

# THE AUDIO VISUAL HORROR OF DANTE TOMASELLI

Since bursting onto the scene in 1999 with his first feature film effort, *Desecration* (which is now available on Blu-ray via Code Red and Kino Lorber) audiences and critics alike could tell that Dante Tomaselli was a visionary auteur with many more stories to tell. Since *Desecration*, he has helmed three additional feature films and released a grand total of five electronic albums (the fourth of which was nominated for 'Album of the Year' by Rue Morgue in 2017). Tomaselli's latest auditory outing, *Out of Body Experience* saw release over the summer of 2019 and was met with favorable responses across the board.

In spite of an already impressive catalogue of feature films and albums, it seems as though Tomaselli is just getting started: The director is currently working on two new films, the first of which is a remake of his cousin Alfred Sole's *Communion* (Alice, Sweet Alice). And his second project, an effort previously known as *The Doll*, has been retitled *Damnation*.

We recently had the pleasure of sitting down with the director and musician to discuss some of his influences, the thematic elements in his work, and the daunting task of remaking a bona fide cult classic like *Communion*.

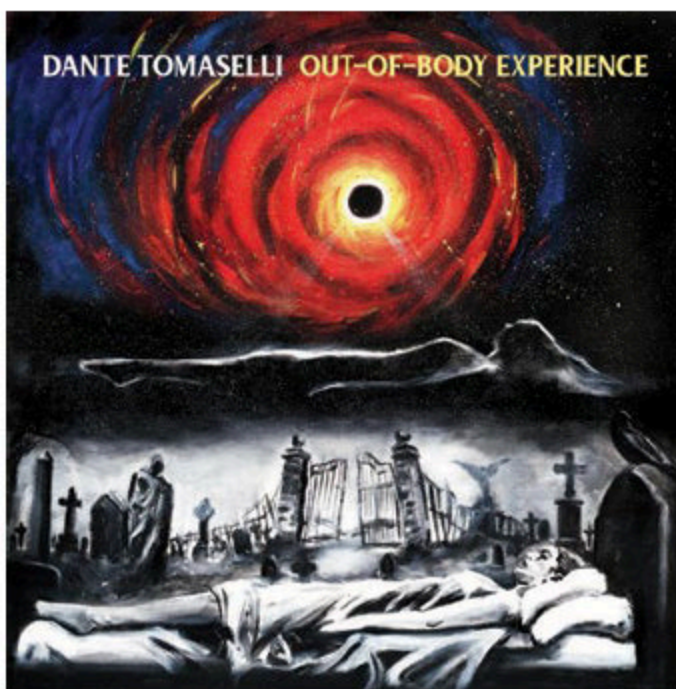
**SCREAM:** One of the recurring themes in both your films and music is a distinctly surreal quality. The viewer (or listener) is taken on a journey that straddles the real world and dream world, often blurring the lines between the two. Can you talk a little bit about your creative process and how you go about bringing your art to life?

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** I like for my films and music to exist at the hazy intersection between life and death. When I was growing up, I had chronic insomnia and my nightmares were so real, so convincing...that there were many times when I wasn't sure if what was happening was a dream or reality. Now as an adult, with these films and soundscapes...I'm trying to replicate those sensations of paranoia...The confusion of being alive...The feeling of being trapped in childhood.



**SCREAM:** A lot of your work seems to share certain aesthetic elements with the Italian horror films of the '70s and early '80s. Is the output of that era particularly influential to you?

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** Believe it or not, I'm not influenced by Italian horror films. I didn't even see Argento's *Suspria* until I was in my twenties. I grew up on John Carpenter, David Cronenberg, Nicolas Roeg, Tobe Hooper, Brian DePalma, George Romero, Pete Walker, Alfred



Hitchcock, Roger Corman, Stanley Kubrick. At this point in my life I can say I'm a huge fan of Italian horror and Giallo films but I did not grow up on those - so I can't really say that I'm influenced by them. In 1999 when I made my first feature, *Desecration* a lot of critics stated with confidence that I must have studied Italian horror. I think maybe I share that kind of sensibility...of an Italian horror filmmaker...because I have Italian blood flowing through me...just like my cousin, Alfred Sole who directed *Communion* in 1976.

**SCREAM:** Speaking of Alfred Sole's *Communion*, that film is a beloved classic.

Words: Tyler Doupe

And you have plans to reimagine it. Has it been challenging to rewrite the screenplay in a way that pays homage to the original but still stands as its own entity?

