

# Parallel Perspectives

## Interview with Nox Arcana



by J.E. Farrow, May 2007 - Gnostic.com



Joseph Vargo and William Piotrowski are the partners of Nox Arcana. William was unavailable at the time of this interview, but we were fortunate Joseph could act as spokesman for the group.

**JEF:** Am I correct in saying that CARNIVAL OF SOULS falls into a musical Gothic genre? The closest I've come to listening to this type of music was a long time ago when I "was into" Metallica & Black Sabbath. Your vision seems a bit more complex. I've got some Vampire CDs on order—and more of your music, of course.



**JV:** Essentially, we create dark concept albums based on various gothic themes, or as we like to describe it "music from the shadows for creatures of the night." Our music is mainly classically based instrumental, although we do incorporate chanting choirs and spoken narratives for dramatic effect to achieve a blend of darkly haunting melodies that encompass the complete gothic spectrum the romantic, the mysterious, and the horrific. We utilize a variety of instruments such as piano, pipe organ, violin, acoustic guitar, drums and tolling bells to achieve symphonic orchestrations. Our concept has always been to create moody and melody-driven gothic soundscapes that take the listener on a musical journey through various dark realms of fantasy.



We generally stay within the domain of gothic horror with our musical themes. This is a dark and brooding nightmare



world, filled with lots of moody imagery. Gargoyles, ghosts, supernatural creatures of the night, and anything set in a haunted mansion or ancient crypt. I love the old American International horror films that Roger Corman produced. They were just dripping with gothic atmosphere.

To convey the mood of an ancient fallen cathedral on *Winter's Knight* we utilized gothic pipe organs and Gregorian chanting. We also used a lot of bells, piano and harpsichords to capture the solemn feeling of winter, and even had two medieval minstrel songs with acoustic guitar and haunting vocal harmonies. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* was the main inspiration for our *Transylvania* cd, that combined brooding horror with a romantic European flair. We basically told Dracula's story through music, then added some original elements like the ominous warnings from sentinel gargoyles and witches.

**JEF.** Another thing I liked about your CD was the inclusion of great artwork & scenario. For the exception of classics that seemed to go out with LPs. Is this a feature of all your music?

**JV.** Yes. I create all the original art for our cds and work closely with graphic designer Christine Filipak to layout the cd booklets. In this age of downloading music, I feel that the people who actually buy our physical cds should get something extra for their money. We even concealed a quest inside our last cd, *Blood of the Dragon*, and hid clues in the booklet, disc and songs. We strive to develop full-blooded concept albums that tell a story, complete with words, pictures and music.

**JEF.** I'm an HP Lovecraft fan (both the writer & the group). Do you have a list of "fav" artists in the past? or today? (Carnival reminded me of Something Wicked This Way Comes...)

**JV.** Our album *Necronomicon* was based entirely on Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos. I've read all of his works several times. He has so many great stories, but some of my favorites are *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, *The Shadow Over Innsmouth*, and *The Dunwich Horror*. I wanted to pay homage to Lovecraft's original concepts of the *Necronomicon* and the sinister mythology that it contained. It's such a wealth of ideas and dark inspiration. The cd gives a rundown of the various monstrous deities, ancient rituals and dark prophecies of the Cthulhu mythos as if someone were reading it from the *Necronomicon*. All of the text is based on Lovecraft's original ideas, ignoring the embellishments of later writers. There are narrative intros to some of the tracks that explain the specific roles of each of the Great Old Ones, as described by Lovecraft. The music ranges from mystical Arabian pieces to dark Egyptian chants to powerful gothic orchestrations.

You're absolutely right about *Carnival of Lost Souls*. The major influence was Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. The idea of a diabolical circus that rises from the shadows to tempt human desires was a tribute to his *Dark Carnival* concept. The *Circus of Dr. Lao* also inspired us, which was the basis for the old film *The Seven Faces of Dr. Lao*.

Once we had the groundwork for this concept, we set out to put our own twist on it. I love delving deep into the shadows of my own imagination. Some of the original inspirations like the gypsy fortune-teller machine, the living dolls, and the spellbound puppet show came from a Halloween party that I put together several years ago. Other concepts like the Theatre of Sorrows, the Soul Stealer and The Devil's Daggers were conceived specifically for this album. We had the cd release party for *Carnival of Lost Souls* on 6-6-06. It was a wild event that tied in nicely with the idea that this sinister carnival, The Circus Diabolique, rises from the shadows every one hundred years. Hopefully, we'll inspire someone to continue this tradition in the centuries to come.

As far as contemporary artists go, soundtrack composers like John Carpenter, Jerry Goldsmith, and Danny Elfman had a major influence on me early on. They made me appreciate dark instrumental music with their scores to *Halloween*, *The Omen*, *The 13th Warrior*, and *Edward Scissorhands*.

