

AN INTERVIEW WITH WRITER/FILMMAKER M.A. LITTLER

Q: I'd like to talk about your various projects at present.

A: Go ahead and ask.

Q: What first attracted you to the DEAD BROTHERS and why did you decide to make a film about them instead of simply enjoying their music?

A: I first heard their record DAY OF THE DEAD in a Rock 'n' Roll club in my hometown.

I physically reacted to it, which rarely happens to me, even when hearing a good record. The music was intelligent and primitive, beautiful and ugly at the same time. It had multiethnic elements to it but I still saw it as rock 'n' roll and the common ethno stereotypes were not present in their music.

The music was referential but it was still their own...plus it was dark and wickedly funny...that won me over.

Q: But why go through the hassle of making a film about them?

A: The idea grew like cancer in my head...it had to be done.

Actually I had the idea without ever seeing them live, let alone ever having met them. I then made a film about VOODOO RHYTHM, their record company and we got to know one another and hit it off, so one thing led to another and eventually resulted in this film. I was more interested in portraying three individuals than a band.

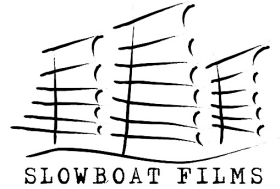
Q: Describe the working process with the Dead Brothers.

A: (laughs) The Dead Brothers are extremely generous with their time and dedicated when you're in the same city. We got a lot of work done, within a short time frame. The challenge was to all be at the same place simultaneously and that proved to be difficult at times.

The Dead Brothers are not exactly efficient planners and organizers but at the end of the day that adds to them in some strange way.

Q: Was the film shot in segments or all at once?

A: It was shot in segments. I joined them on tour and visited them at home. We first did an intensive interview session, I then visited them again to shoot some cinema verite style street concerts and improvised sessions. A few months after that I shot a music video for them that also appears in the film.



Q: Describe the individual members.

A: Alain is a born alpha wolf with all the problems that come with being dominant by nature. He has a contradictory character, he's extremely warm and gentle and volatile at the same time. Most importantly though he gets things done, which at times means stepping on people's toes.

I believe he's the glue that holds the various elements in the band together.

Delaney's the dark court jester...funny and dark at the same time.

When planning things I'll put my money on Delaney and when it comes to theft I would too.

If you plan on going to war you certainly need at least one Delaney on your side...he's a partisan.

Pierre is a ridiculously blessed musician...it's not only the sounds he produces. Simply observe his face, when he plays, that man was born to play.

Like he says in the film he's torn between irony and fragility that pretty much sums it up...in my books he's Django...dirty but clean...I know you have no idea what I'm talking about but I'm sure he'll get it.

Christoph who has become a full time member by now is the Dada element in the band...a genius musician with a feeling for absurdity and surreal humour.

Q: There's the name to talk about: The Dead Brothers that implies a certain sense of family.

A: Watch the movie again and you'll find the answer to that question. They're a family with all the love and hate for one another that you'll find in any family...except this is a dead family.

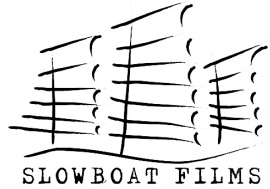
Q: What are the core themes in the film?

A: There's a number of core themes:

The juxtaposition of death and humour, the blending of various ethnic music styles in search of a universal musical core.

There's also the underlying theme of genocide and Diaspora: Alain's half Armenian and the Armenian genocide troubles him personally, so we incorporated that theme into the film as well and I believe his family's story to be a universal one.

Q: If you don't mind me saying it doesn't sound like an easy film.



A: It certainly isn't. If you're looking for mere entertainment go to your local multiplex.

Although it needs to be said that the film is certainly not one long artsy and dark ride...similar to their music it's dark and funny in a twisted way...but you're right it's challenging...you can't sit down and consume it, you have to be awake. It's at times slow and laconic and occasionally becomes quite surreal.

Q: I've read in an interview that you have self-financed your last film.

A: I did.

Q: How did you manage to gather the money?

A: I run a production company and we own basically all the equipment. I bought it over several years, so I don't have to rent equipment, which is a great advantage. We always slept at the bands' homes and ate with them and our crew worked for free. In a nutshell that's how I managed to pull it off.

Q: Why did you not seek the partnership of another production company, network or funding agency.

A: I'm a difficult character, especially when it comes to dealing with business people...I get angry easily and don't like people interfering with my work and my ideas.

And when people can't be convinced in a rational manner, I have convinced them physically in the past...I'm getting too old for that kind of nonsense now, so I do things the best way I know how to...and that's outside of the industry.

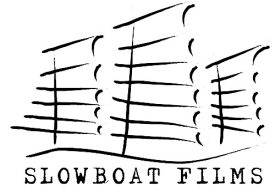
Q: What's the downside of working that way?

A: Well, to begin with you're very limited technically, you only have one camera, which is often times operated by me, you only have a basic lighting kit and usually an inexperienced crew, so you have to do 3 or 4 jobs at once.

The plus however is that the limitations make you more focused. You have to get it right the first time because you don't have the means to fix it in postproduction.

The crew, as inexperienced as they may be, are really motivated and believe in what they're doing. If you're on a professional set, you'll see people twiggling their thumbs a lot, smoking plenty of cigarettes and drinking gallons of coffee, you won't see that on our set.

