



## metal sound

### INTERVIEW WITH NOX ARCANA

by Ivan Markovic

*Although Nox Arcana is an older keyboard-based band, I have just recently got their several records. I can compare Nox Arcana with other bands, but their sound is a way different. Each album is dealing with completely new aspect and storytelling then its predecessors. The music is based upon various topics, so one can easily notice that each full-length is a soundtrack for a different story or tale. Mainly NA is dealing with gothic and romantic themes (such as vampires, ghosts, ghouls, witches and so on) but yet there are some records that are more focused on some writers or epic-fiction fantasies.*



#### **What can you tell us about how it all started? A few words about how this project came to life?**

That's an interesting story that began back in 1997 when I had a showing of my gothic fantasy artwork in a Cleveland gallery. I had put together a soundtrack of various dark melodies to add some gothic ambiance to the art gallery. At the opening, I was approached by a local musician who was struggling to get his music noticed. After a few discussions with him, I agreed to produce a CD of gothic instrumental music. I ended up producing two Gothic CDs with him, but he returned my generosity by trying to take the credit for everything I had done and stealing from me. After that project turned sour, I started my own band, Nox Arcana, in 2003, working with a new partner, William Piotrowski. William is the son of one of my closest friends, and at the time we began working together he was only 15 years old, but he was already an impressive musician and sound engineer. We wrote and recorded our first Gothic concept album, Darklore Manor, and released it six months after forming the band. The CD received some terrific reviews and we decided to really push this new genre of music to its limits by releasing a series of dark soundtracks that explored various gothic and horror themes.

#### **Your music is often described as darkwave, gothic horror, dark ambient etc. However, since I'm an author myself (writer), I know how touchy it can be when others try to classify what you created, so, when it comes to the present Nox Arcana music, how would you label it (in terms of genre)?**

Because we have a variety of styles, it's difficult to classify the entire spectrum of our sound with one label. I think it falls between several genres, but if I had a gun to my head, I would classify it as Gothic instrumental, or dark neoclassical. Most of our music is very melody-driven, unlike most ambient music, and some of our music has a heavy edge with powerful orchestrations. We also use sound effects and narratives to help us relay our theme, in addition to having occasional guest vocalists and rock musicians.

**Nox Arcana has clearly influenced many bands and musicians, but which bands and music giants have influenced your music the most?**

I grew up listening to The Rolling Stones, Aerosmith, Black Sabbath and Kiss, then graduated to AC/DC, Judas Priest, Scorpions and Iron Maiden. These bands influenced my song writing with their high energy riffs and powerful melody lines with strong hooks. Outside of rock and metal, our major classical influences are Beethoven and Mozart, but our main influences in Nox Arcana are soundtrack composers like Jerry Goldsmith (The Omen, The 13th Warrior), Wojciech Kilar (Bram Stoker's Dracula), Danny Elfman and, of course, John Carpenter.

**One thing that I find impressive about your music is the variety of elements you incorporate into the songs. From choir singing to creaking doors, to the use of acoustic guitars and bagpipes. From where do you draw your inspiration? Which books and sources?**

I think it's extremely important to use the appropriate sound effects and instruments to create a musical story. Before we begin working on a theme, we make a long list of sounds and ideas and try to incorporate as many as we can into the CD. Some of our CDs have been inspired by the works of Gothic writers such as Bram Stoker, Edgar Allan Poe, and H.P. Lovecraft. These are some of my favorite horror writers and we pay tribute to their stories with our albums, Shadow of the Raven, Transylvania and Necronomicon. We also loosely based our Grimm Tales CD on the dark bedtime stories of The Brothers Grimm and used Ray Bradbury's story "Something Wicked This Way Comes" as inspiration for our Carnival of Lost Souls CD. All of our other CDs are based on original concepts ranging from a cursed mansion, haunted cathedral, a pirate ghost ship and a forsaken asylum. In these cases, I rely on my imagination and my love of dark mysteries for inspiration.

**So far there are eleven chapters (albums) in the Nox Arcana 'spell book'. Of these eleven, do you happen to have a personal favorite? If so, which one and why? What makes it special, in your opinion?**

We put a great deal of thought and work into every CD, so it's kind of like asking me to pick a favorite child. It really depends on what type of mood I'm in. Each CD conveys a different feeling, ranging from creepy and sinister to darkly romantic. Some of the music is very powerful, especially on Blood of the Dragon and Phantoms of the High Seas. We've written and produced over 200 pieces of music, so it would be difficult to narrow my favorites down to a single song or CD. We get a lot of fans who tell us what their favorite songs are and the list is very diverse. Some people really like the haunting piano pieces, while others say that our fully orchestrated pieces are their favorites. I love hearing this kind of feedback because it lets me know that all of our styles of music are being appreciated equally.