JEF. I want to remind readers that this interview includes both artists. How did you 2 meet?

JV. I began my career as a gothic fantasy artist, selling posters, t-shirts and calendars of my work through my own company, Monolith Graphics, and by 1997, I had established a large audience in the gothic realm. In 1998, I came up with the idea of doing a Halloween music CD that would sound like a soundtrack to a gothic horror movie. I branched out and began producing gothic soundtrack music with another band, but we parted ways after two albums. I've known William since he was very young. I'm actually very good friends with his father and I watched his musical skills develop as he got older. We formed Nox Arcana in 2003. He was very enthusiastic about the project and within a few weeks, we were in the studio working on the initial tracks for our first cd, *Darklore Manor*.

We work on all of our music together, although I'm the main composer and William is the better musician. I write the majority of the basic melodies then we work together to flesh them out to create more elaborate compositions. We mix every song together but William handles all the engineering and mastering while I develop the concepts and write the lyrics.

JEF. Would you describe your technical training? Any special mentors?

I took a few years of piano lessons when I was a kid, then developed my musical skill on my own. I sang in a lot of different rock bands in the 80s and 90s, and then later started creating my own music in my home studio. I produced my first cd in 1998 and have since expanded my studio. William plays several instruments, including piano, violin and guitar. He has also studied classical music and is currently pursuing a degree in music at Kent State University. He learned how to record and engineer music on his own and he's a great studio technician. We work very well together, but because of our age difference and my years of experience, I guess you could say I'm his mentor.

JEF. Any thoughts about the music scene in general you'd care to share?

JV. I don't listen to many of the rock bands that have come out in the past decade. There are a few good ones, but not like in the old days. On the other hand, with Internet sites like MySpace and YouTube, it's very easy for unsigned bands to get their music out to a wide audience. Sites like iTunes and Amazon really help independent artists market their music, so it's not imperative for bands to be signed to a major label anymore.

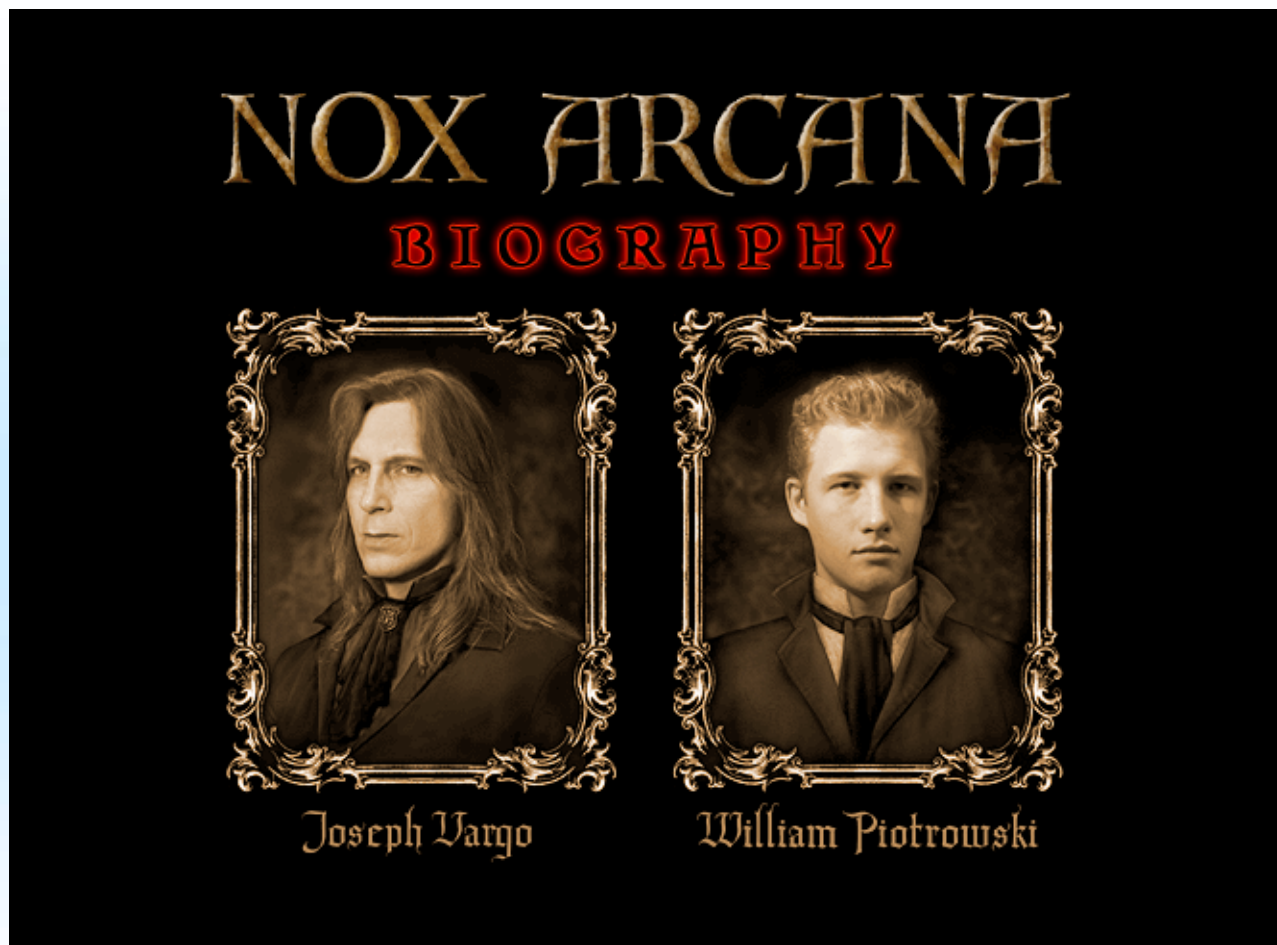
JEF Any tips/advice to kids who want to go pro?



