

WILLIAM FAITH

SCARY LADY SARAH

As well-known names in alternative music, Scary Lady Sarah (Sarah Rose Faith) and William Faith have adapted to recent times by taking Sarah's long-running club night Nocturna to the streaming platform Twitch and continuing work on their band The Bellwether Syndicate with a full length planned for release in 2022. Both have a long history in the underground: William, originally from Southern California, has been involved with many notable bands through the years including Faith and the Muse and Sarah has been running Nocturna in Chicago since the late 80s and has DJed major events like Wave-Gotik-Treffen.

During such uncertain times, these two are part of the legacy of 'goth' from its roots to shaping the scene today and were well suited to discuss some of the thorns of being a creative in today's turbulent sociopolitical climate, tackling cancel culture, feminism, the term 'goth' itself, and the importance of elevating unique voices in the alternative community.

The Bellwether Syndicate's

## SCARY LADY SARAH & WILLIAM FAITH

Interview by Liz Rhodes | Photography by Clovis IV

In an interview from *Fade Away Radiate* in 2017, Sarah said, "I just hope with all my heart that young people do not get discouraged. Look to love and not hate. Music is a binding medium, so people within a scene will hopefully be able to share their views and keep an open mind." Do you still feel this way? How have the events of the past two years impacted this sentiment since you were originally quoted on this?

**Sarah Rose Faith :** In earlier times, like during the lockdowns, I switched to doing online DJing. So, at first, nobody saw anybody for 17 months except on a screen and I was DJing on Twitch. I still am. That brought a lot of people together from all over. I thought, when I started doing it, it would be just in Chicago, just the people who would normally be my patrons from club events that would pay attention and watch. But it turned out to be maybe a third of local people and two thirds people from absolutely everywhere, all over the U.S. and Europe, and some from South America. In that sense, the music has brought people together and I'm one of I'd say 50, maybe 60, goth/industrial DJs on Twitch that have any bit of traction.

**Meaning you have followers that engage with your channel regularly?**

**SRF :** Precisely. For pure goth stuff I'm not beat-matching relative to the others but I did not expect it to be such a worldwide thing. People have definitely come together and feel the sense of community. I never even knew what Twitch was until then. The





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way that people communicate and stick together, and the friendships that have been formed; a lot of people have not met each other but they plan to meet. It's a little bit like going back to the beginning, the dawn of the internet when Usenet was a thing. I was on Usenet groups like Alt.Gothic and there were entire communities around that and there would be plans for events to meet in person. That grew the scene and added to the momentum of it. I think we're having a little bit of a renaissance of that but with people who weren't necessarily around doing music back then.

**What does 'goth' mean to you? Is it a relevant term today and, if not, was it ever relevant?**

**SRF** : We have a commonality, both William and I agree but I think our current use of the term is a little different. William always says that what he thinks of goth hasn't changed, it's just what other people think of as goth has changed. I kind of think the same; I just use it as a catch-all term now. I am a goth. I have no problem saying that. It's obviously not the only thing I am but I'll probably be saying I'm goth when I'm 90, which is not that far off! I'm not embarrassed by it, I embrace it because everything that was goth to me when I found this subculture, I still have those values and beliefs and tastes. So I still identify with that word even though it does not mean the same thing to probably the vast majority of people, at least not those that are younger than our generation. But that's okay. Things change. To me, I don't care if it's in fashion or whatever, it's just what I am, so I'm fine with that.

**How about you, William?**  
**William Faith** : I have a very different perspective on it. To this day, I've said from the beginning and I stick by it now: I'm a punk first and everything else is built on that. Goth was the next layer to add to that and goth to me was something that really developed out of the deathrock scene in the 80s. Sarah and I talk about this a lot, that you came into it from one of two distinct angles: you either came up through the punk scene, which is how we did.

