

FANGORIA

• THE FIRST IN FRIGHT SINCE 1979 •

Gay of the Dead: Dante Tomaselli, Part One

in: [Columns, Gay of the Dead, News](#) | June 4, 2014 - 11:30 am | by: [Sean Abley](#) | [Comments Off on Gay of the Dead: Dante Tomaselli, Part One](#)

The terms "nonlinear" and "dream logic" are used in almost every interview and article about Dante Tomaselli's work (and Gay of the Dead will be no exception). DESECRATION, HORROR, SATAN'S PLAYGROUND and the just released TORTURE CHAMBER – four films that ask (demand?) us to turn off that "Point A to Point B" part of our brains and just go for the ride. But there is an internal logic to all of these films – Point A is deep inside Tomaselli's mind, and Point B is... probably TBD.

I've admired Tomaselli's work for some time, and am thrilled he made time for my questions. And while you're at it, you should definitely check out FANGO editor-in-chief Chris Alexander's interview with him in issue #330, as well.

FANGORIA: There's an EPK on Youtube about TORTURE CHAMBER, but also about your background. At one point you say that you were scared to look at your father, and that totally triggered a memory I have of being literally afraid that my parents wanted to kill me. Like, take me out and drown me or something. I'll let my shrink handle that on my end, but can you shed some light for those that don't know what it feels like to be afraid of your father?

DANTE TOMASELLI: Well, this is difficult to open up about because I get the feeling that my family doesn't want me to talk about my father, at least in a negative light. They're very protective because they had very different experiences and can't relate to my point of view. My Dad died when I was 17 and there's no doubt that we had a damaged relationship. It's something that I don't talk about, but I work it out in my films. Somehow. When I was under six years old, I had borderline asthma and there were many times I would go to bed at night and my nose and mouth felt sewn shut. I couldn't breathe. And then I would panic. I'd go to my parents in the middle of the night and tell them I couldn't breathe. Sometimes I'd sleepwalk. I'd sleepwalk a lot. Usually if it was breathing, my mother would rub Vicks menthol on my chest and I'd eventually relax and go back to sleep.

These episodes were always entwined with nightmares. Lots and lots of nightmares. I remember always lying on my back, barely breathing and having the most vicious dreams where I'd wake up running from the bed. One time stands out... I was practically suffocating and ran into my parents bedroom, they weren't there and I remember collapsing in the bathroom, pounding on the tile floor, I couldn't breathe and I was calling for my parents. I was really calling for my mother, I knew she was downstairs. This time my Dad came to see me and I can still remember it like a freeze frame, even though I was five years old. I was gasping for breath and he looked at me just frowning. And walked away. I guess that was just the beginning of it.

FANG: Is it correct that your mother took you to see horror movies as a kid? That resonates with me as well – my mom and I shared a love of horror flicks. Can you talk about seeing horror movies with your mom?

TOMASELLI: Yes, we saw many, many horror films and she was a fan of horror herself. We both really got into decorating the house around Halloween. That was fun. Her favorite film was PSYCHO. We saw THE FOG together in theatres in 1980 at the Totowa Cinema in New Jersey. I remember it like it was yesterday. I was 10. The sleek classic poster plastered on the side of the cinema, which I now have framed in my room... Mom was slightly down on the film. I loved THE FOG. And the music... I would try to emulate it on a Casio synth I had. The pounding bass. It generates suspense. I love that old-style Moog synth sound. I knew I had to pursue this kind of sound. It was just the kind of gloomy, low toned music I had been creating on my electronic organ and Casio.

And speaking of Carpenter, my mother took all my grammar school friends on my birthday to see HALLOWEEN in theatres and they were petrified, traumatized. Some of the parents got mad, I remember. Something in me craved horror films and I experienced a true masterpiece after watching HALLOWEEN. A work of art. I was caught in its spell for years and couldn't stop thinking about it. And the evil jack-o-lantern poster art. THE SHINING and FRIDAY THE 13TH were also excellent and released on the same week in 1980. Again, I was 10. We went to a lot of Drive-Ins, the whole family. While I enjoyed the camp-like experience of being in the car with pillows and blankets, the bad sound quality of the speakers bothered me, really annoyed me, I remember. I saw lots of horror films at Drive-Ins... THE OMEN, THEATRE OF BLOOD, THE STEPFORD WIVES, INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS, THE SENTINEL, BURNT OFFERINGS, THE CHILDREN. Also, my mother was an actress, president of Playcrafters, a theatre association in West Caldwell, New Jersey. She starred in many different plays. So growing up, I used to practice lines with her a lot and it made me feel like a director already, absorbing a performance. When I got older, in my twenties, I ended up casting her in one of my own movies. She played a nun in DESECRATION.



