

The Terror of Tomaselli

By CHRIS ALEXANDER

For nearly two decades, New Jersey-born horror multihyphenate Dante Tomaselli has been steadily creating a series of surreal, expressionist horror films that favor bizarre imagery and all-encompassing sound designs over traditional narrative structure and logic. That's what makes them so special: pictures like *HORROR*, *DESECRATION* and *TORTURE CHAMBER*. And when Tomaselli isn't making movies, he's releasing movies-for-your-mind with his unique conceptual aural-horror CDs like *THE DOLL*, *WITCHES*, *NIGHTMARE* and *OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE*. *DELIRIUM* caught up with Tomaselli (who, incidentally, is the cousin of *ALICE*, *SWEET ALICE* director Alfred Sole) to find out what makes him tick.

DELIRIUM: What was your first creative passion, sound or image?

DANTE TOMASELLI: I think it really started around 1974, when I was 4—with me playing the family's electronic organ in the dining room. I'd sit on the floor, in a trance, and press different low and high notes, creating a gloomy, ominous mood. All the while, there was this chalkboard right above the organ, and I'd instinctually draw haunted houses on rolling hills with graves, ghosts, flying bats and lightning storms. My passion for both picture



and sound has always been completely equal. I can't imagine not scoring one of my films. Impossible.

While drawing haunted-house landscapes, I was probably unconsciously influenced by the classic Halloween soundscapes album *SOUNDS TO MAKE YOU SHIVER*, which I listened to endlessly. Of course, my mother bought me that LP. Mom knew I loved mysterious sounds and imagery and nurtured this love. My childhood room was decorated like a funhouse. Dad was dead-set against it and said I was bringing the house bad luck. I remember sitting at the electronic organ for hours on end, swirling in a whirlpool of images and sounds. Time would just melt away.

DELIRIUM: Your films are indeed very sensual, and as you say, the music is key. Do you ever build a film out of the music you make?

TOMASELLI: On every one of my films, it doesn't matter if I change cinematographers; *DESECRATION* and *HORROR* had totally different DPs. There's just a certain look. I always strive for each film to be beautiful, tactile and painterly. And for sure, sometimes the macabre music leads the way. If I fall in love with a particular soundscape I've created, you can bet that it will be featured somewhere in the film. There's no doubt, I do prefer the atmosphere to dominate. It's a little experimental and I've made my mistakes, but I even go so far as to score the bulk of my movies before they're even shot. It seems strange, but it allows me to set the tone

from the outset. The hallucinogenic soundscapes live in my head nonstop while shooting. I don't even need to listen; they're so embedded in my psyche. Ultimately, not everything matches up with the actual footage and I end up rejecting a lot of cues and effects, but when everything clicks, it's magic!

DELIRIUM: Which one of your movies do you think most successfully marries the elements of what you hear and see?

TOMASELLI: *TORTURE CHAMBER*. I spent a full year sculpting the soundtrack to that one. I tried to give it a black mass feel, like something vicious, toxic and satanic is looming.

DELIRIUM: Are any of your concept CDs planned or designed to become features?

TOMASELLI: With my music, I do aim to create pictures, to produce images in the listener's mind, but I never want to dictate the music's visuals. Probably the best way to absorb *OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCE* is resting in a reclining chair on a balcony, gazing at the sky.

DELIRIUM: What are you working on now? What albums or films are on the horizon, and what's the status of your long-in-development *ALICE*, *SWEET ALICE* remake?

TOMASELLI: Since Cinedigm released *TORTURE CHAMBER* back in 2014, I've been composing music in my home recording studio. *Musique concrete*. Without a doubt, I'm ready to conjure a new feature with Michael Gingold as co-writer, called *DAMNATION*—previously titled *THE DOLL*. We've been sculpting the screenplay for a while and it has gone through many changes. My intentions? This is a pure horror movie devoted to scaring an audience. It's a supernatural shocker concerning a family in deep psychic pain, bathed in guilt and sin. *DAMNATION* depicts a violent haunting at a family-owned wax museum in Salem. I should be making an announcement on the production soon. *ALICE*, *SWEET ALICE*, also co-written by Michael, is waiting. I have the rights to direct the remake of my cousin's '70s Catholic slasher, and I'm confident that will happen when everything is aligned.

Find out more about the films and music of Dante Tomaselli by visiting his official site at Enterthetorturechamber.com.