**SRF** : Both of us did.  
**WF** : We came up through hardcore eventually. In my case, it was after gigs you wind up hanging out in goth clubs and then eventually you got a goth girlfriend and then you know, as you start listening to enough of it, then you morphed into it. But you either came up through the punk scene or you came in through Morrissey or The Cure or Depeche Mode and that was your way in. So it was a very different experience. I think that if you came in through more so The Cure or Depeche Mode angle you maybe didn't have the same amount of anger and aggression that a lot of people that come in from the hardcore and punk scene did. It was a different approach. As a result, when the 90s came into play, it was kind of the heyday of the whole thing, at least for us. That was when goth kind of broke.

**SRF** : It defined the goth scene, calling it "goth scene" because before that it was just alternative or punk.

**WF** : It was nebulous, there were all kinds of different definitions on it, whether it was deathrock or goth, it was all over the map but it sort of codified in the 90s and there's always an inherent

**THE 90S WERE DEFINITELY A SORT OF HALCYON ERA WHERE YOU HAD THIS BROAD, OPEN MINDSET, AND A LOT OF THINGS WERE EVOLVING AND PEOPLE WERE GETTING INTO DIFFERENT IDEAS. THERE WERE OTHER REALLY FANTASTIC BANDS THAT HAD A SIGNATURE, A REALLY DIFFERENT SOUND AND CREATIVITY THAT WAS UNIQUELY THEIRS AND THAT WAS IMMEDIATELY IDENTIFIABLE.**

—William Faith

danger whenever anything gets codified, then it gets co-opted, much like it did. The 90s were just a fantastic era, I came into my career and had these very concentrated bursts of activity in all the bands that I was doing at that time. I launched everything that I came to do from there. It was a very busy time and so much was going on. The scene was definitely just growing and growing. Faith and the Muse came out in 1994, put out Elyria, and did the Procession tour. By the end of that thing, everyone knew who we were. I think that at the peak of it the thing I still look back on and smirk about the most was a magazine review back in the days when zines had reviews of other zines in the back. There was one that said, "I really love Faith and the Muse but I really wish I could pick up at least one magazine without a Faith and the Muse article or seeing them on the cover." To me, this was indicative of exactly how well we were doing right at that time; a lot of press, a lot of attention, and we were kind of going from strength to strength. At that time it was also the era when goth was fairly broadly defined. You had people that listened to Nick Cave, Diamanda Galas, Death in June, Christian Death, Marc Almond...

**SRF** : Cocteau Twins.  
**WF** : ...Enya and Clannad. All this stuff coexisted really comfortably together: Dead Can Dance...

**SRF** : Skinny Puppy.  
**WF** : ...Loreena McKennitt. There was a lot of stuff that was getting played. As long as that is the definition, I'm happy to call myself goth, but as things must and do, things evolved. Around 1999, that was the year of the schism. VNV Nation, Apoptygma Berzerk and the whole EDM and futurepop explosion was on one side and then the deathrock revival was on the other and all of a sudden, the middle just dropped out. So we had one choice on one side, going into the EDM thing, which I just had zero interest in. Then on the other was the deathrock revival, which I had no interest in because I was there for it the first time. So, as I'm fond of quoting Jeff McDonald from Redd Kross, "there's no future in revivals". I don't want to do that. We definitely felt like a band without a country at that time and that's why we fucked off to greener pastures and started doing different stuff and experimenting. But at that time, the 90s were definitely a sort of halcyon era where you had this broad, open mindset, and a lot of things were evolving and people were getting into different ideas. There were other really fantastic bands that had a signature, a really different sound and creativity that was uniquely theirs and that was immediately identifiable. Switchblade Symphony, for one example, who nobody sounded like. A lot of bands have tried since but at that time, that was their aesthetic

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and their sound. That's not to say that I like to cast aspersions on anybody because for a one- or two-man show I find that makes things trickier to make visually exciting. But Switchblade Symphony, they were second to none. They put on a great show owing to a great live band.