FANG: Okay, I love your mom. In retrospect, what do you think was going on in your life that caused your constant nightmares as a kid?

TOMASELLI: I was emotionally congested. An American misfit kid. I kept too much inside, so it came out in my nightmares. I realize that sometimes it was just the psychic debris of the day but other times I believe these dreams meant something and I was curious about their symbolism. In my teens, I was interested in lucid dreaming and actually used it as a way to try to combat my nightmares. To say to my mind, "Look this isn't real. You don't have to be afraid. You're dreaming." For example before I go to bed sometimes I look at my hands, I visualize them. Then I try to find

my hands in my dream. When I do, I'm conscious in the unconscious and I can guide or navigate the dream. You can't completely control the content but you can nudge it with your intent. I can visit old neighborhoods, grammar school classes, baseball practices... I can go anywhere that I want. The unconscious mind remembers everything.

FANG: You've also mentioned before that your films are about peeling back the layers to reveal pain and guilt. Your films are so rooted in your upbringing, I get the pain part, but what do you feel guilty about?

TOMASELLI: I tap into the guilt that I had growing up. I don't really identify with that guilt with the same intensity anymore. I've worked through and resolved a lot, which can't be put into words because it will diminish it. But I can definitely channel it and when I do, these films squeeze themselves out. I'm channeling my younger self. The images, the themes, the sounds. It's like painting. Totally unconscious. When I had apartments in NYC, people used to come over and ask if the place got ransacked or something. No, that's just the way I create... in chaos. It's like I go into some kind of trance and lose track of all time. It's a place of imagination and I love to be there... to create, to paint with pictures and sounds but it's a dark place, an emotionally violent state-of-mind.

FANG: Okay, how about a more uplifting subject? You dreamed of owning a funhouse as a kid. Describe that funhouse for us.

TOMASELLI: It was like Brigantine Castle or The Haunted Mansion at Long Branch. Those were large-scale funhouses that were well known in Jersey when I was a kid. Out of anything in the world, the one thing that would thrill me was the idea of building and designing my very own funhouse. I seriously planned it at night... lying in my bed. I would imagine the music... the soundscapes from room to realm. I saw the funhouse as a circular maze. These fantasies would light up my brain... and release serotonin. I visualized trap doors. Slides. Gates. Long hallways. Even my childhood bedroom was decorated like a funhouse. When the door opened red eyes would glow from one of my masks.

FANG: As we make our way through this interview, I feel like we're the same person! My funhouse was a three-story home that included a slide from the attic to the basement. Someday...

For more, see Tomaselli's [Facebook page](#), and visit Tomaselli's TORTURE CHAMBER [here](#). You can find our review of Tomaselli's album THE DOLL [here](#).

Engage in some "Gay of the Dead" Twitter-related activities [here](#). Like "Gay of the Dead" on the Face(hugger)book [here](#).

Hungry for more interviews with queer horror creators? Grab a copy of OUT IN THE DARK: INTERVIEWS WITH GAY HORROR FILMMAKERS, ACTORS AND AUTHORS [here](#).

Sharing is caring!



You may also like:



Gay of the Dead – Michael Varrati, Part Three



Gay of the Dead: Jeremiah Campbell, Part Two



Gay of the Dead: Maria Olsen, Part One



Exclusive: Dante Tomaselli to offer musical "NIGHTMARE"



Gay of the Dead: Maria Olsen, Part Two



Gay of the Dead – Michael Varrati, Part One



Gay of the Dead: Babette Bombshell, Part One



Gay of the Dead: Babette Bombshell, Part Two

Related Articles



in: [Books/Art/Culture, News](#) | February 12, 2015
"NIGHTMARE" (CD Review)

in: [Columns, Gay of the Dead, News](#) | October 8, 2014
Gay of the Dead: Maria Olsen, Part Two

in: [Columns, Gay of the Dead, News](#) | October 7, 2014
Gay of the Dead: Maria Olsen, Part One

in: [Books/Art/Culture, Movies/TV, News](#) | March 15, 2016
Exclusive art/comments: Dante Tomaselli's music for "WITCHES"