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** It's a massive responsibility...and I don't take it lightly. Co-writer Michael Gingold and I finished sculpting the screenplay and feel it's finally in place. It's just a matter of the proper financing now.

**SCREAM:** Will your cousin, Alfred Sole be involved with the remake in some capacity?

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** Alfred will be production designer on the remake so everyone can feel safe that the artist who created the original movie is in charge of the all-important sets. Plus we just always wanted to work together. I remember idolizing Alfred...I still do...being a young boy and hearing all about the filming of *Communion* in Paterson, New Jersey, my birthplace. It caused a sensation. My father, who owned a jewelry store and bridal shop, provided the communion dresses, veils, and white gloves for the film. This was a real family affair. So many of my relatives were extras, like my Great Aunt Matilda from Italy...Rest in Peace. Matilda lived in Paterson and Alfred told me recently...he revealed that Mrs. Tredoni was based on her. It's wild because the grandmother character of my first film, *Desecration* was inspired by her too. Matilda came to all the family outings and was deeply religious and mysterious. She had a hunchback and could often be seen clutching her rosary beads and muttering prayers. I know she was the church's assistant in Paterson and her whole world revolved around the church. Matilda was a gentle person and Alfred thought about how frightening it would be for someone like her to snap. I was too young to attend the premiere of *Communion* but my parents told me all about it. I was petrified by the cover of the tie-in book, the image of a white veiled Catholic girl wearing a translucent doll-like mask...brandishing a bloody knife. The book lived in my parents' room and I would take it out sometimes and chill myself. I

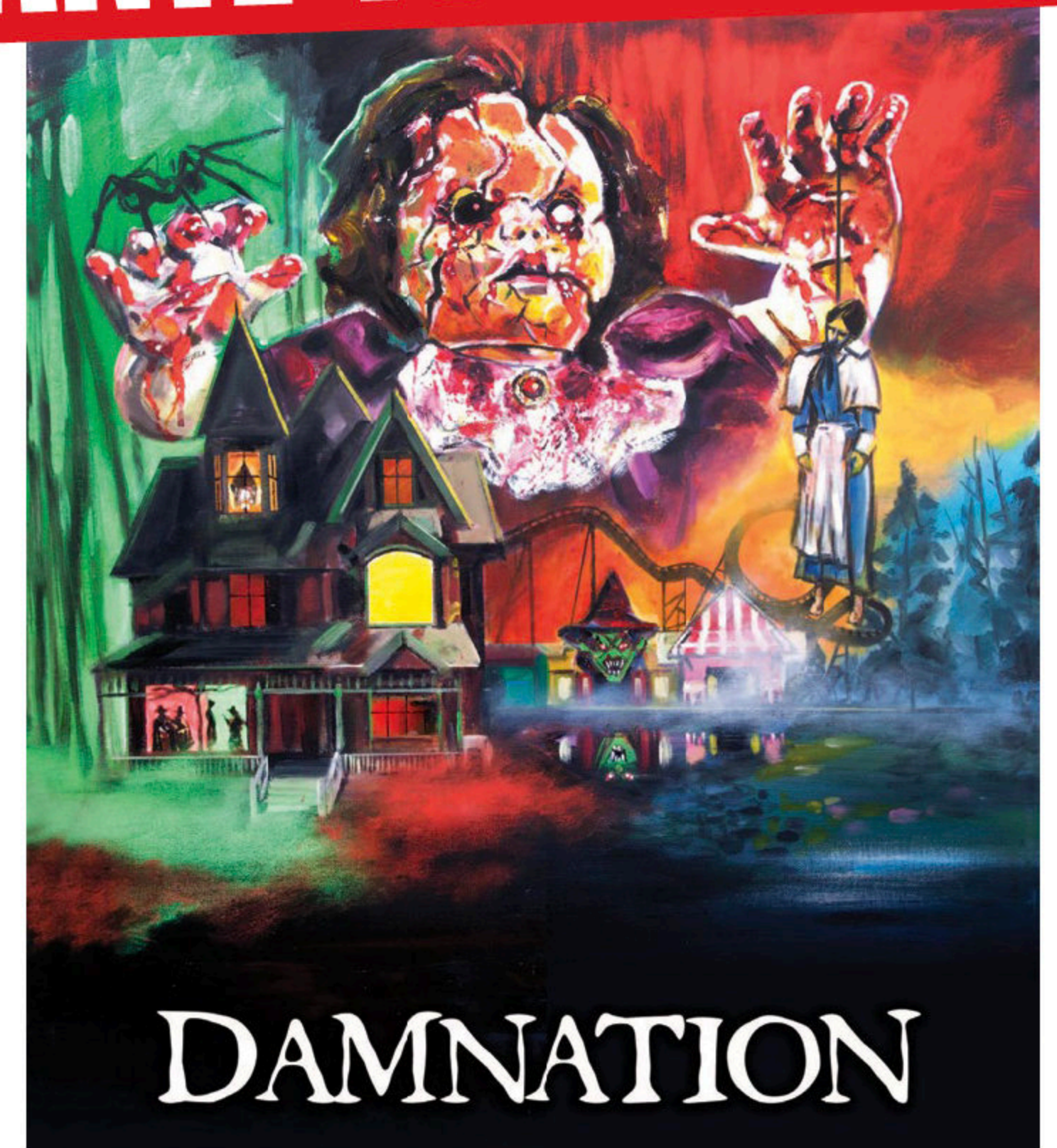
talk about this in an 11-minute interview on the Arrow Video Blu-ray release of the restored Alice, Sweet Alice print, which looks absolutely gorgeous. Michael Gingold interviewed me and I helped with some of the extras by providing the original screenplay and some rare stills. I'm thrilled with this surge of love for the film and so proud of my cousin. I've sort of been a magnet for all things *Communion* over the years because of my longtime connection. I get asked on an almost daily basis about the status of the upcoming remake.