A visually interesting band, too. They had the whole package.

**WF** : They are really talented musicians and I think that gets lost. Susan and Tina were actually really good at what they did and were great people, too. That still counts in my book. It's things like that that made them what they were. Bands like that were unique. Obviously, the bands that sounded like The Sisters, The Nephilim, or The Mission wound up getting the most press because they are comfortable, they're safe, and a lot of people like things that they can put in a box. People that step outside of the box, that's what I'm most interested in. So by that definition, yes, I'm very comfortable with the term goth but post '99 it was far too reductive for my taste. So I wound up moving to greener pastures and defining myself a little bit more loosely.

**You both are aware of what's going on in the world, have a point of view about it, and are actively vocal about your views, channeling it through music like your latest single "Republik." I love the punk undertone of you being into permaculture so I'm curious: What does "permaculture" mean and how does it apply to subculture in general? Social activism and punk seem closely tied to this.**

**WF** : Permaculture is something that I came to from social activism that had been a part of my life since the early 80s. Basically, an old friend of mine curated a bunch of shows on PBS specifically for me that he thought I would find interesting. I ran into him at a show and he said, "Hey, I made this for you." It's my friend Jang Lee from Resist and Exist here in Hollywood. So I went home and was just watching it and there was this little piece in there from a show called Globe Trekker and it was about this group of punks from Mexico City doing this thing called permaculture. They were going to different villages and teaching people

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how to treat their food and water. A lot of the municipalities were building concrete buildings for people because it was cheap housing but because concrete dust will blow off it was creating all kinds of health issues for them. So, these punks with a group of other activists came together and made cob using sand and straw mixed with water to harden like concrete but it would breathe. One by one, everything they were doing was solutions-based and building community around this. Punks who get a bad rep for breaking into houses and stores...

### *Repo Man punks.*

**WF** : Exactly, the Southern California stereotype. Then, here are these kids who were doing this stuff, teaching people how to grow food and how to look after themselves when the government won't do it. This is something that appealed to me right off the bat. Immediately, I went to Google to search the term permaculture. I bought a book and read it in two sittings. At that point, I resolved to go into a one day introduction course at Permaculture Institute of North America, then went to a full permaculture design course in Summertown, Tennessee at this hippie commune called The Farm [Ecovillage Training Center]. I did the entire 72 hour course and they also had some added value coursework around ecovillage building and natural building. So I was very much drawn in. After that I became active immediately and by that point I was out of the city down here [in Los Angeles] and I was living up in Palmdale. It was a challenging area to design for in the high desert so we turned the house into a part farm, part animal sanctuary. We were composting toilets, rainwater collecting, and putting these systems to work out there, trying to turn the place into a suburban homestead and also demonstration sites for tours of the place, showing what is possible. That started permeating into the music as well. If I look back at my activism in the 80s in particular, the thing that I came away from that with was that we just kept doing stuff and becoming involved in single issue campaigns like anti-vivisection and

anti-government policy and anti-nuclear war. Every time you got even some small win, you just knew that the next challenge was lined up for you and you were always struggling, pushing and pushing, never really believing completely that you were making as substantial of a difference as you wanted to or thought you could. Knowing that also this is a very disconnected and disjointed effort, that doesn't really affect the whole, it's just this one thing. When I found permaculture it was the very first thing I saw actually taking a holistic approach to all those things, getting it back to the design level of how cities are designed, how homes are designed, how food systems are designed, how culture is designed, how social systems are designed, and trying to integrate all these things at this base level, closed loop design. So you're trying to design everything in a systems-based thinking where the inputs of your own part of the system are met by the outputs from another part of the system, closing these loops and not having to bring in all of these things from outside, you're actually trying to create an ecosystem that exists on its own and is self-reinforcing. Ideally, this reduces waste and generates energy and livelihood. These were the systems I became really interested in and as a result I now teach and I continue to do so to this day. It is my biggest hope, my number one coping mechanism when things get really bleak, is that there is something out there that works; something I can turn to and it's not Doomsday prepper stuff. The 'Transition Town' movement is also an offshoot of the permaculture movement which is basically about designing cities at human scale and creating walkable cities that aren't reliant on heavy transport where all the needs that are necessary for an area are provided within the area. All the basic needs are provided within that area, making sensible food systems, trying to grow what you eat, where you eat it and also making things where you use them as much as possible. A lot of it is concerned with scale and making things at a reasonable scale that we can actually operate at. Doing things that make a lot more sense and doing things locally as much as possible. That has been the

