



Intervista a Dante Tomaselli

Ciao Dante,

Quoting you, you said "I am not a Satanist. I am a Supernaturalist!". What did you mean, especially about your filming experience?

Some people automatically assume that I worship the devil. Just recently I told someone, a Bible Belter lady from the South in the States, that my name is Dante Tomaselli and my film is called Satan's Playground. She said to me, in a judgmental tone, "I'll pray for you." So there is an attitude that I am a Satanist. I'm not. I'm a Supernaturalist! I'd be chasing ghosts if I didn't have filmmaking. With my films, I'm trying to replicate supernatural experiences.

In your movies, by chance or less, you often use strong religious and symbolic associations. What's the deep reason? Just a quick curiosity. You were born in Paterson, New Jersey, but your full name sounds like an Italian name. Is that true?

I am Italian American. I was born here and my parents too. My ancestors are from Benevento and Caserta, near Naples. I find religion to be terrifying, now more than ever. I think it will be the death of us. All of us. Religion causes hatred and wars. Plus, in my early years, the area that I lived was very Italian American with Madonna statues everywhere, religious iconography...and of course...nuns. I found all of it, the imagery, the sensations, to be eerie, unsettling. I saw the horror in it. Even something simple like going to confession. It just felt...wrong. So many times I'd be on my knees praying at church and I'd trance-out and stare at the architecture. The sounds...the religious chanting became disturbing. My cousin, Alfred Sole, directed the Catholic shocker, Communion (also known as Alice, Sweet Alice) which was about religious fanaticism. That was in 1976. I was 6 years old. It's embedded in my psyche.

Your movies seems inspired from brutal and wild moods of 70's and 80's horror movies. Could you describe the influence of these pictures of the past and how are you trying to establish their charm again? Rob Zombie, in my humble opinion, is doing the same...

I'm definitely inspired by 70's and early 80's horror films. I grew up on those movies, going to Drive-ins. That was a golden period for horror films. The filmmakers were extremely imaginative. It was less about marketing and more about making quality fright films.

Who is your favorite horror director of the past and of these days?

I love Pete Walker, David Cronenberg, Dario Argento, Maya Deren and Coffin Joe. There are many others.

I'm definitely influenced by Dali. I love how he took childhood fears and anxieties and turned them into weird art.

About "Satan's Playground", ending titles are curious and funny, with appropriate quotation given to each crew section. Where did the idea come from? Isn't it a bit too much "indie," even funny how it is? Do you like Fellini?

The producers of the film put those credits in there. It was not my idea. Though Fellini is spectacular, of course.

In this movie you had a chance to work with the Cult actors of Horror Cinema of 70's and 80's like Ellen Sandweiss (Evil Dead), Edwin Neal (The Texas Chainsaw Massacre), Felissa Rose (Sleepaway Camp), Ron Millkie (Friday the 13th). Is it just a funny homage or had it a deep influence on the structure and on characters' psychology?

Well, I am deeply influenced by all those films, so there is a spiritual connection, some kind of closure. It was bliss working with actors from my favorite horror movies. There are subliminal references to each of those classic cult horror films in Satan's Playground

Where is it located exactly? As it is based on real facts, have you been careful to the real story and real characters or did you play with the fiction?

Yes, I based the story on the myth of the Jersey Devil, a mythological creature that haunts residents of South New Jersey. The Pine Barrens is a real place. It's over a million acres of forest and it's very frightening to enter that forest, especially at night. The fear of the unknown comes alive in those fairy-tale-like woods. Here, in 1735, an old woman named Mrs. Leeds gave birth to her thirteenth child. She cursed it. And yes, it came out a monster, a bloodthirsty devil, with razor-sharp claws. Legend says that it's been haunting the Pine Barrens region ever since. There are thousands of documented cases of alleged sightings of the winged demon.

According to you, what makes fear in the movie more than the other? What do you expect from the audience fear?

I love to be lost in a movie, to have no idea where it is going. Something like Nicolas Roeg's "Don't Look Now" or "Jacob's Ladder." I like to be taken on a ride with unexpected twists and turns. I like to be perplexed. My movies are like nightmares. I'm trying to illustrate the hazy intersection between life and death.

The soundtrack is basic in a horror movie. Tell about your composition role...

I score the soundtracks to all my movies. I think the soundtrack is 50% of the film's equation and I treat it with much respect. I plan my soundtracks before my films are even shot. I have a Roland Synthesizer and I like to sample sounds and compositions and mix and experiment. The music helps me write the screenplay, it helps me edit the film. The sound design is all-important to me. I need full control over it. When I was a little boy, even 3-years-old, I used to play my parents organ. I was drawn to it like a magnet. Instinctually, I used to play all the low and high notes to create an eerie ambiance. This is something I still do.

Do you prefer writing or directing a movie?

Definitely directing...and scoring a movie. The writing is always a struggle for me. Michael Gingold, the managing editor of Fangoria Magazine, CO-wrote my upcoming film, THE OCEAN. He brought a lot to the mix in terms of dialogue and characterization. I'm realizing that It's good for me to collaborate with another writer.

How far did you go along in making "Satan's Playground" movie?

Satan's Playground was shot on Super 16 mm film in 25 days during one of the coldest winters in New Jersey's history. The film was completed and copyrighted in 2005. Anchor Bay released it on DVD in August 2006.

Can you anticipate something about your very next project (The Ocean) and future project in general? Will The Ocean be another homage to horror film culture as well?

My next film, THE OCEAN, is about the end of the world. It will be my most ambitious, frightening film. There's a deadly Ebola-like virus spreading along the coast. There's a nun preaching hellfire and damnation. There's a family in deep psychic pain. I would call THE OCEAN a zombie splatter movie, but with an emotionally charged family psychodrama at the core. The budget is 1.8 million. Also on the horizon, is a remake of my cousin's film Communion (AKA Alice, Sweet Alice).

About Halloween 9, for example, what will your involvement in its direction depend on?

Rob Zombie got that job. I was in talks to direct but Rob Zombie has a larger commercial following. Money talks. Best of luck to him. But like Damien, in The Omen, I know my time will come.

Scogli Tu!

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2 Film Stream



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