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Dante Tomaselli's Out-of-Body Experience (2019)

July 27, 2019 | By Mark R. Hasan

Admirers of Dante Tomaselli's prior sonic explorations will be quite surprised at the shift the director of **Torture Chamber** (2013) and **Desecration** (1999) took with his latest album, titled **Out-of-Body Experience**, released July 4th, 2019 via TuneCore, and available on CD via Amazon on Demand, and digitally from Amazon, iTunes, and Spotify.

The filmmaker has used sound to explore the dimensions of future projects, and revisit aspects of previous works; **The Doll** (2014) was supposed to be a precursor to a film tied to the album's carnival of sounds, but when that production failed to coalesce, Tomaselli seemed to step back from a project which engrossed several years, and chose not a reset but a revisit the sounds of his youth, especially the synthetic beats and thematic fragments of vintage video games, if not the electrified analogue world of the late 80s and early 90s.

Oobe is his most accessible in terms of percussion textures, bass grooves, and backbeats, but the underpinnings of the album are like synthetic hooks which draw the listener into a canted, almost Caligari-esque tunnel. In many ways the album is built like a winding passage where the source of a lurid strobing light is never met, but the wanderer's intrigue never diminishes.

The cues have thematic names, but they're embedded amongst each other, flowing in the same organic fashion as prior albums, and when a cue shimmers with an unusual clarity, it's as though the wanderer has found a netted porthole in a wall, through which pulses, textures, reverb, and fleeting human voices are discerned amid the dim shadowplay of mishapen figures. Before one has a moment to fully interpret the sounds, other sonic hooks pull the wanderer away, and redirect one deeper into the passage.

Spanning 17 tracks and 35 minutes, Oobe is a very pleasing shift, and in our recent Q&A, Tomaselli details the creation of the album, his influences, and the qualities which make the album an amalgam of soundtrack, sonic experimentation, and perhaps the equivalent to a midnight crawl through a shuttered urban underworld.



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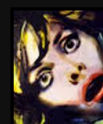
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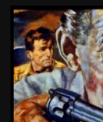
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Mark R. Hasan: Your latest project is a very different animal from prior sonic immersions, with pieces often comprised of very tangible melodic fragments – “The Lighthouse” being a good example – and the use of techno beats and bass lines. At what point were you aware that **Out-Of-Body Experience** (OOBE) was taking you towards a less abstract palette?

Dante Tomaselli: On all my albums I would feature one or two tracks with beats and pulses but very sparingly. Each album I would dip my toe in the water, I felt a little more courage to go further, like on **Witches**, **Kundalini Serpent**, **Lucid Dreaming**... Religion, those tracks all had prominent electro beats and that was challenging for me since I’m more of an atmosphere sound sculptor of floating shapes...I tend to keep the mood brooding and drone-like but with OOBE I just went all-out with a more melodic, energetic sound.

On some of my older albums there were tracks that were very long like 10 or 15 minutes... I decided I wanted everything here to be under four minutes. Also, I was very inspired by a John Carpenter concert I saw in NYC. I traveled to it all alone and was supposed to meet Michael Gingold but couldn’t find him anywhere. Michael was going to introduce me to Ryan Turek for the purpose of...so I could put my name in the hat of directors for the new **Halloween**, the one with the return of Jamie Lee Curtis.

I was feeling anxiety just standing there in the crowd, the sounds of voices were distorting and it was my instinct to escape, just go home. But I couldn’t do that. Here I was in front of my lifelong idol. I felt that I would never get the job of directing **Halloween** (1978), which would be a childhood dream come true...even though I was confident I could deliver... visually and sonically... I was insecure and down on myself. Not in the cards.

I got emotional as the music started and it all felt so unreal, everything about my life. I was actually communicating with John Carpenter’s son, Cody, through email the night before and telling him how I excited I was for this event. I think I’m a little too passionate when it comes to dealing with my heroes, I met Martin Gore from Depeche Mode and just froze, I couldn’t speak. John Carpenter scares me and I’d probably just crumble in his presence. Like I was doing that night... When **The Fog** (1980) played, I teared up. What an outstanding performance combined with mist and dreamlike footage from the movie flickering on screen! All of a sudden I was 10 years old in 1980 and experiencing the ghost movie with my mother at the **Totowa Cinema** on Route 46 in Wayne, NJ. I could see us hunched in the seats and the walls of the theatre.

