

INTERVIEW TO DEAD WHEN I FOUND HER

Michael Arthur Holloway, the man behind the **Dead When I Found Her** project, is one of the more interesting musicians of the last years as far as the Canadian and USA electro-industrial is concerned, considered by loads of people as a genius of this music, that recently has realized his new album, the third, **All the way down**, released by the Canadian label **Artobject Records**. It's an album about death, but covered in a very particular way. Loads have already considered it one of the best albums of the year, so we have thought that it would have been definitely necessary to talk with him, to present him to Italy, but, in general, to present him to who doesn't know him yet.

1) Hello Mr. Holloway, first of all as a fan of your music I want to say thank you for this interview. All the way down is in my opinion your best work, where you have blended all the elements of the past in a stronger and more focused solution, harder, but at the same time more melodic, darker, but at the same time fascinating; can you elaborate about the work behind this album, what happened during these years, how (if even) your modus operandi has changed?

I think my modus operandi hasn't changed all that much throughout the 5 years or so that I've been doing Dead When I Found Her, but with each new album I deliberately try to push myself in a few new directions and force myself into new, potentially uncomfortable territory. But the goal of also retaining the "dead when I found her sound" is just as important, as well. I started this band to create the kind of industrial music I wanted to hear, and that is still the primary goal. Fortunately, industrial music is a genre with very deep possibilities. I could write a dozen albums of industrial music and still be finding new approaches within that realm. All The Way Down is a little different in that, of the three DWIFH albums, it's the most Concept-oriented. The themes, in this case about old age, end of life care, and ultimately death, are much more at the forefront of the work, and explored more deliberately from song to song, than on past albums. That was an important new step for me.

2) The theme of the album is death, not in a fantasy, religious, gore way as it happens many times in extreme and underground music, but analyzing what the idea of death instills in our minds and hearts, something that we avoid, but at the same time know that is inevitable. Not an easy subject, how come that you have chosen it?

Yes, the whole idea behind this album was to make music about death, but to try and make it *honest* in its exploration of death. There are plenty of dark industrial, metal and goth songs about death, and as great as that can be, it never feels particularly honest, or based in any literal, every day kind of fear. So I wanted to explore the fear of dying in a more direct, uncomfortable way. Writing about old people, old age—that's territory that is typically avoided, exactly because it's so uncomfortable for people to imagine themselves being old and infirm. There is so much denial there. So it seemed the logical best place to go in confronting fears of dying, this sort of unspoken taboo territory for art: the elderly, elderly life. But it's also very personal. I thought it would be a challenge, as a musician, to attempt to put music to these fears, but that it might also be a cathartic way of confronting those

fears.

3) I would like to know about your songwriting process, how does a Dead when I found her song come to life?

They all come to life in the same place I'm answering these question— my room in my house in Portland, Oregon. I have a small home studio setup, based mostly around a lot of software, a large Novation midi controller for keys, and a few other items like guitars and my microphone. That's the literal side of it, anyway. I work in **Ableton Live**, and my approach is almost 100% "in the box," meaning that I use software instrument emulations instead of actual hardware. I usually start a song with some atmosphere-forming samples, like a drone or ambience, and start building the rhythm sections first. Ableton's drum racks are almost always the first real instrument I'm using in a song: I choose a bunch of samples from my library to begin with, start loading them into the drum rack, adding fx, tweaking, and then hammer out a rhythm on the keyboard. I love working with MIDI, composition via MIDI, editing in the piano roll, that is the core of the songwriting, and then the production comes down to very extensive use of FX in the mix. The technical stuff is exciting to me, because the better you understand the tools in your toolbox, the better it will help you to create the sounds that are in your head, the sounds that are exciting to you. So the synths, the samplers, the delay and reverb devices— I spend a lot of time learning these and perfecting my approach with them, saving templates, building patches, all of the "work," but it's a fun, very rewarding work, because it's the foundation of the songs that emerge from using those tools. So I guess you could see the process of a DWIFH song coming to life is, at it's core, a very technical process. It involves a very deep level of interaction with the digital tools. You could say it feels like a relationship with these tools. The deeper that relationship, the more I can express exactly what I want to express as a sound designer and musician.

4) I would like to ask you about your music influences: of course some of them are really on the wall, especially the Canadian/American old-school industrial of **Skinny Puppy**, **Front Line Assembly**, **Numb**, **Nine Inch Nails**, etc., and some ambient/dark elements, but I would like to know about some extra influences from other genres, if there are any.