About the author



Sean Abley

Sean Abley is a playwright, screenwriter, columnist and editor of OUT IN THE DARK: INTERVIEWS WITH GAY HORROR FILMMAKERS, ACTORS AND AUTHORS. His writing has appeared in The Advocate, Unzipped, and Fangoria. His microbudget, gay, sci-fi thriller, Socket, which he describes as "medium good," was released in 2007. His two dozen published plays, which include Horror High: The Musical and The End of the World (With Prom To Follow), have been produced hundreds of times around the world. He lives in Los Angeles with his husband, Matt, and their two cats.

CURRENT ISSUE →

FANGORIA #347

INTERVIEW: JOHN CARPENTER kicks off a new chapter in his 40-plus-year career with his first-ever world tour.

INTERVIEW: ELI ROTH isn't fooling around when it comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From **\$1.99!**

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From **\$1.99!**

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From **\$1.99!**

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

DREADTIME STORIES

A NEW RADIO DRAMA THAT WILL GIVE YOU NIGHTMARES

PRESENTED BY **FANGORIA**

HOSTED BY MALCOLM MCDOWELL

LISTEN NOW FOR FREE!)))

FANGORIA

• THE FIRST IN FRIGHT SINCE 1979 •

Gay of the Dead: Dante Tomaselli, Part Two

in: [Columns, Gay of the Dead, Movies/TV, News](#) | June 9, 2014 - 3:00 pm | by: [Sean Abley](#) | Comments Off on Gay of the Dead: Dante Tomaselli, Part Two

In [Part One](#) of this interview with Dante Tomaselli, we talked about his background, complex relationships with his parents and building the perfect funhouse. In this second of three parts, we discuss his personal life, how his synesthesia affects his music and his filmmaking (Yes, he makes music!), and some of the filmmakers of which he is a fan.

FANGORIA: I don't want to dwell on the gay thing, but humor me with one question. When I reached out to previous interviewees for recommendations for future interviews, two folks mentioned your name. I was a bit stunned, because I have my ear pretty close to the ground when it comes to queer horror filmmakers. Is being out a new development? Or am I just not paying close enough attention?

DANTE TOMASELLI: I've been out for a long time to my family, friends and co-workers. And when I shoot a film, I usually don't discuss my private life, so probably many people don't know and when they find out maybe they're a little surprised, but it's no secret. It's no big deal. I don't hide it. No one cares. So I'm not coming out right now. I've been out. If someone would ever ask me, I'd tell them. I'm just low key, I've never felt the urge to talk about it. Or maybe I was afraid. Plus it's a part of my life that is private.

It was a long journey to get here... I fought it in the beginning and had girlfriends. It was wrong to be deceitful, wrong on every level and it messes with your aura. But that's in the distant past; high school and college years. A long time ago.

I'm at the stage where it's not the slightest issue. I feel aligned with who I really am. I'm a Creator. I'm just more upset about what's happening in different parts of the planet. And the evil preachers who lead the way. It upsets me. And Scott Lively is running for Governor of Massachusetts?! If religion is going to be some force for something positive, why doesn't the Pope speak out on the atrocities taking place in certain parts of the world. In Africa... in the Middle East. I'd love to see the day when religions, all religions stopped dividing and tearing people apart. Some religious conservatives in the States are gleeful about the mistreatment of our fellow human beings here and abroad. Gay-bashing all in the name of holiness, righteousness and stomping out the Devil, of course. It's an insanity that inspires horror films.

FANG: I want to talk about your music, which I'm listening to right this minute. First of all, I love that you did a CD of Halloween music, because when I was a kid, my friends and I used to make cassette recordings of haunted house sounds (which was pretty much us screaming and banging pots and pans). But more importantly, I wanted to know how your synesthesia manifests when you compose.

TOMASELLI: I'm really glad you enjoyed SCREAM IN THE DARK. Growing up, I used to play Funhouse with my friends. I'd have someone enter the basement in the dark on a wheelchair and I'd guide the person through secret passageways.