My father owned a Jewelry store and Bridal shop called Lu-Mar Jewelers, and it was located right next to that movie theatre. Events in my mind flowed into each other... It was like a time/space dislocation standing there in front of John Carpenter and in that moment I saw my whole life flashing in front of me... all to the pulsing sound of **The Fog**, a soundtrack I would mimic myself at the age of 10 on an old family electronic Organ, on my 80’s Casio Keyboard and on my brother’s drum set in the basement. So here I was in the present... an adult filmmaker and musician myself... swaying to the beats and melodies of

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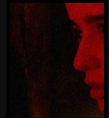
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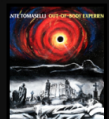
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BR: **Werewolf in a Girl’s Dormitory / Lycanthropus** (1961)

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DVD: **Spielberg** (2017)

Distilling the career, the creative and industry accomplishments of Steven



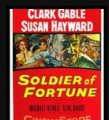
BR: **Tall Men, The** (1955)

Director Raoul Walsh may have been attracted to The Tall Men by the oddness of



DVD: **Soldier of Fortune** (1955)

Upon it’s original theatrical release, Clark Gable’s first



DVD: **Mike Wallace Is Here** (2019)

The title of Avi Belkin’s highly



John Carpenter whose songs equal perfection! Suspenseful, punchy... hypnotic, always pleasurable. His music just releases serotonin in the brain. Horror fanatics... we react chemically to his output, we can't help ourselves.

So I wanted this new album to be an Out-of-Body Experience in almost a literal sense... a kind of spiritual journey. It's tactile, 3-D-like... A dark night of the soul. I hope it allows listeners to time travel if they decide. I hope it opens a door. Probably the best way to absorb **Out-of-Body Experience** is resting in a reclining chair on a balcony, gazing at the sky. A track like Astral Projection might produce colorful and glowing intergalactic visuals... Or the netherworld of The Snake...where there's an invisible beat and a strange voice intoning, "Your thoughts have been recorded."

Mark R. Hasan: Did OOB require you to build a new archive of sounds, given many cues seem to be built-up from rhythmic patterns?

Dante Tomaselli: All of my albums employ unused sounds that didn't make it to my movie's soundtracks, so I have this huge bin...an island of misfit sounds... and I would constantly dip into it. But not too much for OOB... overall here was a brand new palette. I used a lot of new laser-like sounds...hallucinogenic space effects and chopped and mixed them to death. Still, though I couldn't help myself and occasionally lifted choice elements from my old and ever-growing audio paint library.

Mark R. Hasan: Fans of prior albums may find the cues to be much brighter, if not humorous rather than starkly nightmarish, such as "The Gate" which infers a journey which might be a little dangerous, but also a little fun.

Dante Tomaselli: Exactly. That describes it very well... Brighter. It takes place in 1980 when I was 10... the time of the birth of video games, arcades and Atari vs. Intellivision. Synthesizer sounds were fresh and exciting and I was drawn like a magnet. Those analogue sounds fill the space of this album. I knew I was taking a risk since my signature is darkness but I've explored pitch-black audio horror... Of course there's always more to explore...more terror trips... Strange sinister sounds seem to drip from me, there's not much I can do it about it... If you squeeze me, you might sense these vibrations.



The late G.W. Bellini's highly entertaining documentary on



New Soundtrack Reviews

LP: John and Mary (1969)

Written during his busiest period (1968-1970), Quincy Jones' score for John and



CD: Runaway Train (1985)

For some soundtrack fans, it was a bit of surprise to learn the composer of pioneering



LP: Bourne Identity, The (2002)

The first film in the enduring franchise gave John Powell





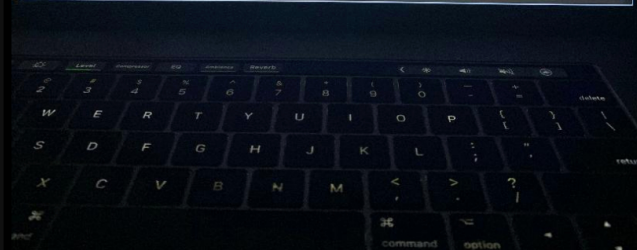
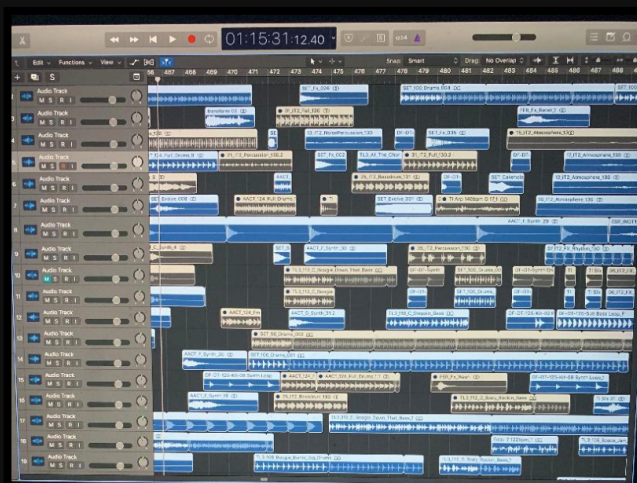