Coil is a huge influence, both their music and the whole intellectual, spiritual ideologies that seem, in an albeit ghostly and drug-hazed way, to exist behind the band, within those two enigmatic men. They are very inspiring people to me on multiple levels, **John Balance** and **Sleazy** (RIP), and terrifying to me on other levels.

Mentallo & The Fixer has been a huge inspiration for years and years. I've been listening to **Where Angels Fear to Tread** and **Burnt Beyond Recognition** for almost as long as I've been listening to Skinny Puppy and FLA. I think the DWIFH approach to composition is similar to Mentallo, I think — there is a distinct focus on the subtle development of melodic motifs that I probably learned in large part from the **Dassing** brothers.

I could name a lot of other important bands or albums: **Forma Tadre**, **Kalte Farben**, **Individual Totem**. Puppy is of course still my favorite band, but these other bands have been a very important part of industrial music history for me.

5) What do you think about the current neo-old school wave of industrial, with the “artsy” Los Angeles scene and the general return to the roots of EBM/electro industrial/electro punk?

I think it’s great. Seeing the success of **Youth Code** and **3teeth** is really exciting, it shows there is still a lot of passion out there for old school electronic music, people are still really willing to get behind it and support it. And those bands are going into it 100%, they are really fueled by a passion for the music and the energy within it. I hope they continue to rise, and that more and more appear.

6) You always have seemed like a down to earth person without a stage image/photos based on fake blood, bad guy poses and whatever, focused on the music in a professional way. Is it a conscious thing, or just the way you are and the way you want to express your music and general concept?

Well I don’t want to shatter any mysterious illusions here, but I think the “down to earth” approach to the stage might be just as much a matter of time and energy as it is a reflection on my actual persona. Most of my time for DWIFH goes into the studio, but it’s been an interest of mine to focus more on the Live side of things, too. It’s difficult though, when you still have to work an unrelated job for 40 hours of your week!

7) Does the name of your project give you any problem or bad rep. by someone too easily offended that wants to see something that isn’t there?

It has caused a few problems actually, yes, but I haven’t let that bother me. I think it’s a name that is open to interpretation, and it’s really quite nonspecific as to what it’s actually saying or telling. So if a person finds something really negative in there, they are reading into it and creating their own narrative around it, and I don’t feel responsible for that. The source of the name comes from a bit that Tom Waits did during a live show, so it’s a pretty innocuous source. For me, it’s always evoked images of Film Noir, which is a genre I really enjoy. But it’s not saying anything, or trying to tell any specific story. It’s a vibe, albeit a dark one— but that darkness could be told in a lot of different ways.

8) What about your live activity? Is it important to you? How do you approach your concerts?

I may have already addressed some of that in question 6. So far the live incarnation of DWIFH has only played local shows and festivals — we have never actually toured. That doesn’t mean I don’t want to, but that it simply hasn’t been a part of this project so far. When we do play, I take parts of the songs, sample them into playable sample instruments in Live, and John Worsley (who also does all the visual art for the band) plays them as live key parts. So every song has multiple live key sections for him to play, while I play guitar and do the vocals. It’s a simple approach, but it works, and allows both of us to actually feel like musicians onstage rather than just dudes queuing clips of songs to play back

to the crowd.

9) How will your music endeavors evolve? Do you have any ideas now of what you want to achieve in the future?

Outside of DWIFH, I'm looking to get deeper into the Game Music world. I scored the mobile game **Skullduggery!** last year, and hope to do a lot more projects of that nature, everything from mobile to platform and beyond. I'm learning how to implement adaptive audio into games with programs like **FMOD** and **Wwise**, so that's a whole new world to explore, and really a very creative one.

With DWIFH, I am already working on new material. In fact, *All The Way Down* was finished and submitted to the label back in June of this year. I've had a very productive fall so far, writing a lot of new material and trying some new things. So I can definitely say that there will not be another 3 year wait for new DWIFH music. There will also be new cover songs to come.

10) Thank you for your time, invite the readers to buy your new album, if you feel like that.

The best ways to get the new album are via Storming The Base for the physical CDS

<http://www.stormingthebase.com/dead-when-i-found-her-all-the-way-down-limited-2cd-digipak/>

And Bandcamp for the digital versions

<https://deadwhenifoundher.bandcamp.com/album/all-the-way-down>

<https://deadwhenifoundher.bandcamp.com/album/the-bottom>

Author: Davide Pappalardo

Website: <http://fluxproject.altervista.org/intervista-dead-when-i-found-her>