

Nightmare Sounds

Dante Tomaselli has gained notoriety over the past 15 years as an auteur of cult cinema, with filmic efforts including *Desecration*, *Horror*, *Satan's Playground* and *Torture Chamber*. Recently, however, Tomaselli has also been busy with a second career as a composer of nightmareish music, approaching his audio adventures in almost the exact same way he scores his own movies.

"The processes are very similar," explains Tomaselli. "I preview each sound separately; it starts there, and then I mix—in my imagination first, and then with my equipment. I'm a sound hunter; I'm always searching, and I crave all kinds of sounds. They can come from anywhere. Once I have a palette that suits the project, I'm ready to 'paint.' One difference is that on all my films, I've worked with editors and keyboardists. On these albums, it's me alone at the keyboard. Once I'm finished, the mixes are mastered by Don Olson, who was my piano teacher."

The first of Tomaselli's CDs (all issued by Elite Entertainment) was *Scream in the Dark*, an album of Halloween music styled for scary parties and haunted attractions. Its follow-up was *The Doll*, the soundtrack for his yet-to-be-produced film of the same name, which he describes as "a haunted-house shocker that deals with a violent haunting at a family-owned wax museum in Salem, Massachusetts." As Tomaselli reveals, creating the score prior to the feature itself is common practice for him. "I've done that on every film; this is just the first time I've released it," he notes. "They're like demos that help me explore the movie, to try and go completely inside of it. I like to start with the sound first, which I know seems strange. I prefer to say it's experimental. I like the element of surprise. While creating these preliminary soundtracks, I'm discovering the film's essence, its emotional core."

Tomaselli doesn't just create his music; he lives and breathes it, and his creations are an extension of himself. That's especially evident on his latest album, the appropriately titled *Nightmare*. The CD is rife with scary sounds and jump-inducing tones that keep the listener in a constant state of unease, and Tomaselli considers this to be the darkest of his sonic trio. That's immediately apparent upon looking at the cover, which depicts a Grim Reaper rowing through a sea of blood.

"That artwork sets the tone immediately," Tomaselli says. "This album definitely took longer than the others to create, and was a more difficult, varied production. Although it's shorter in length than the other two at 49 minutes, it's a larger file. I was fixated on *Nightmare*. I couldn't focus on much else; I was a slave to its birth."

Its production, he recalls, was a bit of a nightmare itself. "During its creation, my

sound-editing software kept breaking down," he recalls. "I would compose and mix these elaborate, time-consuming concoctions, and then the computer would just freeze. Everything would disappear. I would then have to start all over, and somehow remember what I had done. I was enraged. This happened over and over from start to finish, like there was a real ghost in the machine. For a while, I wasn't sure if there was any end in sight. Many times I was yelling at the computer screen, pulling my hair out. I thought about how Margot Kidder went unhinged after losing pages of her writing, and could relate."

Nightmare came to be as a result of a painful mishap; like much of Tomaselli's work, it was as if the music was trapped in his mind and begging to escape. "One night, I jolted out of bed, gasping for breath, and collided with a sharp wooden crate," he says. "After that, I remember just shuffling into my studio, turning on the computer and sound-editing software and sculpting these worlds as my back was bleeding, throbbing with pain. I should have gone to the hospital and gotten stitches. I created the bulk of *Nightmare* that way. I couldn't sleep."

This kind of insomnia isn't new to Tomaselli, he admits. "When I was in college, I didn't sleep for a full week and experienced daytime hallucinations. I have a history of sleepwalking, and one time woke up in a Korean deli in New York City. This was very similar. During the making of *Nightmare*, I believed I had a fungus growing around my eyes, and felt like I was invaded by parasites. I could imagine them devouring me, and hear them twitching. Out of desperation, I purchased something called Black Walnut & Wormwood Combination Extract and ingested this vile-tasting potion three times a day. And one night, I had a dream where I swallowed lake water; then I designed the track called 'The Lake.' The album took about five months to complete."

—Tyler Doupe