**Do you and William have some side projects besides Nox Arcana? If I understand correctly, one of you is working on a series of short stories? Can you tell us a bit more about that?**

I started my career as an artist, and I still do a lot of painting. A collection of my work is published in the book Born of the Night: The Gothic Fantasy Artwork of Joseph Vargo. I co-wrote The Gothic Tarot Compendium for The Gothic Tarot card deck that I created. Many of my designs and paintings are also available on posters, journals, t-shirts and other merchandise from the Monolith Graphics website. I've co-written some horror fiction, including Tales From The Dark Tower, a collection of vampire and ghost stories, and The Legend of Darklore Manor and Other Tales of Terror, an anthology of horror stories which includes the novella based on the story I wrote for the Darklore Manor CD. William is finishing up his final year of college where he is studying music and graphic design. We just finished working on Zombie Influx with a friend of ours named Jeff Hartz. The CD is a creepy soundscape that creates the mood of a zombie invasion with sound effects and cinematic music. I co-wrote the album with Jeff Hartz and William did the engineering.

**November is the date when the twelfth album is expected to come out, entitled Winter's Eve? Can you share a little bit about it? The idea behind the music? The concept?**

The concept centers around an ancient pagan spirit that lives deep in the forest who watches over the world during the winter season. Most of our music is geared toward a horror audience, but our 2005 Winter's Knight CD was our version of a winter holiday album. I had always planned on creating a trilogy of winter-themed CDs, so Winter's Eve is the second of the trio. Somewhere down the road we will eventually make one more. The melodies on the new CD are just as haunting as those of Winter's Knight, but Winter's Eve has more of a darkly romantic edge to it. Our good friend Jeff Endemann will return to the studio with us to sing the title track. Other than one Gregorian choir piece, the rest of the CD is all instrumental music, mainly piano, acoustic guitar and bells. Because of William's school schedule, I wrote and recorded the entire CD myself, but he's doing the engineering and mastering, and we've already written several tracks for our next CD together.

**Since this is a metal webzine, would you mind sharing with our readers some of your favorite metal bands (in case you listen to metal)? Does any particular type of metal appeal to you more than the other types?**

I love old AC/DC, but I think they lost most of their metal edge after Back In Black. As I mentioned before, Judas Priest, Scorpions and Iron Maiden are some of my favorite bands. I love melodic metal with a great singer like Klaus Meine or Rob Halford, but there are some bands that have growling vocals like Rammstein and Disturbed that I really like. We are also friends with Legion of the Damned and we contributed some intro tracks to their last CD, Cult of the Dead. They make some great headbanging music. As far as operatic metal, I really like the diversity of Therion. Unfortunately, heavy metal music isn't as popular in America as it is in Europe, not like it was in the 80s and 90s. The radio stations in the U.S. play the same garbage over and over, so I don't get to hear many new bands that appeal to me. It really is a shame because I know there are a lot of really good new bands out there making some great new metal.

**Have you any interest of composing music for motion pictures? Are there such aspirations among the members of Nox Arcana? Have there been offers so far?**

I originally wanted to score films, but the majority of soundtrack music isn't very melodic or interesting. Most directors don't want the music to distract the audience from the story. They don't seem to realize how a great soundtrack can make people enjoy the film even more. If I did work on a film score, it would have to be for something that I really felt strongly about, or something I had written or directed myself. It would be great to be able to write, direct and score a horror movie like John Carpenter did with the original Halloween film. We've been contacted by several major film studios to use our music. We aren't actively seeking for licensing, so when they do approach us about a project it's very flattering. In a few cases the films were not very good, so we declined. In one case the particular film just never got released, so I don't even know what they used or didn't use. And then there's always the filmmakers who want to use the music but don't even want to give proper credit. That's just not cool.

**Who is responsible for the artwork gracing the covers of your albums?**

I create all the artwork for our CDs. I really like to create an image that will capture the theme of our CD in an intriguing way. All of our CDs have elaborate packaging with artwork and stories throughout the interior booklet. There are also a lot of hidden messages and symbolism in the CDs and on our website. Most of our CDs contain puzzles and riddles that lead our fans on quests to decode them.

**Since Nox Arcana is a well-established band in the field of dark ambient, are there any new promising U.S. bands you'd like to recommend to those fond of such music?**

A musician/producer named Charlie Clouser has been creating some impressive music. In addition to working with various metal bands like Rob Zombie and Rammstein, he created a lot of great sounding film scores for movies like Saw and Dead Silence. The bands Dark Sanctuary and Arcana are also very good. There's an Australian band called Electric Mary that has a terrific debut CD of old-school hard rock.

**Have you any grand plans for the future, when Nox Arcana is concerned? Some ideas that have yet to be implemented?**

We have plans for our next four concept albums. Our music is used by several professional magicians, so our next CD will center around the dark realms of magic and illusion with a sinister twist. After that we will be working on another fantasy-themed CD, and we are discussing the possibility of adding a track or two with electric guitars, similar to the hidden track on our Carnival of Lost Souls CD. I would love to create a gothic computer game based on one of our album storylines, utilizing my music and artwork.

**In the end, all I can say is – we're looking forward to your new album! Cheers and the best of luck to you!**

Thank you Ivan. Darkest wishes. Long live metal! -- Joseph

Official websites: Nox Arcana: <http://www.noxarcana.com> Monolith Graphics: <http://www.monolithgraphics.com> Joseph Vargo: <http://www.josephvargo.com>