

LILIS LAIR

HORROR ENTERTAINMENT NEWS, REVIEWS AND INTERVIEWS

Welcome, my morbid little miscreants! Join me, your cryptress, Lili DesGhoules, as I dig up and dish out the devilishly delightful dirt from the dark side of the entertainment industry!

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Minions of Lili's Lair

From the Crypt

► 2016 (4)

► 2014 (6)

► 2013 (5)

► 2011 (8)

► 2010 (5)

▼ 2009 (29)

► October (9)

► September (3)

► August (7)

▼ July (10)

Interview: Christine Filipak

Interview: Joseph Vargo of Nox Arcana

12 Bells Movie Promo

Interview: ZOMBIE!

Wednesday, 29 July 2009

Interview: Joseph Vargo of Nox Arcana

To say that Nox Arcana is just another goth band, and Joseph Vargo is just another musician, is a blasphemy. Those committing this blasphemy will be sent forthwith to the guillotine.

Joseph Vargo is much more than the founder of Nox Arcana or a simple musician; not only is he a brilliant composer, he is also an internationally acclaimed gothic fantasy artist, author, producer, entrepreneur, and creator of the renowned Gothic Tarot. For complete bios for both Joseph Vargo and William Piotrowski of Nox Arcana, please visit the links at the conclusion of the interview.

For me, Nox Arcana is so much more than just simply music I enjoy sometimes. Since *discovering* them over five years ago, not a day goes by literally that during some point of the day I am not listening to one of Nox Arcana's CD's. I love the deeply haunting, melodic complexity that places you in another world. Another realm of being. Nox Arcana touches the deepest, darkest parts of my Irish-born soul, and envelopes me in the subtle bouquet of each note, each piece, on every CD. I could go on and on about each and every CD, not to mention Joseph Vargo's exquisite art, but I think I'll save that for another time. For now I will simply say I am grateful for such talent and that it is shared with the rest of us.

It is in this feeling of gratitude and personal delight that I offer up to you this interview with Joseph Vargo of Nox Arcana.



Lili's Lair: Was Nox Arcana once known as Midnight Syndicate? And if so why did you come to the decision to change your name?

Joseph Vargo: No. That was another band that I produced between 1998 and 2000. I was working with two other guys at the time and the creative atmosphere was very stifling, so I left the project to pursue my own artistic visions. In 2003 I formed Nox Arcana so that I could explore all the various aspects that I had conceived for a series of dark concept albums. With Nox Arcana, there are no musical or creative restrictions and we have produced eleven diverse CDs in just over five years.



Lili's Lair: You are a multi-talented individual. You create beautifully haunting music, you are a gifted artist, and you write quite well. Which of these gifts manifested themselves first?

Joseph Vargo: Thank you. I was constantly drawing at a very young age, and even then I loved to draw monsters. My mother always encouraged my artwork, while my father encouraged me to read. They were very supportive of art and literature. When I was eight years old, my parents bought a piano and my older sister and I took piano lessons from a retired music teacher in our neighborhood. Art and music were always part of my life. I didn't start writing until I was a teenager, and I didn't write anything serious until several years later.

Lili's Lair: Which of your talents do you enjoy the most?

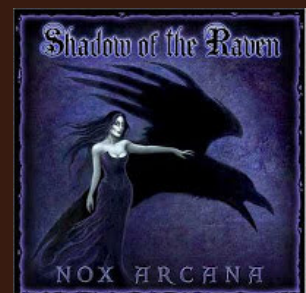
Joseph Vargo: I get a great amount of satisfaction from each of my artistic pursuits, and though I don't have a favorite medium, they each have their own rewards. Art gives instantaneous feedback. People look at a painting, and within a few seconds they begin to tell you what they like about it. It's interesting to watch people view my paintings in a gallery. Some people gravitate toward specific pieces of art. Many people have told me that they were drawn to certain paintings from across the room. I love to hear them describe how their favorite works make them feel.

Music inspires a mood that you can revisit again and again. It stirs deep emotions and memories and is often very inspirational. Of all my artistic labors, I enjoy writing music the most.

Writing fiction allows me to describe my visions in much more detail than a painting allows. But no matter how descriptive a story is, it still leaves the reader to use his imagination to visualize exactly how everything looks and sounds.

Lili's Lair: Have you always known that music and/or art would be the path you were going to take? Or did you want to be something else "when you grew up" ?

