

Music to his Fears: Daniel Schweiger, Part One

Written by Mars

Sunday, 06 February 2011 10:12



Former FANGORIA scribe Daniel Schweiger may not be a household name, but fans of the horror genre will know his work in several different media. As a music and picture editor, he cut numerous trailers for Full Moon Entertainment. He's been in a few great horror films as an actor (most notably as one-half of the comedic duo of hearse drivers in BUBBA HO-TEP), and has written liner notes for CD reissues of several classic horror soundtracks in recent years. Schweiger loves the genre, has devoted much of his professional life to it and is more than worthy of a good, old fashioned FANGORIA brain-picking...

FANGORIA: Tell us a bit about your music background.



DANIEL SCHWEIGER: While I might not have any musical training, I'm a hardcore fan who knows how music is supposed to work dramatically and how to segue between cues, which definitely abets my main job as an editor specializing in temporary soundtracks at Modern Music in Hollywood. Some of the dozens of flicks I've worked on include the temps for I AM NUMBER 4, THE HOLIDAY, STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT and THE CRAZIES.

The seminal movie and soundtrack that really started it all was Jerry Goldsmith's LOGAN RUN, which I picked up on vinyl at the time of the film's release. That movie definitely played a major part in my geek generation, as can be witnessed in a movie I have a fun little part in called FREE ENTERPRISE. Film music really lets your own imagination create, which definitely explains my love of the genre. Besides being married to the film composer Penka Kouneva, who did the score for the nifty horror flick MIDNIGHT MOVIE, I have done a couple of dozen liner notes [including PREDATORS, CLUE and LITTLE MONSTERS], and I am the soundtrack editor for AssignmentX.com and Filmmusicmag.com, where my composer podcast "On the Score" can be heard.

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FANG: You worked for Full Moon in its heyday and contributed to FANGORIA years ago. What was that like?

SCHWEIGER: I've been writing since junior high school, where I made a point of seeing if I could review a great lesbian sports drama called PERSONAL BEST in my school paper, which I did. My first published article was "Yellowjacket's Personal Problems" for a roundup of AVENGERS comics—as much psychoanalyzing of a superhero as a high-schooler was capable of—and since went on to write for Emerson and Columbia's newspapers, then magazines like *Video Times*

. But it was Fred Clarke's

Cinefantastique

that really made me want to be a writer, especially with all of the glossy horror nudie interviews inside, beyond the great writing. Ultimately, I did get to write for CFQ, TOXIC HORROR and *HorrorFan*

back in the day. I always loved the splatter photos and writing in FANGORIA, and was really thrilled when I broke in there. Tony Timpone and Michael Gingold are terrific—nice and talented editors who I'm happy to still call friends. Now the print magazine I do interviews for is a great glossy called

Venice

in LA.



As for Full Moon, I was able to get in there through a connection at a trailer-editing company in NYC. I was very lucky to go to LA with a job, and even luckier that I was one of the few people there whose checks didn't bounce. But seriously, Charles Band was a super-cool, creative guy full of geek love, and let you do whatever you wanted as long as it came in at the lowest possible cost. I did all of Full Moon's trailers and worked on most of the Videozone segments that accompanied their films. I also got to do second unit on LURKING FEAR and produce the release version of ARCADE, where I, Robert Burnett and budding filmmaker Peter Billingsley turned something unreleasable into a movie that a few people still enjoy. We had no money in the infancy of computer graphics, and despite Movieline.com labeling it a "Bad Movie We Love," I'm very proud of what we accomplished with Albert Pyun's existing footage.

Full Moon had a wonderful energy and was essentially a little studio. It's still the best creative

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time I've ever had in Hollywood, but I had to move on when finances hit bottom with the Paramount implosion. I'd been helping out on temp tracks while there and went into that career full-time at Segue and now Modern Music, where I've happily been for a while. My goal is to be happy and creative at whatever I do, and I have a fun side career doing character bits in genre films, which also include DIE-NER and the upcoming BLOODY BLOODY BIBLE CAMP and BAKER. The one thing I discovered at Full Moon was what great people the horror directors I idolized were, and am very proud to call Stuart Gordon a close friend. Stuart really gave me the idea of going into temping when I put THE LION IN WINTER over the end of PIT AND THE PENDULUM.