thing that's been most positive for me. It's actually about doing something, it's not about telling people what they can't do. It's not anti, it's defining yourself in the positive which really flipped the script for me entirely. From that moment, I haven't operated out of anger with this. When people start to despair, I always point to possibilities rather than talking about how fucked up things are. Even in "Republik" I'm pointing toward one to one conversations. That's where it all starts.

**The "no future" punk mentality, there's a place for that but you're talking about elevating that mentality from being reactive to being visionary in the sense that you are considering what we can do instead of talking about what's not working. It's a really different way of alchemizing that anger so inherent to punk.**

**WF** : To me, it's really carrying on with a lot of the thinking that Crass brought to the table: instead of 'no future' there is hope, there is a future for people to work for. That was the kind of thing that actually gave confidence. These people are creating something really positive, really egalitarian, and anyone can participate, anyone can do things where they are, starting with the smallest thing. It was a realization of the anarchist dream, in practical and pragmatic steps. That was the whole thing that turned me on to it and what keeps me going.

**What are your thoughts on the cyclical nature of art? If we think of culture and generation theory, things tend to move cyclically. We seem to be re-embracing art and ideals most recently held during the late 70s and 80s Cold War era; before that it was the Interwar Period when art movements like Dadaism and Surrealism emerged and artists like John Heartfield used collage/photomontage and cut-and-paste as a new form of visual language which has been prominently used in album artwork by many alternative bands from various genres. Paraphrasing Alan Cross from *A Journal of Musical Things*, when there is a conservative administration in office, there tends to be greater output of art by artists considered**

**to be 'alternative.' Are we revisiting this energy and do you think it will spark creativity that feels more innovative? Is there a way to elevate this cyclical process in art?**

**SRF** : I hoped when Bush got in twice—the last Bush—I thought, "well, at the very least we're gonna get some really good art out of this." I didn't see it happen, not to any noticeable degree at least in our scene, maybe it was in other scenes we are not familiar with.

**Do you think the Trump era was different in that regard?**

**SRF** : More so and definitely, from the little bit I know, I don't know a whole lot about current day punk but it seemed like [artists] pulled some good stuff out of that.

**Do you think there's been output that is noticeably different and darker?**

**SRF** : Not as much that is obviously political. In the 80s Reagan era, everything I listened to was about politics. That was what I thrived on, what kept me going and gave me fuel being a very worried teenager. That was a really positive change. I don't see that much of it now. I think so many people may be upset but complacent at the same time.

**WF** : I saw it during Bush and particularly when he got in for the second term; for me, that was unacceptable. So my reaction to that was to form Anima Mundi, this anarcho-punk project and then joining Conflict again, I got into that state of mind. I saw a lot of activity around Bush. I did not see the same sort of groundswell during Trump. It was a very bizarre, singular phenomenon, because in nearly every other administration that I can name, there's been some sort of move forward, some sort of reactionary art that came out at least to speak against this. But with Trump, everything seemed to be on the street. I didn't really hear it in music. No actual movements to speak of that I can think of.

