



<http://www.graveconcernsezine.com/>

Band: Anathema Device
Interviewer: Julie Johnson
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Grave Concerns(GC): What the name of your band and who the current members?

AC: The band is Anathema Device. The perpetual member is myself, Kerry Smith. Stephen Baker (keyboards) and Eric Reed (drums) have been with me a little while and I hope they stick around.

GC: How did you become connected to make music?

I guess this question means "How did we meet?" I was looking for a live band for some songs I'd written. Stephen was already a friend in the NYC scene and I got Eric through an ad on Craigslist.

GC: What are your musical influences?

AD: It's pretty spread out. There are a lot of obvious, scene-related seminal heavy bands like Nine Inch Nails, Ministry, Marilyn Manson, Hanzel und Gretel, Rammstein... But then it really spread all over the place: Prodigy, Tori Amos, Sarah Maclachlan, Outkast, Rasputina, U2, a bit of classical, smatterings of pop singles. A lot of old-school "goth", like Siouxsie and The Sisters of Mercy. I write music for a living, so I can't really close myself off to any style. I tend to nick whatever good there is about an artist/genre and put it in my repertoire. Lately, a lot of East Coast indie bands we've played with have put out great CDs that have been my listening choice: Ego Likeness, Nicki Jaine, Saint Eve.

GC: What is your live show like?

AD: There's always a lot of energy. I've been accused of being a pretty hyperactive performer. I've tried to... not dampen that, but focus it a little more. Most of our set is pretty aggressive. We usually build in a couple of the more melodic and/or down-tempo tracks in the middle, if there's time. Sometimes we have kooky outfits or lights, and sometimes it's very stripped-down and raw. Hopefully it always comes across like a big-concert performance that kicks you in the stomach.

GC: Tell us about your own unique style of music?

AD: Hmmm. That's like dancing about architecture. I've written a lot of music since I've been in NYC. I've sold hundreds of tracks for TV. It's really hard for me to settle myself in one genre. So, what I set out to do with this band was to make something that had punch and immediacy, was playable by guitar/bass/drums/keys, gave a nod to my goth/industrial roots while staying viable as a "rock" act, would allow me to experiment with a broad spectrum of sounds and always...always put good songwriting first. In it's simplest terms it explores darkness, but is hopeful. Music can be so many things to people. It's the soundtrack to events in your life. I hope that the music we make connects

with people on a meaningful level and can put them in a good mood, or help them through a bad time, or remind them of someone or something. That's what the music that's mattered in my life has always done.

GC: What separates your band from all the other bands out there?

AD: I've listened to a lot of music out there, and I really haven't heard anyone that sounds just like us. Our influences are so disparate that we don't easily categorize. We're not spearheading some seminal, new style, but we are doing what we want to in our way. There's a tendency these days for bands to want to be in a genre, a scene. We don't. We're not a goth band, industrial band, electro band, metal band or pop band. We're a little of all of that. I like to talk about NIN, because he's all over the place as well. I've seen other bands labeled "NIN clones", but I honestly don't see it. He's too hard to pin down. Now, I have heard a ton of Skinny Puppy (early sound) clones or VNV clones, by comparison.

GC: How do you go about writing songs?

AD: Every song is different. Sometimes it starts with a beat I heard, found, made, etc... Sometimes it's a bass, keyboard or guitar lick I came up with. Sometimes it's just a feeling that I want to express and I have to find the right sound for it. Usually the lyrics come after some skeleton of music exists. I have my "initial cool thought" and then I have to craft the other parts to hold up to that idea. For example, usually I don't write choruses first. I have my cool riff or verse idea. Then I have to write a chorus that takes it to a new level. I will say that usually once I'm done with a song, my next instinct is to write something that is nothing like it. Usually once I've explored a direction, I've pretty much mined all of the good ideas in it for awhile. I can't bear the idea of following trends. But I have no qualms about incorporating an element from something in vogue, if I think it has merit.

GC Pick one of your latest songs and talk about everything from writing it, meanings, the challenges of recording it?

AD: Okay. Let me talk about "Breathe", which will be on our new record "The Severing of Tithes". This started from a little ostinato synth bass part that I came up with for something else. It wasn't right for that song, but it had a really compelling, hypnotic quality that I liked. So, I started with that, and built one line at a time in the verse: mellotron flutes, piano, etc.. Next, because I love dynamics, I had to put in something big and mean. I ended up with a section that's now a pre-chorus. It's a little over-the-top but it really hits emotionally. There's a little break at the end of it which gives a better transition to the chorus than just plowing into it would. I struggled on the chorus for a while. I knew it had to be really good, because the rest of the song really took you on a journey, and it needed to go to the next level. I started writing the lyrics and melody (rarely done separately-they have to flow) at that point. I knew I wanted the song to be a little sad and introspective. But, I also wanted it to burst forth and rip someone's heart out when it peaked. I don't usually talk about lyrics, because I prefer to leave them somewhat vague and open to interpretation, but on this one I was moved by stories from my wife, who is an RN on a cancer ward. The music had a sad but hopeful aura that made me think of sitting next to your lover/parent/child/best friend/etc... who's in a hospital bed, and not being sure if they're going to make it. You're talking to them, but more to yourself, to whatever you may pray to in a time like that. The rest just kind of fell into place. I deliberately didn't program the drums this time, because I wanted it to be more organic. I brought it to the band and it evolved into something really special. Over several performances, I changed the vocal style and started singing a little more melodically, and up an octave in the chorus. It can be hard to reach sometimes, but it's very cathartic. I've

worked in a recording studio, making music for years. So I knew that this song would be tricky, but I also knew I could pull it off. Since the synth bass that is the verse is time-locked, I had Stephen trigger it from the sampler. He had to turn it off just in time for the pre-chorus and chorus, which we just did on our own. I went back later and re-tracked the guitars, bass and vocals. I was recording Stephen's performance as MIDI information, so I cleaned up his track and messed with some of the sounds. Luckily, I didn't have to align the live drums with loops or programming. I've really grown to love that fusion of sounds, but it does result in some editing once everything's in place. Sometimes it's a little funky and you leave it, but when it has to be tight, you can be in there cutting for hours.