I used to always love being with my Grandma Rose Ruocco, she was my best buddy and favorite person in the world. I always give her special thanks in the credits of everything I do. If there is a God, then she's my Guardian Angel. I remember watching thunderstorms out on the front porch with her, feeling so snug and close and something that happened every time that there was a loud thunderclap. The sky...would flash colors but it wasn't the sky. It was almost like a sparkler or a hologram of a sparkler. The sound of the thunderclap produced it. It's actually transparent...your hands go right through it. Like a slide being projected. I mainly have sound color synesthesia. Sound triggers colors or sometimes patterns. Like if there's a low sounding note, something bassy, it will look dark purple or brown. Something high, a high note is white or yellow. For me. It's in the corner of my eye, a projection of color, like a slide show in the air. Tiny floating dots like fiber optic specks of light. It all depends on the sound.



But this is mostly in the background, waiting to come out. It's not like I live my life in a video game or anything. Though I have to say when I'm composing and recording hallucinatory soundscapes in the final stages it can look like a freaky scene and I wish I could film it, share it. Sometimes I feel it's a shame that only I can see it. The soundscapes...I reach out and feel them... I see them, I need to touch them with my hands. I turn out all the lights and they're like laser lights in the corner of my eye. They're alive. It's like when you're lying on your back on the beach and the sun is over you. It wouldn't matter if your eyes were closed or opened, you'd see patterns, shapes, like little cells, images that you have no control over. I usually only see lasers, dots or spirals. When the soundscapes are finally right in front of me like a slide show in the air, that's when I know they're working. That's when I knew SCREAM IN THE DARK, my first audio CD was completed, when I could touch all of it.

FANG: And how does it influence your filmmaking?

TOMASELLI: When I'm filming I appear to be in darkness, wearing sunglasses. But that's not true, it's the opposite, I see everything brighter...more pristine...I'm wearing special glasses designed to find golf balls. The glasses have the electric blue tint that's been in all of my movies from the beginning. I've worn them on every single film shoot and as my crews always learn, I never take them off.

Having sound color synesthesia influences my sound design, when I create the soundtrack mainly. While I'm shooting, I like to listen to tracks, my demo tracks on my headphones and decide if they click and match up. Usually they don't, but when they do it's magical and when that happens I almost always have a scene that remains a favorite. I know the moment I see the image through the viewfinder and hear the soundscape on my headphones. Total alignment. I find it impossible to separate the sound from the visual, that's why I could never ever give someone full control on my soundtracks. It's 50% of the film's equation. I couldn't relinquish that responsibility. Especially with horror films where mood is everything. I'm obsessed with the soundtrack. Taste color. Touch sound.

FANG: In an interview with Chris Alexander for FANGORIA, you mention you have (or had) hallucinations. So I'm adding up that, your synesthesia, nightmares, plus your various themes and references in your filmmaking and – I swear to God this is a compliment – I think of Carly Fleischmann, a young woman with autism who is nonverbal, but one day she sat in front of a computer and started typing. She found her "voice" and it was revealed she's actually an advance-placement level student. And now she's a writer who is able to finally communicate what it's like to be autistic from the inside. Is filmmaking your way of communicating what it's like to be Dante Tomaselli from the inside?

TOMASELLI: Yes. My films speak in dream language. The music...feels like sculpture, like I'm sculpting. I only have a need to communicate this way, otherwise I'd be doing mindless industrials non-stop. Whatever comes out of me, it's got to be very personal and it's got to be horror. I see it and hear it as one package when I'm creating, it's always close to my heart, the film project...something that needs to be released or unleashed. The act of creating the film becomes a mission. In all my films, I like to convey the feeling of peeling back layers...an unfolding...almost like waking up from a dream and then being pulled back even deeper into it. It's a riptide, a loop that I understand.



Tomaselli, On Set

FANG: Interviewers typically ask you about your nonlinear, dream logic style (of which I am a big fan). You obviously have a voice as a filmmaker that you're comfortable with, and good at. I wonder what horror filmmakers' styles you enjoy, but think, "I couldn't do that"?

TOMASELLI: David Cronenberg. His films are so thoughtful and powerful, he's such an intellectual filmmaker and some of his movies are among my all-time favorites, like THE BROOD. Pure psychological horror. I love John Carpenter and believe he has some more amazing horror films in store for us. I don't ever count him out.