**SRF** : Again, maybe there was something outside of our sphere of interest.

**WF** : I keep my eye on the punk scene, even though punk is largely de-fanged for the most part in this day and age. I just didn't feel it, I just didn't see it. Weirdly,

the art reaction to it wasn't so much musical—I saw it much more in graphic mediums but not so much in a solid musical representation of the reaction to it. Certainly, I saw it represented on album covers and a lot of graffiti art. A lot of really great writing on the subject but it doesn't appear that anything was particularly insightful or challenging around Trump. But back to what you were saying earlier, I do find the cyclical nature of where people draw from, because a lot of the 80s—what we would now call goth and deathrock stuff—was derived heavily off of Dada. Tristan Tzara and the Dadaists, they were drawing off of that. Even the cut-and-paste technique, [William S.] Burroughs was doing that, [David] Bowie lifted that off of him and now people have lifted that from Bowie and [Brian] Eno was obviously a broad influence still. The whole thing is there's almost bastard children drawing off of this with no context or understanding of why it was, and that's fine, but for me it's always good to find the source and follow the evolution of the thing.

**I remember in *Letters to a Young Poet* by Rilke when he responded to a letter from someone asking for advice about writing. Rilke told the friend they needed to mine their own depths in order to understand themselves as an artist and identify their need to create as something separate from ego. To me, in a way he was saying that you have to encounter yourself and your shadow fully to know why you create; if you are truly an artist, then you'll write about something interesting. I think you both agree that art is political. It intrigues me that young Millennials and Gen Z are the demographic that we would expect to be filling up bars and nightclubs as the current target consumers of the scene. Given the importance placed upon social media and connecting via screens versus face to face contact, I've wondered if this will render younger people more passive than previous generations when it comes to artistry and activism. I also wonder how these new, digital ways of connecting will impact having a point of view as an artist, even if it is considered**

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**controversial. What are your thoughts on that?**

**WF** : The worst thing that is going on here—and I'm not gonna put this squarely on Gen Z—there's a sort of outrage culture that is going on in recent years. Whatever the genesis of it is, and it's probably a longer conversation than we have time for to peel that onion, it fostered a culture and a time where people are afraid to speak. People are afraid to be honest and say what they really think for fear of being torn down. We are in a place where there's no room for people to make mistakes. There's no room to misspeak, there's no room to work a thought process out in a public forum or setting for fear of being branded this or that.

**There's zero learning curve. It seems as though you either have to be perfect or you're eschewed. The loss of nuance and the vulnerability of processing complex issues through dialogue seems to be absent.**

**SRF** : One mistake and forget it. Even for a perceived mistake.

**WF** : Yes, exactly. It's the same thing as in the press, no one reads the page seven attraction, they just stick with the headline that they remember. So it's the same thing, although this is all in real time on social media.

**SRF** : It's a small amount of people doing all this, but they're very vocal. I think most people don't make a judgement either way. They just enjoy what they enjoy and keep their opinions to themselves.

**There's actually a night that you were doing your club night Nocturna on Twitch earlier this year and in the chat you said that you wanted to play a band that was a 'hot topic' of controversy at that time. You received crowd feedback and it was pretty mixed with some people saying "don't play it" and other people saying to play it if it was a good song regardless of the scandal surrounding the band. You did end up playing the song and it created an opportunity for discussion that I have not often seen in the dark alternative community. As an observer, it looked like you were taking**

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a risk by even bringing up the topic of a controversial band and then deciding to play their music in your set despite some of the negative feedback. The thing is, you have a platform to talk about it. I think you handled it beautifully to say, "I'd like to play this band that I think has good music, but they're in some hot water right now. What do you guys think?" You valued the opinions in the room but you still went with your internal compass and played the song because you believed in the art/artist. I was pleasantly surprised that you didn't have a huge argument occur in the comments after that. It leads me to ask about how you have navigated as a DJ amidst the concept of 'cancel culture' that has become embedded in mainstream as well as underground culture.