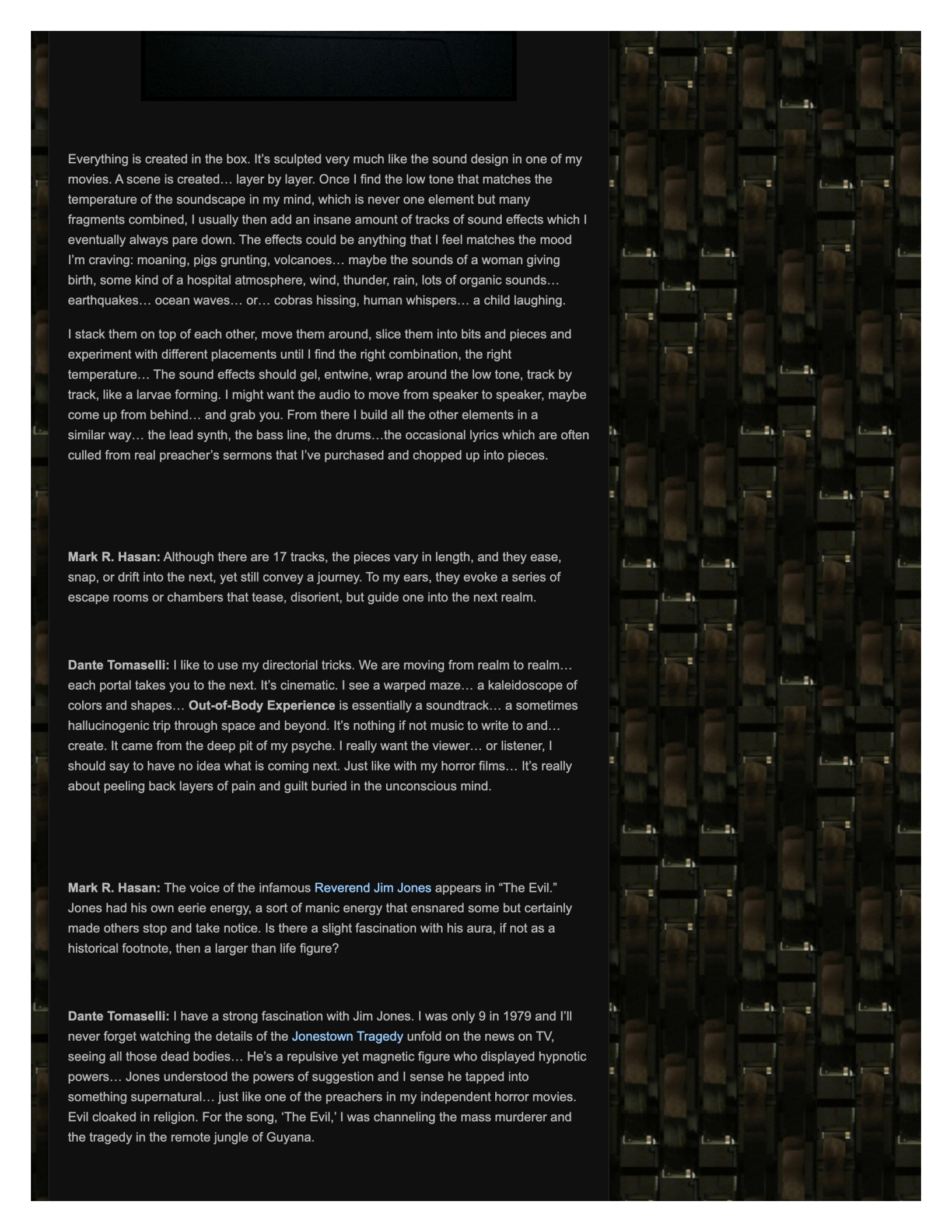
Scream in the Dark, my first album was pure funhouse at the amusement park and **The Doll**... Chris Alexander said it's an evil album, **The Doll**... and it is. He said he played the first track with his son in the room and they were beyond disturbed. I know I was tapping into something very dangerous and black-hearted. And **Nightmare**, which was like a black mass...that's probably the most satanic of the five albums...I thought a fungus was invading me as I created that one. And my computer kept crashing. I would lose everything. I understood how Margot Kidder felt when she lost her materials.

