mm can look like 35 mm. I plan to shoot my fourth film, *Apparition*.

which deals with the ocean and supernatural riptides, on 35 mm, but for *Satan's Playground*, super 16 mm is perfect. It will give it a kind of 1970's vibe... that faded-yet-color-saturated look.

AYG: How do you feel about the advances of Hi Definition video used in a film like *Session 9*? Would you ever consider shooting on that format?

DANTE: You know, I never saw *Session 9*, though I heard a lot of great things about it. Still, I can't get that excited about Hi Definition video. I'm just way too in love with film. I understand it's economical but I refuse. I'll always use film. Even the best video to me looks flat, thin-looking... one-dimensional. I have to say, though, my dislike for the format wouldn't prevent me from seeing another horror film shot on Hi Definition video. I'm not prejudiced about it. It's just my personal decision as a filmmaker. I prefer film.

AYG: Tell us a bit about the look of *Satan's Playground*... sets, photography, lighting, etc.

DANTE: Overall, it's very dark and shadowy. Few special effects. Just an old creepy house and the mystery of the woods. Stripped-down. Emphasis here is on suggestion and mood, not gore, though it will definitely have its moments. The film will be mostly shot in the woods. It'll be atmospheric, with lots of fog and eerie lighting. There'll be a devil lurking in the forest. I'm in love with the visual of trees in late October, early November. Trees in the woods at that time are so skeletal. I hope *Satan's Playground* will be beautiful to look at. And scary.

AYG: Please give us some words of wisdom.

DANTE: The key is to believe in yourself. That's life's secret. If you don't, the gate stays closed. The door, locked. Though, I know, there is a long journey to get to that door. That gate. I still haven't reached it. I see it ahead of me like a mirage, but then the hallways distort and dissolve. I understand now, the journey to get to it may never end...



Dante (left) as a child