As far as nonlinear films, experimental films, there's Maya Deren at the top of the list and no one can touch her. She's like the Laurie Anderson or Kate Bush or Wendy Carlos of experimental film. The grandmother of strange cinema. When I first saw MESHES OF THE AFTERNOON, in my early twenties at a New York School of Visual Arts film class, I was mesmerized. I related to Deren's trance-like filmmaking. Wildly, I actually knew the Executrix of the Maya Deren Estate very well. Her name was Cherel Ito. Rest in Peace. We met by chance at a post office in the West Village and she and I became very close friends. Cherel helped all my early DESECRATION shorts get accepted into the Independent Feature Film Market at Angelika Film Center in NYC and other film festivals and markets. She really helped my career. And I miss her.

There are a lot of other filmmakers who are untouchable that I idolize: Kubrick, Bava, Argento, Fulci, Pete Walker. I often bump into Brian De Palma on the elevator in NYC and find myself unable to speak. SISTERS...CARRIE...THE FURY...DRESSED TO KILL. I'm awestruck. My cousin, Alfred Sole, created ALICE, SWEET ALICE in the 1970s, which I feel is one of the greatest horror films of all time. He's untouchable.

FANG: When I was cutting my film SOCKET down to a 10-minute presentation reel for distributors, I had this really horrible feeling – If I can cut my feature down to ten minutes, all the rest of it must be worthless. Is there a point during the postproduction of your films when you think, "I've totally blown it..."?

TOMASELLI: Yes, it's like a panic attack. After a while, once the air clears, I can see things more clearly. I've learned that I should never make snap decisions when it comes to creative stuff. Give it at least one night to absorb and allow the unconscious mind to work on it. Many times, my answers come to me in dreams. Many times, bad moods come on like swirling storms, creating chaos and destruction. I've learned, time and time again to think things through carefully and that my first gut, my first instinct is usually always correct. These days I sugar coat things less. Hopefully my filmmaking is improving. I'm at war with two parts...a side of me who's a people-pleaser, I like to make people happy and another side that is uncompromising.

For more, see Tomaselli's [Facebook page](#), and visit Tomaselli's TORTURE CHAMBER [here](#). You can find our review of Tomaselli's album THE DOLL [here](#).

Engage in some "Gay of the Dead" Twitter-related activities [here](#). Like "Gay of the Dead" on the Face(hugger)book [here](#).

Hungry for more interviews with queer horror creators? Grab a copy of OUT IN THE DARK: INTERVIEWS WITH GAY HORROR FILMMAKERS, ACTORS AND AUTHORS [here](#).

Sharing is caring!



You may also like:



GAY OF THE DEAD – Michael Varrati, Part Three



Exclusive: Dante Tomaselli to offer musical "NIGHTMARE"



Gay of the Dead: Babette Bombshell, Part One



Gay of the Dead – Michael Varrati, Part One



Gay of the Dead: Jeremiah Campbell, Part One



Gay of the Dead: Babette Bombshell, Part Two



Gay of the Dead: Joe Zaso, Part One



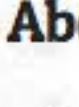
Gay of the Dead: Maria Olsen, Part One

Related Articles



in: [Books/Art/Culture, News](#) | February 12, 2015
| [March 15, 2016](#)
Exclusive art/comments:
Dante Tomaselli's music for "WITCHES"

About the author



Sean Abley

Sean Abley is a playwright, screenwriter, columnist and editor of OUT IN THE DARK: INTERVIEWS WITH GAY HORROR FILMMAKERS, ACTORS AND AUTHORS. His writing has appeared in The Advocate, Unzipped, and Fangoria. His microbudget, gay, sci-fi thriller, Socket, which he describes as "medium good," was released in 2007. His two dozen published plays, which include Horror High: The Musical and The End of the World (With Prom To Follow), have been produced hundreds of times around the world. He lives in Los Angeles with his husband, Matt, and their two cats.

CURRENT ISSUE →

FANGORIA #347

INTERVIEW: JOHN CARPENTER kicks off a new chapter in his 40-plus-year career with his first-ever world tour.

INTERVIEW: ELI ROTH isn't fooling around when it comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From \$1.99!

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From \$1.99!

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From \$1.99!

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99 →

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From \$1.99!