GC: What is your latest news with the band?

AD: We're about 2/3 to 3/4 done with our new record, "The Severing of Tithes" and once it's done I hope to find someone to put it out this time. So, that may take a little bit of time. Maybe late 2004? The year has mostly been a wash until this summer. Our lives demanded precedence. But now we have a new bass player (Fred Ditman) and we should be playing shows in the NorthEast, Mid-Atlantic and Near-MidWest areas in the last couple months of the year.

GC: Where do you hope to be in 5 year with your band?

AD: I hope that we can become well-known enough that we can tour North America, and Europe without losing money. I think that speaks to a certain level of success that's ambitious, but reasonable.

GC: How are people currently reacting to your music?

AD: It's always a surprise. It's usually positive. Now I go to other cities and people recognize me and complement the band. A lot of people seem to "get it". Nowadays though, many people aren't buying CDs from indie artists. There's all the file-sharing, ripping and such. Which is kinda okay. I'd hope they'd want to buy it if they really like it, but the economy isn't great right now. The thing is, when people were buying CDs, you at least had a better idea of how many people your music was getting to. Now it's a mystery. Plus, in this scene it seems like every other person is a DJ, has a 'zine, radio show, etc... So you usually give free discs to those people. Hopefully, they write a review or you happen across a playlist online to let you know what they thought of it, or if they even listened to it. It's very easy to be popular, but not know it in this scene.

GC: What would be the top 3 reasons for listening to you music?

1. You love "dark" bands in all genres but you'd like to enjoy a whole album, rather than taking a few songs for the "shuffle" mode of your MP3 player.
2. You really want to get "feelings" from the music you're listening to.
3. You just like good music.

GC: What is your best experience as a band?

Touring: playing with our friends and meeting new people is always fun.

GC: What is your worst experience as a band?

AD: Either paying the bills for touring, or replacing band members. It's a big commitment.

GC: What is most important to you in your band?

AD: Feeling that I can stand behind each and every song and say "This is good. It has a point of view that is it's own."

GC: Do you have a personal favorite song?

AD: No. I like them all, for different reasons. Newer ones tend to be favorites for a while, but I know that's just because I'm wrapped up in the afterglow of writing them.

GC: What was the hardest song to write and why?

AD: "The Paragon of Animals", from our EP "Something Lurking in the Dark". It's kind of an amorphous song. I knew it had potential, but it took a lot of wrangling and experimenting to find the hook that made it worth presenting to other people.

GC: What do you think of the current gothic/ EBM/ Industrial/ noise/ synthpop etc scene today?

I think it's a little to rigid. A lot of people seem to be trying to be "specialists", sticking to a very narrow style of music, dress or "persona". There's a lot of variety if you look across the scene as a whole, but it's divided into homogenous little sects. Music, fashion and the like become classified as a Genre when a set of patterns, behaviors, etc.. are established that become the rules. Too many people are living by the rules. Maybe it's too much to ask for wholly original ideas, but some more cross-pollination and variety wouldn't be a terrible thing.

GC: What music do you currently listen to?

AD: Right now Ego Likeness gets a lot of time on my iPod and stereo. Also Nicki Jaine. New Skinny Puppy and Ministry. I got on a "metal" kick when I was in Norway in May, so Arch Enemy and Lacuna Coil, as well. Plus, there's that one Black-Eyed Peas song "Where is the Love?" that's stuck in my head.

GC: How do you keep change your music from album to album or plan to change it?

AD: I don't have a plan. I write songs. Then when I have enough, they get recorded and released. I hope I can work a little faster before the next record, but I still have to pay the bills in the meantime.

GC: What kind of recording environment do you have?

AD: I have a pretty serious home studio, as well as the studios I work in. It's funny, because most people gape in awe when they visit, but I just take it for granted now. I mainly use Digital Performer as my writing and recording tool. Lots of synths of all sorts. A bunch of guitars and the means to process them. A few nice mics. I've tried to acquire the sorts of things that will allow me to be flexible with what I record. I also try to record live instruments live if possible. I'd rather call a cello player and pay them to lay down a part than screw around for hours, trying to make a synth sound real.

GC: How long did you spend on your latest effort?

AD: Ha! It's a continually evolving process. Although, the "recording" part of it, which is to say, having the band play over the programmed skeleton, and then editing and mixing, looks like it will take about 2 months, off and on.

GC: What is the hardest thing about being in a band for this genre?

If you're too mainstream to be embraced by the indie labels/fans, but not mainstream enough for the bigger labels/fans.

Also, the DIY trend is great. But it's very taxing being artist, engineer, record label, booking agent, PR rep, webmaster and everything else at once.

GC: Feel free to do any shameless self-promotion here of you band, now is your turn to talk about anything you want about your band, ideas, or life in the band.

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