Joseph Vargo: I always wanted to be an artist. I took advanced art classes in high school and attended the Cleveland Institute of Art when I graduated. But there was a period of almost 10 years that I worked at several different jobs that were completely unrelated to the art field. I almost gave up on my dream, but I never stopped drawing and painting. I did numerous freelance art gigs in



my spare time until I decided to start my own business. Once I had established myself as an artist, I returned to creating music.

Lili's Lair: From concept to completion, how long does it generally take to create one of your CDs?

Joseph Vargo: It takes an average of about four months to conceptualize and produce one of our CDs. I put in a solid forty-hour work week in the studio while I'm working on a CD. Aside from the composing, recording and mixing, I also have to put in an extra two to three weeks worth of work creating the artwork for the cd cover and booklet design. And then there's the puzzles hidden in our CDs, which take quite a bit of time to develop as well.

Lili's Lair: When coming up with the concept of a CD, which part comes to you first? Is it the music or the art?

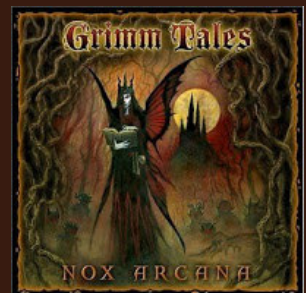
Joseph Vargo: Once a specific theme has been chosen, the music and the story develop together. The art is usually the last thing I tackle because the concept may change from the initial idea. The only exceptions to this were two of our earliest CDs, Darklore Manor and Winter's Knight. The cover artwork for both of these CDs was created years earlier, but the interior booklet art was created after the CDs were finished. I make a lot of notes and sketches while I'm in the studio, but I like to immerse myself in my work, so I try to keep my focus on the music and concept before I switch gears to "artist mode."

Lili's Lair: Many people who are musicians, writers, and artists have described an almost ethereal presence come upon them when the muse strikes. How would you describe your personal experiences when your muse strikes?

Joseph Vargo: It just feels right. I don't have a spiritual epiphany, but I do follow my intuition. Sometimes the muse strikes and I have to write down whatever idea or melody is in my head before I forget it. Other times I sit down in front of a piano or blank canvas and start creating with a basic idea or mood in mind and the magic just happens. I don't ever feel any ethereal presence, I just keep working till things begin to click. Once I see the potential in a painting or song, it's fun to flesh-out the finished product.

Lili's Lair: As a creative partnership, do you ever find working together difficult? If so, how do you sort that out?

Joseph Vargo: We have had a few disagreements over the years, but we've always managed to discuss the problem and come to an amicable settlement. I think it's a good thing to have differences of opinions on some things. It allows the best ideas to rise to the top. It would be redundant and unnecessary to have two members of a creative team that had the exact same ideas about things.



Lili's Lair: Who comes up with the concepts for your projects, or is it a collaborative effort?

Joseph Vargo: I conceive the themes and develop the stories for all of our cds. Some of them have been based on the works of my favorite gothic authors like Edgar Allan Poe, Bram Stoker and H.P. Lovecraft. Others were original concepts that I concocted on my own. I have so many other ideas in my head that I'd like to develop as well.

Lili's Lair: Where does your inspiration come from when creating your music and art?

Joseph Vargo: Mostly from my own imagination. Once I get an idea for a concept, I just begin to visualize the history and details of the surrounding story. For example, for Winter's Knight, I wanted to do a holiday album, that was darker than the traditional Christmas albums. With this basic idea in mind, I began to come up with ideas for a ghostly spirit that appeared in the ruins of an ancient cathedral each year on the eve of the winter solstice to tell a tale of redemption to those who would listen. The story links the music together and the song titles help to guide the listener through a crystal forest to the haunted village of Ebonshire where magical things can happen. Once I get rolling with a particular concept, the ideas flow like a waterfall.

Lili's Lair: Do you find the saying "art imitates life" to hold true? Or do you think life imitates art?

Joseph Vargo: I think that's true with some art and fiction, however our concept albums are based on fantasy themes chosen and specifically crafted to conjure certain moods and emotions, so the majority of ideas are solely inspired by imagination, while others pay homage to classic tales of fiction. None of our themes are set in the present day, and I try not to base things on personal experiences. I also really want our concepts to be completely original, or to put an original spin on an familiar theme.

Lili's Lair: Your music is very intense, very full of emotion. Do you feel that your personalities reflect this type of intensity as well? If they do, how so?

Joseph Vargo: Definitely. I strive to make my music a reflection of who I am. I like to listen to music that is powerful and dynamic, but I also have my quieter moods when I listen to music that is more melodic and haunting. I really am a romantic at heart, but I am also someone who enjoys action, danger, mystery and fantasy. My work really does mirror my own diverse personality traits.