On **Witches**, there are some emotionally-violent instrumentals like "Caverns of Hell"... It's not that I'm abandoning horror with OOB... I'm not... it's definitely still there. I can't escape it myself. I was just craving to try something different, something a bit more upbeat and optimistic... though it's very dark and stormy near the end of the journey.

Mark R. Hasan: I wonder if you can describe a bit of the process in which a cue is built up – whether it's from a specific series of sounds that are shaped, or patterns that you explore, tear apart, and reassemble, and the meticulous layering which ensures no piece is anchored to a single, rigidly recurring idea.

Dante Tomaselli: Well, it really starts with an impression... Usually it vibrates internally and then I find a way to translate it. Let's say it's a low-toned drone with a spacey, ethereal presence...and it's probably the spine of the soundscape... I'll preview a bin of baritones and stack them on top of each other in my sound editing software, Apple Logic Pro X. Or if needed, I'll go to one of my synths, either a Roland Fantom X 6 or my Novation Morodernova synthesizer and play around and sample different notes and transfer them to the computer.





Everything is created in the box. It's sculpted very much like the sound design in one of my movies. A scene is created... layer by layer. Once I find the low tone that matches the temperature of the soundscape in my mind, which is never one element but many fragments combined, I usually then add an insane amount of tracks of sound effects which I eventually always pare down. The effects could be anything that I feel matches the mood I'm craving: moaning, pigs grunting, volcanoes... maybe the sounds of a woman giving birth, some kind of a hospital atmosphere, wind, thunder, rain, lots of organic sounds... earthquakes... ocean waves... or... cobras hissing, human whispers... a child laughing.

I stack them on top of each other, move them around, slice them into bits and pieces and experiment with different placements until I find the right combination, the right temperature... The sound effects should gel, entwine, wrap around the low tone, track by track, like a larvae forming. I might want the audio to move from speaker to speaker, maybe come up from behind... and grab you. From there I build all the other elements in a similar way... the lead synth, the bass line, the drums...the occasional lyrics which are often culled from real preacher's sermons that I've purchased and chopped up into pieces.

Mark R. Hasan: Although there are 17 tracks, the pieces vary in length, and they ease, snap, or drift into the next, yet still convey a journey. To my ears, they evoke a series of escape rooms or chambers that tease, disorient, but guide one into the next realm.

Dante Tomaselli: I like to use my directorial tricks. We are moving from realm to realm... each portal takes you to the next. It's cinematic. I see a warped maze... a kaleidoscope of colors and shapes... **Out-of-Body Experience** is essentially a soundtrack... a sometimes hallucinogenic trip through space and beyond. It's nothing if not music to write to and... create. It came from the deep pit of my psyche. I really want the viewer... or listener, I should say to have no idea what is coming next. Just like with my horror films... It's really about peeling back layers of pain and guilt buried in the unconscious mind.

Mark R. Hasan: The voice of the infamous [Reverend Jim Jones](#) appears in "The Evil." Jones had his own eerie energy, a sort of manic energy that ensnared some but certainly made others stop and take notice. Is there a slight fascination with his aura, if not as a historical footnote, then a larger than life figure?

Dante Tomaselli: I have a strong fascination with Jim Jones. I was only 9 in 1979 and I'll never forget watching the details of the [Jonestown Tragedy](#) unfold on the news on TV, seeing all those dead bodies... He's a repulsive yet magnetic figure who displayed hypnotic powers... Jones understood the powers of suggestion and I sense he tapped into something supernatural... just like one of the preachers in my independent horror movies. Evil cloaked in religion. For the song, 'The Evil,' I was channeling the mass murderer and the tragedy in the remote jungle of Guyana.

Mark R. Hasan: You've designed many soundscapes and textures that almost breathe – Is there a process you use to find, shape, and build these elements which are integral but never dominant parts of a piece, especially in OOBÉ?

Dante Tomaselli: I'm a sound hunter as much as a sound sculptor, I'm always on the hunt for any kind of interesting environment to sample... Outer space or the fiery pits of hell... It can be just simple everyday sound effects or some otherworldly synth tones or even a religious sermon, any kind of audio paint at all... vintage or brand new... I have no prejudice, it can come from anywhere. For sure, any sound that I incorporate will be transformed...in my blender... The shaping of the sounds... Sometimes I feel like I'm cutting... I visualize that I have splicers and I'm cutting the footage just like Super 16 mm film. To me, these are bits and pieces of images, scenes... footage... I feel like I'm making a movie, even though it's an album.