As for Fango, a good review I wrote of PHANTASM III led to my friendship with Don Coscarelli, for whom I music-supervised BUBBA as well. And there will be some very cool things coming from that end, including a fun cameo I did in JOHN DIES AT THE END.

FANG: What is some of your favorite genre-film music?

SCHWEIGER: Man, that's a long list. But top scores would be anything from the team of John Carpenter and Alan Howarth, John Williams' THE FURY and DRACULA, anything Christopher Young did, THE MONSTER SQUAD—which I did the liners for—Goldsmith's THE FINAL CONFLICT and Gil Melle's THE ANDROMEDA STRAIN, which I also did liners on. Martinez and Arimeyev's two SOLARISEs. The mind boggles!

FANG: Do you feel a correlation between writing music and the craft of writing about music? Above and beyond the notion that perhaps a musician should be the person commenting/critiquing on music, that is?

SCHWEIGER: Well, I'm not a composer, so I couldn't really comment on that part. I think a musician should be composing as opposed to writing about what other people do, so I'm all good on that end! But it's great when a composer passes on his knowledge to the next generation, as people like Goldsmith, Young and LAURA's David Raksin have done with their inspirational classes.

FANG: What would you say are the standout elements to a truly effective horror score?

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SCHWEIGER: Themes and melody. While horror films that are dissonant have their place, the collision of notes and nonsensical rock pads gets tiring very quickly. Just because your orchestra and synths are going apeshit doesn't mean something's scary. Unfortunately, it seems harder and harder for young filmmakers, with zero appreciation of melodic scores, to appreciate that. They equate terror with kicking a drum kit to the ground, or blowing like a maniac into brass instruments, attacking violins like a psycho with a knife. But that kind of stuff is more noise than music. I mean, look at HALLOWEEN, PHANTASM, PSYCHO and THE OMEN. Whether they were scored with synth or an orchestra, they all used a melody and still stand as some of the scariest films of all time. There's nothing to be ashamed about using a lush symphony. But that approach is beyond these gosh-darn kid directors who just want a rhythm pad or a shrieking brass section.

FANG: Something the fans will certainly appreciate is your involvement with several reissued soundtrack CDs over the years. Any favorite releases come to mind?



SCHWEIGER: THE RUNESTONE took years and years to get done, mostly because they unearthed the complete tapes, which had to go through some major restoration, and I couldn't believe it when that came out. I love that crazy movie and its score, and it was a huge deal to be one of the guiding forces to getting it out on Robin Esterhammer's Perseverance label. Some liners I've done for movies and scores that I was a huge fan of include BIG TROUBLE IN LITTLE CHINA, KNIGHTRIDERS, MARTIN and DAY OF THE DOLPHIN. But one that had a particular meaning for me was the score for 1987's NIGHTFLYERS. It's a very cool, unrecognized sci-fi film and has one of my fave synth scores of the '80s. Its composer, Doug Timm, was tragically murdered. I also did liners for Barry DeVorzon's NIGHT OF THE CREEPS, where you can really hear his influence. I'm convinced Doug had a great future ahead of him, and I kept putting the idea in Varese Sarabande chief Robert Townson's ears. I was thrilled when he finally asked me to do the notes for their Varese Sarabande club, as they put it out on LP. Finally, I'd done something for Varese, whose old LP releases were *major* influences on my love of film music.

Whenever I do liners, I do it from the direction of someone writing an article about the film itself, as opposed to talking in musicologist terms, which I couldn't begin to do. And with

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NIGHTFLYERS, I was able to interview Doug's mom and his composer friend John Beal [TERROR IN THE AISLES]. They were really touched to see the only released score of Doug's brief and impressive career finally get its due. It was a release that meant something to people's lives beyond introducing the fans to Doug's music after so many years. And that's probably made NIGHTFLYERS the most personally meaningful CD I've been involved with.

TO BE CONTINUED

{comments on}