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

In print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

SWAG

DREADTIME STORIES

A NEW RADIO DRAMA THAT WILL GIVE YOU NIGHTMARES

PRESENTED BY

FANGORIA

HOSTED BY MALCOLM MCDOWELL

LISTEN NOW FOR FREE!)))

FANGORIA

• THE FIRST IN FRIGHT SINCE 1979 •

Gay of the Dead: Dante Tomaselli, Part Three

in: [Columns, Gay of the Dead, News](#) | June 17, 2014 - 11:30 am | by: [Sean Abley](#) | Comments Off on Gay of the Dead: Dante Tomaselli, Part Three

In [Part Two](#) of my interview with Dante Tomaselli, we chatted about being out, his music and films, and I compared him to an autistic genius (which he took well). In this final of three parts, we talk about his regular cast members (Danny Lopes and Christie Sanford), THE OCEAN (what happened?), more filmmaking, and just what is he doing when he's not making a film?

FANG: You've used Danny Lopes and Christie Sanford in all of your films. In an interview around the release of SATAN'S PLAYGROUND, you mentioned that he was your projected alter ego. Still the case? He's about ten years younger than you – are his characters you ten years ago?

TOMASELLI: I met Danny when he was 15. I was casting for the lead role of DESECRATION and he came along and swooped up the part easily. He was already going to Catholic school and was overall exactly what I was going for in terms of the character, the lead in DESECRATION. He owned it. Plus, he told me that he's the son of a Jeweler, just like me. Apparently my parents and his parents even briefly knew each other back in the day. Danny said my Dad helped his Dad with advice in the Jewelry business. It does seem like Danny Lopes is my alter ego in my films. He's like a younger brother to me and I'm very protective of him. Yes, his roles are probably projections of my forbidden side. Especially his role in HORROR. I don't want to be contrived so I don't plan for him to be in my films. If it feels right, and he fits the part, then it happens.

FANG: It seems like Christie is your Mink Stole. (Again, a compliment). What is it about her that drives you to create roles for her?

TOMASELLI: Same with Christie Sanford. I never actually create a part with her in mind. She just always naturally fits a lead role in my projects. God, we've worked together since 1993, when I was 23 and living in NYC on West 10th and Bleecker. Every single short and feature of mine she's starred in. We're so aligned that I direct her almost telepathically. Christie was the bewitching lady of clay that I was dreaming about when I was a little boy. I used to fantasize about being a horror film director and used to watch films like TOURIST TRAP and THE SHINING and fantasize that I actually directed them. I could only imagine what a big deal that would be, and it gave me a feeling of virtual accomplishment. I always knew I wanted to make horror movies. This path stretches out far.

Anyway, I have VHS tapes of Christie sitting in front of my camera in my old NYC apartment and practically shape shifting. Her facial expressions were so bizarre, contorting to a possessed look very quickly. I always would tell her to open her mouth and smile as widely as possible, show all her teeth. She's a monster. We've been practicing this stuff for years. Christie and I had no idea what was in store for us back then in the mid-90s, but we both sensed some powerful experiences were on the horizon. DESECRATION, HORROR, SATAN'S PLAYGROUND, TORTURE CHAMBER. Those movies were right around the corner. I remember when we finally shot the nursery room scene in DESECRATION, I had a tear in my eye. The flickering lights, the giant toy blocks, the Jack in the Box, the cage. This densely hallucinated image... Here it was. And what an apparitional performance by Christie. She took my breath away.

FANG: As I was putting this interview together, H.R. Giger just died after a fall in his home. He was a huge part of my horror adolescence. How about you? Was he an influence?

TOMASELLI: I'm not as fanatical as some people but yes, I was a fan. His spectacular, epic dreamscapes were perfectly realized in ALIEN. I usually fail to mention that as one of my favorite films of all time, but it is and thank you H.R. Giger for the grotesque and astounding designs. Their depth of beauty is beyond words.

FANG: I assume THE OCEAN isn't a favorite topic of yours these days, but I ask this because you've mentioned in other interviews how angry you were about the film not working out, and how TORTURE CHAMBER is sort of a new start for you as a filmmaker in reaction to that failure. What happened to the film in general? And of course I have to ask, is it still on your plate?