At times it's frustrating to see that you can't get certain things you want and to see certain technical insufficiencies but that's a price I'm willing to pay to make my kind of films without any interference.



Q: How do you convince people to dedicate their time and effort for free?

A: They fall in love with the project like falling in love with a woman. The strange lifestyle also attracts people. Making these kinds of films is definitely miles away from what I would consider normality and some people are drawn to that.

Q: You have self distributed your last film, were you forced to or did you choose to?

A: At first I was forced to, then I had the chance to go through a distributor but again I don't work well with industry people and that's why I turned it down.

At the end I'm glad I did because I learned a lot about distribution and had great partners in Beat-Man (president of VOODOO RHYTHM RECORDS) and several underground clubs and cinema owners and promoters.

We showed the last film all across the globe and even made a modest plus on the film.

A: You have a multiethnic background as well, is that one reason why you were drawn to the music.

Q: Well, I've got a German-Anglo-Celtic background but I don't think that has anything to with it.

I'm drawn to all sorts of things outside of my own culture and I love to throw it all in blender and make one wicked little cocktail out of it.

I reckon in that respect there might be a certain similarity with what THE DEAD BROTHERS are doing musically.

Q: What are those influences?

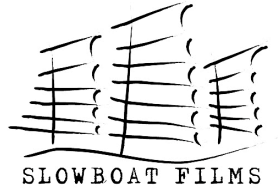
A: That'll take forever.

Q: Name a few.

A: Jazz, primarily Coltrane, raw blues, fucked up Rock 'n' Roll, dark Christian imagery, religious painters like Caravaggio and Bosch, the American South, crime novelists like Jim Thompson, writers like Kerouac and Hubert Selby Jr. the film's of Melville, film noir, Lee Marvin, the list goes on.

I guess the number one source of influence would have to be the people and places I come across...art can never be as strange and fucked up as reality...so mostly I steal ideas from the reality I perceive.

Q: That brings me to another question: You're also a writer, I've read a number of your poems and a short story and there seems to be an affinity for outsiders, decay and a certain apocalyptic core that runs through everything.



A: (laughs) You should be a critic.

Q: Well, am I correct?

A: Yeah, I am attracted to outsiders and I have a rather grim vision of the general state of things and the future as well. Some believe the ship is sinking, I believe it has sunk and now we're living in the ruins of a shipwreck with a bunch of eels and squids and jellyfish...but if you know how to, you can have a pretty good time down there.

Q: Some people might argue that's a bit too dark...too one dimensional.

A: That would be a legitimate comment, yes.

Q: And what would you answer?

A: I would compliment them on their perceptiveness.

The fact is, I'm drawn to the Bible and Caravaggio, Hieronymus Bosch, dark country and blues songs and I don't deny it.

Q: Do you have any further literary ambitions?

A: It's an ongoing process...I don't really differentiate between film and literature. Some ideas are best expressed in poetic form or in prose, some in film. Since I write my own screenplays, the writing process is an integral part of filmmaking for me.

I am also currently collecting my short stories and intend to shape them into a novel. We've recently added a literary department called SLOWBOAT INK to our film production SLOWBOAT FILMS.

I've also got a project I refer to as "The Boomerang Project". I've recorded plenty of poems of mine in the past and have recently send the recordings to musicians I respect and asked them to compose and perform some music as a soundtrack to the poetry. The key however is that I don't get involved, they simply listen to the recoding and add whatever they please, without informing me.

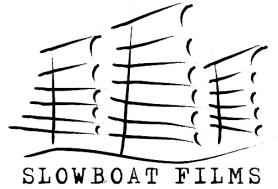
So I throw out a boomerang and hope for it to return at some point.

If it does return it'll probably be all banged up and half broken...I would love that!

Then there are always readings, alone, with other writers and/or musicians.

Q: Who is involved in that project?

A: A bunch of musicians I respect, some of which I've worked with on my last film. DM Bob is involved, The Dead Brothers, Jem Finer of the Pogues, the Croatian Surf Noir band The Bambi Molesters, Robert Butler and a bunch of others.



Q: What about further films?

A: We're currently developing a moody black and white road movie that bears similarities with old time gangster films. We're planning to go into principal photography in September 2006. It deals with the themes of guilt and redemption...I reckon my affinity for biblical themes will shimmer through again...enough said. And there's always a music video on the way or some strange little experimental piece.

Q: In recent years you have turned out quite a bit of material...why the rush?

A: I don't think it has been that much...it could have or rather should have been more. Also, you never know when you're going to run dry, so I milk the ideas as long as I have them.

Q: In your last film you asked the interview subjects what is important to them...what's important to you.

A: I knew that that question would bite me in the ass at some point. My answer is going to be as awkward and corny as theirs.
Love is the Alpha and the Omega, apart from that I only try to remain true to what I believe in, in spite of financial pressures and Machiavellian propositions that loom at every street corner.

Q: Sounds like a true moralist.

A: (laughs) Sweet Jesus, that's what I've become...a bloody moralist...totally presumptuous and vain.
Can we at least agree on being a fucked up moralist?

Q: That would be a lame compromise.

A: Alright then, I confess.

Q: Thanks for taking the time.

A: My pleasure.