**WF** : We have these conversations a lot. **SRF** : It depends on the topic. I mean, in this case, my opinion is that [the band] made a poor decision but I don't think they did it in any kind of mean spiritedness or out of hate or disregard. I think it was naïveté and certainly they regretted it. I don't think they regretted it only because of the backlash they got—they certainly regretted that, I'm sure.

It's not so much about that particular band or that experience, it's definitely that tough call of what you do these days if you have a supporting band that has some kind of negative press going on about them at the time?

**SRF** : Or if you're the supporting band for a headlining band that has negative press out there about them.

**WF** : Everyone gets to size that up for themselves; everyone gets to make that call and it's not easy. It's not simple math because at some point, I think you have to have a spine and you have to stand on your convictions. My attitude with these things generally has been that I make a decision based on the information available at the time. If you choose to judge me for that, you're entitled to do so but all I can do is work with the information at that time. If I make a mistake, I will certainly own it, step out in front of it and apologize for it, explain the context of what informed the decision.

That's really all a person can do and often that is not enough for the crowd. People will choose to dig in their heels and really come at someone and it seems this particular mindset of people who eat their own—**SRF** : That's exactly the phrase I was going to use, "so many people just eat their own." And that is a lot of what "Republik" is about. **WF** : Lyrically, that's definitely what I was pointing out. They are not going after the big targets; they are not going after the Right or the Nazis, or the racists.

Or the system itself.

**WF** : They are going for anyone that is slightly to the right of their perspective. They are looking to tear down their own friends, people they are connected to. **SRF** : There is no gray.

**WF** : I don't think people who engage in this kind of character assassination have thought through what this looks like over time and exactly how far this can go. It is a very slippery slope. At the end of this, if you wind up at the top of your self-righteous hill, you are also very alone because you've obliterated anybody with an opinion in any way that differs from your own. In the process, you learn nothing. You were "right" but there's nothing left. It's an ouroboros, the serpent eating its own tail.

If artists are the storytellers and the ones that are telling the truth about what's happening in their private lives or on the larger scale of social and political movements they experience, this is a really scary prospect to be self-censoring for the sake of "maintaining." It reminds me of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* because in life, Alighieri was exiled from his home for what he wrote, naming those he believed were corrupt or unjust in his time. It took courage on his part to stand up for his point of view and his own convictions. I'm just curious where we go from here, considering you two were engaged in a different level of activism while you were in your formative years and now we would hope to see a resurgence of that, but we're not seeing it in the same way. It makes me curious about your perspective is because the bottom line is that your persona and your name is

your business, it's a source of income, and it's part of your livelihood. So, if people all of the sudden stop supporting you, that becomes very problematic.

**SRF** : I have recently had to defend other bands a little bit and our associations with them, my own personal history, and our collective history. Our record of activism, our ethics, and beliefs show this is not some kind of recent virtue signaling. It's just part and parcel of who we are. We are anti-racist. We're not just not "not racist" we are anti-racist. We are anti-capitalist, we are pro-people and pro-peace. It's rough when there are people who are just hell bent on the social currency of likes and followers by creating stirs when they have erroneous or misconstrued information, sometimes just blatantly wrong, flat out wrong.

**WF** : We're very careful in our associations and this goes back as far as the 80s in that I will never knowingly support anyone who maintains any sort of racist views, so if there is anyone squatting among my Facebook friends that holds these views, they keep it fairly well hidden where I have not found them. I would never associate with anyone who exhibits bigotry of any sort. When people suggest otherwise, it's insulting and it's infuriating because all they have to do is infer; they don't have to back it up with anything and people are willing to readily accept it. It's ultimately a huge waste of time so I do try to step back from that as much as possible and not engage with that because it's basically people just telling stories.

What is different for you two is that you have established yourselves over decades so you have a lot of history behind you and the things that you have done; therefore, if these accusations are made about you, it's easy to see how divergent it is from your pattern of behavior. For those emerging young artists there's a fear factor because they don't have that track record like established artists do. So who's going to back them up? I'm bringing all this up because it's a microcosm of the bigger story that is happening around the world as far as culture and politics go. Ultimately, when you're looking at bands to book on a tour or for an event, you have to be thinking about all of this stuff now.