TOMASELLI: Yes, the whole period of not making THE OCEAN, around 2007, 2008 was a very disturbing time for me. I had two of my favorite actresses, Adrienne Barbeau and Dee Wallace interested in the lead character. The character being a psychic haunted by visions of a watery apocalypse. Also attached in other co-starring roles were Judith O' Dea, Lynn Lowry, a lot of terrific performers who read the screenplay and were ready to be in it. There was positive buzz around the film, as I was scouting locations in Puerto Rico. I even hired a daredevil cameraman, Mike Prickett, to film huge waves as B-roll footage for THE OCEAN. All was flowing...until I discovered that the money was not there. I'm definitely used to delays, but something was wrong. I waited and waited but it never arrived. I was so depressed, practically suicidal, but I eventually picked myself and started writing TORTURE CHAMBER. Put all my rage and frustration into it. To me, it's a film about the confusion of being alive.



"Torture Chamber"

FANG: I don't know why, but after reading about a dozen interviews with you, I get the impression you're a fairly serious guy. In what context could you be found completely letting loose and, I don't know, maybe yelling or acting a fool?

TOMASELLI: [Laughs] I'm really not that serious all the time. There's a kookiness about me. I love to laugh, I smile a lot. I try not to take myself or any of this too seriously, no matter how it sounds. I'm an unrepentant weirdo. Growing up, I used to read palms and write horoscopes for our school paper. I draw mazes that are shaped like brains or intestines. For me, fun is working on storyboards for my next film. I'm a slave to my films.

FANG: I also think of you solely on a set. Like, Dante Tomaselli doesn't exist unless he's shooting something. You seem like such a creature of filmmaking. Other than the obvious (working on the next script), what are you doing when you're not working on your next film?

TOMASELLI: That's a very accurate description. I am a creature of filmmaking. I think back on all the years I walked through the Manhattan streets to labs, studios, with rented camera equipment, carrying lights, all the grunt work... walking...walking...for many, many years... Always plotting every move to get me to the set of my next feature film. Everything I say, everything I do. People invite me to events and I almost never go. Thankfully they understand. Some do take it the wrong way and all of a sudden I'm the enemy. I'm like an airplane pilot, when I'm gone...I'm gone. You might catch me at a NYC postproduction studio, picture editing or at a sound studio...mixing.

Other than that, I'm probably no more than a blur on a NYC street. Since I made four movies by being this way, I know it really works. Tenacity is important. I like playing with my dog, Trippy. I enjoy listening to albums by Coil, Depeche Mode, The Cars, Jean Michel Jarre and Laurie Anderson. I go to the beach. I'm right near it. And the woods. I live in South Jersey in Ocean County on the outskirts of the Pine Barrens.

FANG: There's a shot of you in that previously mentioned EPK digging in the sand at the beach as a child, and you speak of liking the ocean, digging holes, rocks. And your films have a very earth-bound, pagan feel to them despite the Christian imagery. I expect people to be swallowed by the ground at any minute. (Actually, as I recall that happens in SATAN'S PLAYGROUND) Am I reading too much into your work, or do you have an affinity for an "earth as intelligent entity" imagery?

TOMASELLI: My Sun is in Scorpio in the 1st House with Mars in Capricorn. I've always been intrigued by Astrology, the constellations. I find it so interesting... The moon controls the ebb and flow of the ocean currents. 70% of our bodies are water. There seems to be something to it. The natural elements...earth...fire...air...water. They're beautiful to visualize and photograph with rich symbolism. Plus one of the earliest paintings to come searing into my mind was "The Witches Sabbath" by Goya. I was only 7 years old. I was in the school library browsing the category of supernatural and this painting jumped out at me from its pages. My heart started beating so fast and I couldn't stop staring at it. Everything about the image was so mysterious. It's like I entered into it.

I'm trying to connect the dots myself. I think it's about another world poking through...the spirit world. I believe that I experienced the Stendahl Syndrome. (*Stendahl syndrome is basically experiencing various mental and physical reactions when observing art or things of great beauty.* – Ed.) Or something similar to it. Sometimes, growing up, my nightmares felt practically supernatural with satanic goats, bloodstained nuns, witches' sabbaths... holes and quicksand. Quicksand, the idea of it, frightens me to the core and I had to include it in SATAN'S PLAYGROUND. I'll incorporate it in another film for sure. The earth as enemy pushes a button in me. A hole in the ground...I prefer to make it black, a bottomless pit, like in DESECRATION. I incorporate holes in my stories every chance I get.

