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AN INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL TURNER AND MANDY COUSINS FROM TITANIA
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Q: You've been making music for well over a decade, what have been the most rewarding and what the most disappointing things all these years?

Mandy: The most rewarding thing is finishing an album and listening to the songs in sequence. Knowing that it's right and feeling committed enough to that body of work to put it out. The most disappointing thing is our work being ignored.



Michael: I would have to say the most rewarding thing is the music itself. I like listening to our old music and realising that we are still improving. The most disappointing thing for myself is that we are virtually unknown where we live, even though we have been around for many years. Our lack of success locally means that even our families don't seem to take what we do very seriously, oh well...

Q: Finding a label never seemed to be a worry for you - how hard is it for a band to get signed and to what degree does a band need to compromise in order to stand out and do a break through?

Mandy: I guess it's not hard for a band to get signed if they play the game, I'm just not interested in all the bullshit that goes along with it. As far as trying to "breakthrough" I don't try, I just do what's true to myself.

Michael: I think it is probably quite difficult to get signed. Only a small portion of groups end up having any sort of success, I think there is a lot of luck and timing involved in any sort of commercial success. I have known a few band's that have had dealings with major record labels, from what I have learned this is not a path I would ever want to go down. Most labels are only interested in shifting units. I think a lot of groups compromise their art to sell more records. I know it sounds precious but our music is too important to us to to just relinquish control to someone else.

Q: What is your source of inspiration for making music? If you didn't make music, how would you release your need for self-expression?

Mandy: I just knew I was meant to sing, there

was no other way! If I didn't sing I really would have no other means of expression.

Michael: In my teen years I was inspired by Joy Division and other post-punk groups. Joy Division in particular impressed me with the simplicity of their music, simple yet powerful. It seemed at that time that anything was possible, the future of music seemed so exciting. So many great bands emerged in the early 1980's. As soon as I started playing music I realised that's what I wanted to do from that point on. If I didn't play music I can't imagine what other creative outlet I would have.



Q: How would you describe your music to someone who'd never listened to it? If you were to put a label to what you're doing, what would be it? Do you feel part of what some call the "shoegazers' scene"?

Mandy: I find it very hard to describe music by putting it into words. It would do a disservice to any music I love by trying to describe it, I just can't do it. I don't think our music fits into any classification.

Michael: I get asked this question all the time by people that haven't heard us. I usually say that our music is quite slow, a little melancholy, with lot's of layers of guitars and beautiful female voice... I never felt a part of the so-called shoegazer scene at all. I'm not even sure that there was a scene to start out with. The key groups linked to the so-called shoegazer thing (My Bloody Valentine, Pale Saints, Ride, Lush) seemed to distance themselves as much as possible as soon as the label was invented. I think it is always easy for the music press to put a bunch of groups under one umbrella, it's lazy journalism really.

Q: Do you feel that the music scene is healthier now than, say, ten years ago?

Mandy: There is a lot of great music out there but you've really got to look because it certainly doesn't get any radio play. Unfortunately the "image first / music second" attitude has resulted in a lot of great artists being overlooked.

Michael: There are still lot's of great bands releasing great music. The downside is there are a lot more awful bands releasing awful music. It is much easier for a group to record and release music these days. The sheer volume of groups competing for attention from magazines and radio stations makes me less likely to discover music I like purely by chance. When I was a teenager I used to buy records just because I liked the record cover (and was often pleasantly surprised). Nowadays I am more likely to buy something if it is connected in some way to something I already like. I'm not really sure if that means the music scene is healthier or not.

Q: How was the Angelmark project born? Is it a one-off project or will it continue for more records? Except from the vocals, what other differences are there from the Titania music as to what moods and soundscapes you wish to create?

Michael: The Angelmark record came as a result of Mandy taking some time off from singing. I soon realised that the project had taken on a life of it's own. I found the process very rewarding personally. In the past I had released instrumentals on the Sensualists albums but I never really thought people would be interested in a whole album of instrumentals. The initial response I got from friends was very encouraging. The big challenge when making instrumental music is to make something compelling enough that people want to listen to it. Vocal music is more appealing to most people because most people feel more of a connection with someone singing. The human voice is a very good medium for conveying emotion, it is a challenge for an instrumental artist to achieve the same result. I intend to continue releasing albums as Angelmark as well as working with Mandy in Titania.



Q: What are your plans for the future?

Mandy: I myself have had a bit of a break from music because of a loss of self confidence. I just want to make a great album that tops the last one.

Michael: I want to get our record label (Resplendent) distributed properly and to start work on the next Titania and Angelmark albums as soon as possible. The most exciting music for me is always the stuff I'm going to be working on next.

For more info, please visit the official Titania site and this fan site.

In addition to the limited edition Titania / Angelmark CDEP included with Sense #32 and the impressive decade-long catalog released under the name The Sensualists, both Titania and Turner's solo project Angelmark have new albums released in the fall of 2003 by the band's own label Resplendent. Also, the Minneapolis based independent label Words On Music has offered Titania a spot on "A Houseguest's Wish", the label's tribute CD to the Wire pop gem "Outdoor Miner", due out in 2004.
