

Growing up in the Midwest during the 1980s was a neon Wild West for the loner pre-teen, especially when sports was a foreign concept to you and the only stats you were interested in were those found in the cassette liner notes of Rush and Slayer albums. And instead of watching IU and Purdue play in the NCAA semi-finals, you'd prefer to watch *House By The Cemetery* or *Dawn of the Dead* alone in the dark. Unlike today where you can find your own tribe of music and horror movie weirdos within minutes in the confines of a laptop and a decent wifi signal, 40 years ago you could go an entire adolescence thinking you were a singular freak among the dense cornfields, church parking lots, and neighborhood basketball courts of Northeast Indiana.

That pretty much mirrors my youth. As soon as I saw Romero's *Creepshow* in 1984 I was done for. And with an older brother that played me *2112* and *Master of Puppets* by the time I was 12, my fate was sealed. Though, I was lucky enough to have a handful of friends and teen philistines that preferred their music loud and fast, their horror films unrated, and welcomed having their brains rewired by film composers with names like Frizzi, Carpenter, Simonetti, and Rizzati.

The first time I'd ever heard the prog/synth duo Zombi (Steve Moore and AE Paterra) it felt like this massive secret door had just been revealed. It seemed to me these two guys that hailed from Pittsburgh, PA grew up fairly similar to myself. Or we were all at least circling in the same musical and cinematic atmosphere.

Moore (synth/bass/guitar) and Paterra (drums/percussion/electronics) could very well have been all star athletes in high school, but listening to *Escape Velocity* (2011) for the first time I felt I'd found two guys that "got it". Their sound highlighted a rock rhythm section combined with cosmic electronic swirls that landed somewhere between sci-fi futurism, synth-driven horror scores, and chromed-out progressive rock. Kinetic songs that felt both prescient and nostalgic at the same time; sounds that felt equally born from a love of Rush, King Crimson, and ELP. And peppered throughout were the hazy sonic worlds of film scores by Carpenter, Goblin, and Vangelis.

Zombi dropped their debut *Cosmos* in 2004. It was an album that out of the gate showed two musicians locking in and knowing what direction they wanted to take their musical world. A two-man group that filled each track with lush soundscapes and ominous musical intentions. Tracks like "Cetus" and "Serpens" felt fully formed and ready to redefine the idea of what a rock duo could sound like. Heady synths gave these songs a cosmic feel as the rhythm section laid down a foundation that was meteoric and muscular. Tracks like "Cassiopeia", "Andromeda" and the epic closer "Taurus" gave equal sonic spotlights to both fans of Rush' *Subdivisions* and Jean- Michel Jarre's *Équinoxe*.

With each album release, Zombi's songs got tighter and more expansive, revealing depth and a compositional heft within the facets of Moore and Paterra's musical DNA. From the opening salvo of *Surface To Air's* "Challenger Deep", with Moore's tasteful '80s synth touches and AE Paterra's ever-evolving Neil Peart-meets-Bill-Bruford drum muscularity; to the epic ferocity of the

band's 2009 masterstroke *Spirit Animal* which revealed a widescreen cinematic approach that would come in handy with future film scores Moore would compose later on. *Escape Velocity* was a masterclass in rhythmic propulsion and grandiose melodies of the highest order within the synth rock world. 2015's *Shape Shift* brought Gothic undertones with '80s synth pop touches that brought both radio-ready opulence and an underground, "if you know, you know" street cred. And of course the band's last release, 2020's *2020*, gave sound and vision to a world crumbling with a heaviness and guitar-centric sound that Zombi hadn't yet explored in such depth.

Zombi's discography is bulletproof and each release is an essential one. Every album is a building block and an evolution in the musical world of the band. From the early EP collection of *Zombi Anthology* to the more recent covers series *Zombi and Friends*, Steve Moore and AE Paterra show they're as influenced by Alan Parsons Project, Steely Dan, and Eddie Rabbit as they are King Crimson, Goblin, and John Carpenter. They're inspired equally by AM Gold, AOR rockers, and horror film scores.

2024 will mark the 20th anniversary of Zombi's debut release *Cosmos*. In the spring of 2024 the band will release their seventh full-length album, *Direct Inject*. *Direct Inject* is 9 tracks of pure, unadulterated Zombi. *Direct Inject* came to fruition in 2022 after a European headlining tour was canceled due to low ticket sales thanks to a resurgence of Covid. Instead of being a complete loss, Moore and Paterra camped out at friend Fred Weaver's home studio in Clearfield, PA, setting up their equipment and jamming for a few days. As AE Paterra describes the sessions, "Most of the tracks that ended up on the album were pretty close to their final form, spontaneous jams that just flowed out of us." Those few days of improvisation and jamming turned out to be fruitful, with 3 or 4 sessions over three days turning out several gems.

After a 2022 fall tour with OM, AE Paterra spent three weeks recording live drums to the tracks from the previous session. After mixing and editing his parts, he sent the tracks to Steve Moore to add final synths, bass, saxophone, and guitar. Paterra says of this process, "I'm always amazed at what happens after I send off my finished parts to Steve - tracks suddenly take on a ton of life and head in directions I didn't think they could go." *Direct Inject* is the result; a propulsive, muscular, and progressive sound world that never relents in its melodic intent and forward-thinking arrangements.

Capturing the spirit of previous all-timers like *Escape Velocity* and *Surface To Air*, while expanding the band's sonic palette into territory as diverse as '80s synth rock ("Direct Inject") and even saxophone-heavy slow jams that Sade or George Michael would have loved ("Sessuale II"), *Direct Inject* is essential Zombi and quite possibly their most diverse and engaging record yet. You can't help but get carried up in the slipstream of tracks like "Bodies in the Flotsam", the hard rock/synth strut of "Kamichi & Sandy", the guttural dirge of "The Post-Atomic Horror", or the heady sonic touches of "Insurmountable Odds".

The spirit of improvisation and creating in the moment permeates Zombi's newest opus, opening a door into the compositional world Moore and Paterra exist within and have existed in since the

beginning. What really matters with *Direct Inject* isn't song titles or how we got here, but what we find when we reach the destination. *Direct Inject* is Zombi in their finest form; taking improvisations and mining them for gold. By my count every track here is Fort Knox level. The riffs, the beats, the vibes, and the chromed-out sheen of the production all come together to create a bold sound world that brings together the past, present, and future of Zombi. Moore summed up the vibe of *Direct Inject* perfectly: "*I love what can happen when you roll tape and just go for it.*"

On *Direct Inject*, Zombi indeed go for it.

After 20 years, 7 albums, several EPs, solo projects, collaborations, and film score work Steve Moore and AE Paterra - aka Zombi - continue to evolve and expand on what started in 2004 with *Cosmos*. Zombi continues to enlighten and engage with their sound, never wavering from their musical mission. *Direct Inject* keeps Zombi's creative fires burning, with minds engaged and blown in equal measure.

- J Hubner, *Somewhere In The Midwest*, December 2023