FANG: I've been doing a little searching, and can't seem to find that documentary about you, THE HORROR OF DANTE TOMASELLI, anywhere. Did it ever get released?

TOMASELLI: There's a trailer for it on the Anchor Bay SATAN'S PLAYGROUND DVD, a teaser...but it was never actually completed. I'm in touch with the director, Chris Garetano and I'll ask him. He's busy gearing up to release his new film, MONTAUK CHRONICLES. For THE HORROR...I believe there are probably a lot of bizarre things in store like a tape recording of me snoring. I was taped sleeping one night because I didn't believe that I snored. It took me by surprise...It sounded like a cobra hissing. Sounded reptilian.

FANG: Give me a movie to watch that is part of your required viewing list, and tell me why. I'll watch it, then report back!

TOMASELLI: The House With Laughing Windows. Because I'm deathly afraid of withered old women brandishing butcher knives and it's a Euro-horror classic. Enjoy.

FANG: And I did! This one had escaped my attention for some reason. I'm not a huge Pupi Avati fan (although SALO which he collaborated, is a favorite), but this was fun and twisted. And involves a church, so I can definitely understand the appeal to your tastes. Great recommendation!

For more, see Tomaselli's [Facebook page](#), and visit Tomaselli's TORTURE CHAMBER [here](#). You can find our review of Tomaselli's album THE DOLL [here](#).

Engage in some "Gay of the Dead" Twitter-related activities [here](#). Like "Gay of the Dead" on the Face(hugger)book [here](#).

Hungry for more interviews with queer horror creators? Grab a copy of OUT IN THE DARK: INTERVIEWS WITH GAY HORROR FILMMAKERS, ACTORS AND AUTHORS [here](#).

Sharing is caring!



You may also like:



Gay of the Dead – Michael Varrati, Part Three



Gay of the Dead: Babette Bombshell, Part One



Gay of the Dead: Joe Zaso, Part One



Gay of the Dead: Maria Olsen, Part Two



Gay of the Dead: Babette Bombshell, Part Two



Gay of the Dead: Jeremiah Campbell, Part One



"NIGHTMARE" (CD Review)



Gay of the Dead – Michael Varrati, Part One

Related Articles



in: [Books/Art/Culture, Movies/TV, News](#)
February 12, 2015
"NIGHTMARE" (CD Review)
Exclusive art/comments: Dante Tomaselli's music for "WITCHES"

in: [Columns, Gay of the Dead, Movies/TV, News](#) | June 9, 2014
Gay of the Dead: Dante Tomaselli, Part Two

in: [Columns, Gay of the Dead, News](#) | June 4, 2014
Gay of the Dead: Dante Tomaselli, Part One

About the author



Sean Abley

Sean Abley is a playwright, screenwriter, columnist and editor of OUT IN THE DARK: INTERVIEWS WITH GAY HORROR FILMMAKERS, ACTORS AND AUTHORS. His writing has appeared in The Advocate, Unzipped, and Fangoria. His microbudget, gay, sci-fi thriller, Socket, which he describes as "medium good," was released in 2007. His two dozen published plays, which include Horror High: The Musical and The End of the World (With Prom To Follow), have been produced hundreds of times around the world. He lives in Los Angeles with his husband, Matt, and their two cats.

CURRENT ISSUE →

FANGORIA #347

INTERVIEW: JOHN CARPENTER kicks off a new chapter in his 40-plus-year career with his first-ever world tour.

INTERVIEW: ELI ROTH isn't fooling around when it comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From **\$1.99!**

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From **\$1.99!**

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From **\$1.99!**

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

It comes to his gruesome production "Clown."

...AND MUCH MORE!

PRE-ORDER: \$10.00
DIGITAL: \$3.99

FANGORIA PRESENTS

GEORGE ROMERO

THE OFFICIAL SITE

CHECK OUT THE NEW GAR PLUSH!

FANGORIA

DIGITAL ISSUES

From **\$1.99!**

Download the issues you may never see in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

in print again. A new one each month!

GORE STORE

BACK ISSUES SUBSCRIPTIONS

SWAG

DREADTIME STORIES

A NEW RADIO DRAMA THAT WILL GIVE YOU NIGHTMARES

PRESENTED BY **FANGORIA**

HOSTED BY MALCOLM MCDOWELL

LISTEN NOW FOR FREE!