

Terrifyingly Gnarly: Wade MacNeil of Alexisonfire

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Saturday, 29 May 2010 09:13



Horror's universal themes and ability to gnaw at at least one of everyone's fears make it an incredibly wide-reaching and affecting genre that often spills over into the interests and influences of other artists, including those not directly related to the business of the macabre. Unsurprisingly, one such avenue terror often extends into is music, and band members who may play, sing and scream by day, but revel in splatter at night.

And while there are bands that take explicit inspiration from terror flicks, writing songs about their favorite films or ghouls and other dark materials, there are just as many whose image, music and messages don't necessarily scream "genre fan." In the past, I've interviewed the likes of Jeff Moreira of Poison the Well, Keith Buckley of Every Time I Die and Geoff Rickley of Thursday, all of whom fit into the latter category—as does my latest subject, Wade MacNeil, guitarist/vocalist of the outstanding Canadian band Alexisonfire.

While sifting through live videos to get a feel of what the group's upcoming U.S. headlining set list would look like, I came across the fact that recently, Alexisonfire had been coming on stage every night to the tune of Goblin's iconic theme for Dario Argento's classic *SUSPIRIA*. Granted, you don't have to be a certified nerd to know of and appreciate *SUSPIRIA*, but highlighting its soundtrack in such a way gave me the idea that these dudes just might know what they're talking about, and happily, I was right.

"That has kind of been the new opener since we started headlining on this record, and we'd been wanting to do it for a while," MacNeil says. What's odd is that the idea didn't come from him, but rather one of the band's less genre-happy members. "It's actually kind of funny—I think myself and our singer George are the guys who are probably the most into horror, but our guitar player Dallas had gotten a 'Best of Goblin' CD and he was showing it to us. I had always liked those movies so much because of those bizarre soundtracks, and all the ways those Argento movies just... I think the reason they're so eerie is mostly because of the way they sound; it's just this way different mood from American horror movies or things like that. So he had this

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collection of all the title themes, and SUSPIRIA's is definitely one of the most epic ones." Here's a look at how they rolled to Goblin:

While definitely appreciative of Argento and his peers, MacNeil's personal preferences nonetheless lean a different way. "As much as we were talking about all that Italian stuff that's really cool and all mood and atmosphere, I like really goofy, campy stuff more than anything," he says. "Like BLOOD DINER and C.H.U.D., stuff like that—those are the movies I think I like watching the most. I guess there are those that never really get old. TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE has got to be in there; no matter how much time has passed since that movie came out, it's still the most terrifying thing in the world. I'm a really, really big fan of HOUSE OF 1000 CORPSES and, going along more with the sheer ridiculous ones, JASON TAKES MANHATTAN. That's one of the unsung FRIDAY THE 13THs—it has that head punch rolling down over the cityscape into the dumpster.

"I try and watch newer stuff," he continues, when asked about his more contemporary favorites. "Probably the most recent thing I saw was LET THE RIGHT ONE IN. That was very, very cool. I haven't really come across anything else, though. Maybe I'm not proactively seeking out new films as much as I am digging through old stuff."



Being that the band hails from Canada, it only makes sense to bring up that country's own legendary contributor to horror, David Cronenberg. Like most sane film lovers, MacNeil is definitely a fan. "A couple of years ago, George and I somehow weaseled our way into a gala event for EASTERN PROMISES," he recalls. "We got these exceptional tickets at a film festival, and all the actors were there. We didn't really know what we were getting into; we showed up wearing our dirty Converse shoes and blue jeans and were like, 'Oh my God, we could get popcorn and champagne!' Then we got in and had these unbelievable seats, and pretty much because we looked like such scumbags, the ushers kept coming up to ask if we had the right seats until the movie started. It was great; Cronenberg did a Q&A, and he's unreal."

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Alexisonfire has just ended a headlining tour of the U.S., its first in a good number of years and since the band's latest release, *OLD CROWS/YOUNG CARDINALS*, hit shelves last June. Having spoken to Macneil as it began, he told me, "It should be good; we spent most of the summer touring the States on the Warped Tour, but that's kind of a weird way to see bands. I definitely went to it a lot when I was younger, so to be involved and doing that whole thing was cool. But at the same time, any band that you see or you like at a festival like that, if you go see them play in some dive club, it's going to be 10 times better. We're excited. The tour is pretty comprehensive as far as the States goes. We get pretty much everywhere, and we're here for a while. It's been a long time."

Like each of their albums, *YOUNG CARDINALS* is a bit of a departure from their last effort—*CRISIS*, which in turn was nowhere near a retread of their second album, *WATCH OUT*. "We try to challenge ourselves every time we write something new," the guitarist explains. "You definitely run the risk of alienating the people who support your band, but every time we sit down and write, we've got to be honest with ourselves first and foremost. The bands I've always respected the most were those that tried to develop and have more eclectic record catalogs. People have stuck around and the shows have been great and have gotten bigger, and it may have been a bit of a hard pill to swallow at first for some fans, but I think the people who care the most are still around, so I'm really stoked."

One of the reasons Alexisonfire's albums have been so successful at being entirely different beasts is that the band is made up of musicians with varying tastes and influences. And it's evident, from his personal style to his side project Black Lungs, that MacNeil is probably where its more punkish aspects originate. Being that he grew up during a time when horror had an extremely punk attitude, it's not a stretch to note a linking of his tastes. "Yeah, absolutely," he agrees. "Probably the first time I heard The Cramps or stuff like that was in some old horror movie. I remember seeing *Texas ChainSaw Massacre 2* and they playing some weird stuff on the radio station, and I remember trying to track down that soundtrack, and that's how I found out about The Cramps. There's definitely a really big correlation between that stuff, so yeah, the two are kind of synonymous with one another, and I was pretty excited when I was younger and saw *RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD*. I always kind of liked being scared."

A complete rundown of Alexisonfire's tour dates is available at its [official website](#) and [MySpace page](#).

If you haven't checked out the band's music yet, I would highly, highly urge you to do so by listening to any of the tracks there, or watching the videos posted above.

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