**SCREAM:** Another film that your fans have been looking forward to is *Damnation* (previously known as *The Doll*). What can they expect from that feature and how has the concept evolved in the time the project has been incubating?

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** *Damnation* will be my fifth feature film. I knew from the outset that I wanted to create a pure horror film - devoted to frightening an audience. It concerns a violent haunting at a family owned wax museum. Michael Gingold is co-writer and he brings so much to the table in terms of characterization, dialogue and pacing. With this script, I finally have flesh and blood characters you can really root for. There's a vulnerable family in deep psychic pain. An evil force is preying on 17-year-old Gale who lives with her mother and little sister in an historic wax museum in Salem, Massachusetts. Gale is a lesbian and her conservative, religious mother does not approve. The past horrors depicted in the museum's haunting displays are finding their way into Gale's present - and their point of entry is an old, cracked porcelain doll. I should be making an announcement on the production very soon.

**SCREAM:** Like John Carpenter, you are known for working with the same onscreen talent on multiple projects. Should we expect to see any familiar faces popping up in *Alice, Sweet Alice* or *Damnation*?

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** I do tend to work with a lot of the same actors, it



creates a kaleidoscopic universe but this time should be different. For sure, *Desecration*, *Horror*, *Satan's Playground*, and *Torture Chamber* all form a straight line to *Damnation* and *Alice, Sweet Alice*. I learned some important lessons on each past film and I want to squash some familiar patterns. One big part of that was relinquishing control of the screenplay and bringing on Michael Gingold as my co-writer to assist. He definitely adds a lot of polish and depth to the new stories. My films are really about peeling back layers of pain and guilt buried in the unconscious mind. I strive for the new films to be sensitive...emotionally-charged. I like crafting scare sequences...unpredictable and disorienting scenes...so the viewer has no idea what to expect next...like a dark night of the soul.

**SCREAM:** You've previously said that your album *The Doll* was intended to serve as the score to *Damnation*. Do you still plan to utilize some or all of the tracks from that record in the film?

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** I usually compose the bulk of the main theme music and sound design before a film is even shot, which I know seems odd, but it allows me to establish a mood from the start. The new screenplay has gone through so many changes that I don't think it would match up with that preliminary score anymore.

**SCREAM:** You now have five electronic albums under your belt, all of which have been met with acclaim from fans and critics. Do you have a pulse on what your next auditory adventure will be?

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** The albums have been an outlet for the soundscapes that ooze from the dark pit of my psyche but I'm positive that whatever music I create now will be for the soundtrack of my next feature horror film.

**SCREAM:** Thank you for talking to us.

**DANTE TOMASELLI:** My pleasure.