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Veteran Cyberpunk Composer Stuart Argabright Comes to Moscow

By Timothy Misir

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Emmy-nominated composer Stuart Argabright's cyberpunk techno group Black Rain is performing on Sunday.

Music industry veteran Stuart Argabright, who played a part in almost all the new styles that came out of New York's fertile music underground of the 1980s, brings one of his incarnations — cyberpunk techno group Black Rain — to Moscow for a concert on Sunday.

Black Rain, whose harsh electronic sound combines ambient, noise music and science fiction, started out as an industrial metal act. "It used to be a four-piece group. I put it together in '89-'90 just wanting to do a more industrial, darker music that we were into at that time, and then also at the time have it be with song structures too," Argabright said.

"My nutshell mission at that time was '[horror punk group] Misfits meets [German industrial band Einstuerzende] Neubauten,' something with fury and post-industrial intensity but at the same time something that is also accessible." he said.

"Our last show was with G.G. Allin on the Lower East Side and then half the band joined a more hardcore group that was doing a tour, and then I turned around and my partner Shin [Shinichi Shimokawa] was with me, and we were ready to do these 'Johnny Mnemonic' and 'Neuromancer' cyber soundtracks just the next year, so we kind of flipped it."

The score that the duo composed for "Johnny Mnemonic," a high-budget science fiction film starring Keanu Reeves based on the William Gibson novel, did not make the final cut, but in 2012 London-based label Blackest Ever Black released "Now I'm Just a Number: Soundtracks 1994-1995," reigniting interest in Argabright's early cyberpunk work, leading him to reform the band for a few shows. This year Black Rain released "Dark Pool," an album of new material.

"It really wasn't hard at all to really pick it up again because I've seen Shin over these years and we talk all the time. Shin was in Death Comet Crew, so we already went through the phase of reforming Death Comet Crew, we did the same thing with Ike Yard. ... When I see that fact, like 'first album in 18 years,' I have to laugh, but at the same time, it's true," Argabright said.

The Emmy-nominated composer and producer is not surprised at the response to his early work and the renewed interest in Black Rain. "I think it's just a generational discovery. ... It's almost as if I'm throwing a dart back in time with these kids because somehow I really get a response from them, even a more physical, visceral response."

"That kind of thing may be happening with Black Rain too because the things we are doing with Black Rain are all things that have all got stronger, whether it's dark music, whether it's a goth-type thing, all of those things have all gotten stronger. ... Everyone's looking for an answer, and I've tried to supply a few within Black Rain's technological framework that I set up, for example, on this new album."

Reflecting on the development and relevance of science-fiction to his work now, Argabright explains: "It was one thing to work with the influence [of William Gibson] and to try to score exactly what a Tokyo night city was for example, for 'Neuromancer,' written in '84 and now ... I think more than ever that the wants, needs and desires of humans, and the speculated ones of humanoids run pretty close and are pretty indistinguishable. So I really wanted to shed a light on the humanoid mind, and what the female humanoid mind might be concerned about."

Argabright started out in Washington D.C.'s punk scene in the 1970s with The Rudiments, moving to New York in the late '70s to make his name in genres as diverse as post-punk and proto-techno in the group Ike Yard, to dystopian hip hop in Death Comet Crew, featuring late visual artist and hip-hop visionary Rammellzee.

"It was kind of like a night-after-night adventure. You could change genres every night," Argabright said of his time in New York in the 1970s. "It was kind of amazing because it was very tight and very close, and at the same time it was very explosive and new genres were being made."

Speaking about his influences, the producer said: "I was coming from heavy music and hard rock, and even [David] Bowie and glam stuff like that. But then, here comes the Sex Pistols and here comes The Clash, and those musics which I absorbed before I came to New York,

and by the time I came to New York, it was time to make our own new brew and make our own new sound from what was happening."

Argabright said he is looking forward to playing in Moscow on a bill that also includes "other survivors from the '80s," such as British post-punks Clock DVA. Italian dark ambient act Bad Sector and Russia's own ambient producer Kryptogen Rundfunk round out the star-studded bill.

Black Rain plays at club Pipl, 22 Derbenevskaya Ulitsa, on Sunday at 7 p.m. Tickets available at ponominalu.ru*.*

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