JV. I work very hard at all aspects of my craft, but I feel very fortunate to have enjoyed the success that we've had with all our projects. I am a firm believer in the old saying that success is hard work meeting with opportunity. Many people who want to pursue careers as musicians, artists or writers think that they'll strike it rich with one big break. Inevitably they fail because they aren't determined to put all the effort into neither polishing their work, nor doing all the marketing to get their work out there. If record companies or publishers haven't ever heard or seen your work, they're not going to come knocking on your door. You have to make all the contacts yourself, or hire an agent who you can trust to do it for you. I feel that experience is the best teacher. It gives you a real sense of accomplishment to know that you created something substantial by following your dreams and doing things your own way.

JEF. Any future plans you'd like to share?

JV. We are currently working on our eighth album, *Shadow of the Raven*, which is based on the writings of Edgar Allan Poe. It's darkly romantic in a haunting and elegant way, but there are some seriously creepy pieces as well. And, of course, there'll be lots of sinister artwork to decorate the booklet.



Joseph Vargo is a music composer, published author, and internationally acclaimed artist. His visions of gothic fantasy have graced the covers of several books and cds, appeared in numerous publications including *Spectrum III*, *Carpe Noctem*, *Dark Realms*, *Bite Me*, and *Dark Visions*, and have been used for set design by broadcast companies such as NBC, Universal, 20th Century Fox, A&E and The Discovery Channel. He began his professional artistic career in 1991 and achieved worldwide status by 1993 with the release of a series of art collections entitled *Born of the Night*. After several years of success in this field, Vargo extended his talents to other venues: In 1998 and 1999 he conceptualized and produced the popular Halloween soundtracks *Born of the Night*, and *Realm of Shadows*, and to this

day his influential sound and ominous voice resonates in almost every haunted house and theme park across the country during Halloween. In the following years, Vargo created various artistic and literary projects; most notably to date is the illustrated gothic anthology *Tales from the Dark Tower* and *The Gothic Tarot*. In 2003, he returned to the music arena with his new band, Nox Arcana, to compose the haunting melodies and darkly themed orchestrations that are a trademark of his gothic realm.

William Piotrowski began his professional music career at the early age of 15 when he was hired to create the musical score for an independent video production entitled "Ghosts of Ohio," a video documentary about the original "Ghost Whisperer," now a TV series on CBS. In 2003, he joined forces with Joseph Vargo to compose and engineer the foreboding orchestrations for Nox Arcana. William plays several instruments including guitar and keyboards, and is well versed in midi and digital recording technology. William's interests in the realm of the supernatural are reflected in his dark, symphonic compositions and his expertise as a studio engineer enables him to bring Nox Arcana's artistic visions to life.

The name Nox Arcana is derived from two Latin words, which roughly translate to "mysteries of the night." It is a great interest in ancient lore, gothic literature and classic horror that unites Vargo and Piotrowski in their neverending quest into shadowy and dangerous realms.

### First Time Was The Charmer



This was my first time to explore this "spooky" genre in music, as well as the first exposure to Nox Arcana--and, my, what a darkly seductive experience it was. I'm not quite sure what I expected. Something "Gothic" for sure—but would it be art? It WAS art, art-full, deeply mesmerizing & very entertaining. AND "Carnival" is technically brilliant. One of the things I missed when CDs replaced LPs was the creativity that went into the record jackets. Most pop CDs these days offer very little for the eye—but this is not the case in *Carnival of Lost Souls*. A beautiful little booklet is enclosed loaded with wonderful drawings & other illustrations, as well as a Goth libretto of sorts & many other strange & curious & wonder-full things.

Obviously Nox Arcana knows how to make the Dark Side fun. —JEFarrow



Questions? Comments?

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