Lili's Lair: If Nox Arcana could rewrite a musical score for any movie that has ever been made, what movie would it be, and why?

Joseph Vargo: That's a tough question. The first film that springs to mind is Francis Ford Coppola's masterpiece Bram Stoker's Dracula. It has all the elements we love to convey with our music— mystery, romance, suspense, action and horror. The only problem is that the film already has a fantastic musical score, so I wouldn't want to mess with it. It would have to be a film that I really liked that had a weak score. Maybe one of the versions of the film Nosferatu. I think the original silent film would be cool to score, but the film itself is very choppy and disjointed, so I guess I would pick the 1979 version starring Klaus Kinski and Isabelle Adjani. I'd love to create a main musical theme for it that is as memorable as the themes for Halloween and The Exorcist. Other than that, if Tales from the Dark Tower were ever made into a film, our range of musical styles would be perfect for the score.



Lili's Lair: How much time do you dedicate every week to your work? Do you divide your time evenly between music, art, and writing, or do you work on whatever appeals to you at the moment?

Joseph Vargo: I have an insane work schedule. Over the past ten years, we were so busy with our business that my partner Christine Filipak and I used to put in ten to sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. We were so involved with all the aspects of Monolith Graphics, Nox Arcana, Dark Realms Magazine, The Gothic Tarot, T-shirts, books, posters and calendars that we didn't have any time left for ourselves. Not only did we create and produce all of our products, we also distributed them worldwide. After eight years of publishing a magazine, we decided to end it so that we could have some free time for ourselves. Now I only put in six to eight hours a day. I still work on the weekends, but I try to relax a little more.

Now when I work, I can dedicate an entire day or week to one project instead of being forced to juggle several different projects at once. Even though our concept albums combine music, art and writing, I still consider it to be a singular product and I work on it all at once. A lot of artists and musicians are very driven, but they aren't very disciplined when it comes to putting in a full day of work. I know that I have to put in some long hours stick to a tight schedule to meet my deadlines, even if they are self-imposed.

Lili's Lair: Five years down the road, what would you like to see Nox Arcana doing?

Joseph Vargo: Nox Arcana is just over five years old and we already have eleven full-length cds, so another five years from now, I can easily see us having about 20 albums that cover every dark musical theme imaginable. I used to think it would be cool to score films, but I'm not really interested in doing that anymore, unless I have control over the project. I think it would be very cool to create some interactive gothic-themed computer games with my music and artwork.

Lili's Lair: *Blackthorn Asylum* is your newest project. Any hints for your fans as to what is next on your immediate agenda?

Joseph Vargo: Yes, we just released *Blackthorn Asylum*. It's a musical nightmare set in an abandoned sanitarium for the criminally insane where the doctors conducted horrible experiments on the inmates. Even though the asylum has been deserted for years, it is still haunted by the tortured souls that once resided there. The music and sound effects are very dark and somewhat disturbing and the CD and website hold a puzzle and mystery for fans to investigate.



Now that *Blackthorn Asylum* is done, I've begun working with a good friend of mine, Jeff Hartz, on his first CD, *Zombie Influx*. His style is very different from our music. It's more of a mixture of unsettling ambient soundscapes and industrial techno music, all centered around a zombie infestation. I've written a few tracks for him and will be producing the CD with him as well. Because these latest cds themes are very horror-oriented, the next Nox Arcana CD will be more darkly romantic and mysterious.

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Quench Your Dark Desires...

<http://www.monolithgraphics.com>

<http://www.noxarcana.com>

<http://www.josephvargo.com>

3 comments:



Terrormaster 29 July 2009 at 13:59

Pardon my language but that was bloody friggin brilliant. I've read a lot of interviews with Vargo but that was by far the best - you asked some damn good questions which I'm surprised no one else has asked him. And his answers were spot on.

Loved the comment about him wanting to maybe do a dark computer game. Now that's something I'd love to partner up with them on if I can ever get a team together.

Reply



Lili Des Ghoules 31 July 2009 at 11:31

@Terrormaster. Thank you for the compliment. It was easy to write the questions, because I love their music.. So, I just asked what I thought other people who liked their music wanted to know without being redundant. You get going on that game. Just make sure I get to do the writing. :)

Reply

Anonymous 16 October 2009 at 23:19

Great interview...I can't wait to get the Zombie influx cd

Reply

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