It's always experimental – the act of building cues... you never know what a certain combination might produce... there are infinite possibilities and I keep an open mind. I really took my time with **Out-of-Body Experience**. It took a full year to create, just me alone in my home studio and then another four months mastering the album with my sound engineer, Don Olson. I like to stack many layers on top of each other. You might think you're hearing just one sound or one instrument in one moment, but really there are somewhere from 30 to 60 tracks going at once. These ingredients combine and react, bounce off each other.

Mark R. Hasan: I've cited before the sharpness and clarity of your sound design, edits, and processing. It's a unique characteristic that embraces the cleanliness of digital rather than analogue grunge and distortion. How do you ensure your digital world is never sterile, because your sounds, such as the electrical feedback that launches "Ghosts," have character?

Some of it might be attributed to the fact that I have something called sound-color synesthesia. Anesthesia is the dulling of the senses...[Synesthesia](#) is the joining of the senses. It's neurological. I see certain sounds. Pristine, crispy sounds. Like if it's raining outside, I'll see little fiber optic dots, floating specks of colored light.

With my music and films, I want everyone to *taste color* and *touch sound*. I also really love to play with depth of field of sound. Like on the track, "The Dark," there's this glacial snake-like riff that rattles along throughout the whole song and it would seem that I should pump up the volume on that shape but it drifts...it recedes... it's very soft, even though it's the heart of the song. *I did this so other tactile effects pop and pierce 3-D-like*. It's a balancing act, though and I fail over and over and over until I get to something decent.

Mark R. Hasan: At what stage in the process – editing or mixing – do you sense an album is near completion, and was OOBÉ's finishing different from prior works?

<**Dante Tomaselli:** Even while mastering, during that final stage I'm obsessively trying to fix what's perceived as wrong and I go back to a song over and over. I'm never satisfied. Eventually, if it's moving in the right direction, the problems lessen and I can begin to realize



that a piece might actually work. Usually the problems don't improve and I end up scratching it all together. I'm used to it. The titling of tracks was completely different for some reason with this new album. On all my other projects, I would think of a title, like let's say, The Hearse...and then I would color it in, score it. But with Out-of-Body Experience I gave the songs names *after* they were created.

Mark R. Hasan: And lastly, can you describe the process that led to discovering the artist who created the fantastic art for the album, and was there a deliberate choice in evoking the surreal, hand-crafted sketches and paintings of 1950s and 1960s novels and anthologies?

Dante Tomaselli: I was originally supposed to work with this one artist, a painter who shall remain nameless, I think he was going through a bad time with health issues but I paid him a couple of hundred as sort of a down payment and kept asking him to send me a sketch but months passed and he would reply back with every excuse not to show me anything, so eventually I had to let him go. I never received one sketch from this artist and never asked back for my deposit.

I thought long and hard before I came to the conclusion as to how the **Out-of-Body Experience** cover should appear. I wanted to conjure the sensation of having your life flash before your eyes... in the form of an Out-of-Body Experience. Then out-of-the-blue I received an email on social media from **Simon Pritchard**, who was offering his services to me as a painter. I needed a painter at that very moment... I looked at his work and was thrilled. Apparently he and I shared the old school painting aesthetic and we both dislike modern, thin computer generated images. His work has that 50's, 60's, 70's aura that I live in.

He was totally professional and sent me sketches on time and created the whole painting in about two and a half weeks. For the album, I gave Simon a very detailed scene description and he translated it perfectly. I was tickled... He's a spectacular talent and I'm glad we found each other. My painters are like my cinematographers and Simon and I share a special bond. I always plan for the listener of each of my albums to be able to stare at the cover art and transport into that specific realm...outer space...the ocean...a haunted house...a graveyard....



Out-of-Body Experience is an especially crisp recording that delivers a wide range of sonics without the need to add any extra bass or midrange. My preferred test is listening to

an album – digital, CD, and vinyl – via a Marantz tube amp, and for OOBÉ there's no need to fiddle with knobs, because the range of frequencies, especially very low bass and drones, are so precise.

Out-of-Body Experience is available on CD via [Amazon on Demand](#), and digitally from Amazon, iTunes, and [Spotify](#).

Also available at [KQEK.com](#) are prior interviews with Dante Tomaselli concerning the recent Blu-ray release of his feature film debut **Desecration** (1999), [prior albums](#), and [filmic influences](#).

A teaser video for the written Q&A is available on my [Vimeo](#) and [YouTube](#) channels, with [a making-of blog at Big Head Amusements](#) featuring gear stills and other rententia.

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