You embraced the new opportunities for creators to utilize Twitch to reach your followers and continue DJing. How has that changed the way you look at DJing itself? The immediate feedback via comments on Twitch seems so different from the traditional model of DJing where you use intuition and observation of behaviors, seeing what draws people to or repels them from the dancefloor, when to mix in a new track or artist, and what genre or vibe to stay with.

**SRF** : Not in the sense of being aware of playing or not playing bands based on any kind of the controversies, real or perceived. It has changed the breadth of what I can play; it's much more broad because I don't have a dancefloor. I love the club experience but the livestream version of that has been very liberating in a lot of ways, too. At a club like Nocturna I have a very large venue and I have to keep people there happy and dancing for a long time. I definitely always try to throw new things in there. Younger people seem to be more receptive to dancing to stuff they don't know, which is tremendously wonderful and very different than what it used to be when I could kill a dancefloor with one new song. Now, people just dance to it. They might not know the song but they just keep dancing. Online, I have all the freedom. There are bands I have cut from my playlist. I might personally enjoy their music but their viewpoints I've come to accept are far too negative and hateful to support. It's not like I ever run out of things to play so I can cut out those bands that I don't want to support and have plenty of bands to play.

Sarah, I recall you were involved in an interview with Obscura Undead about female DJs in the alternative scene. For me, it brought to the forefront a lot of things I had not thought about being female and in the scene that has mostly been male dominated. Your conversation with the other panelists about the power dynamics of the DJ being in control of the mood of the room was great because each of you had different perspectives. It got me thinking about you specifically as one of the notable women in the dark alternative scene who has been a long

time promoter and DJ spanning the last three decades. I can't think of many other women in the world who have been doing what you're doing and supporting a scene single-handedly. Are you aware of the role you play in your community and the scene on a larger scale?

**SRF** : I am. It's pretty cool. It's a little strange sometimes because my sense of time, especially the older I get, stymies me—how was it 33 years ago? This year it will be 33 years that I've been DJing Nocturna, my club night.

Has it changed since you started in 1988? Right. How has it changed overall and for you as a female?

**SRF** : Tremendously! On that Obscura Undead panel that you mentioned, I felt very much like the odd woman out in a way because a lot of them were much, much younger than I am and seemed to have had a lot more difficult experiences as far as being either seen as objects or treated like less than you should be. I never really experienced that. I've had—of course, how could I not—here and there little things, but generally no. I think that's just part of my personality. Maybe because I come from the punk scene and not from the other places that people came to goth from, I've got anger and I target and channel it when I need it. It's always there. I can use it as a motivating energy rather than sadness even though it's what's associated more often with goth. I would rather have something that can propel me rather than hold me back. So I've had very little bullshit from men. I obviously know what happens, I see it and I hear it from other people. I think I definitely used my sexuality more when I was younger because I was thin and young and cute. Now, I'm squarely middle-aged and it's fine, I'm comfortable with myself. But I definitely see that nobody flirts with me, which is fine. I've been noticed, once in a while, but now I'm looked at with reverence, which is kind of cool. I've never wanted children and I'm so happy I never had any. But I feel like I have that fulfillment of maybe a child from all the kids that I've seen grow up in the Chicago scene.

## *Spotlight* LIFESTYLE || A

Notably, you did strive to make your events 18 and over, not 21 and older. **SRF** : Since I was given the opportunity, since 1999, I've had Nocturna at Metro, which is a venue that is one of the very rare places in Chicago that is allowed legally to have under 21. Most venues because of a very, very strict liquor license cannot allow underage people and it costs me more money and is a much bigger deal but I thought it was so important because the years that we didn't do it, I felt like we lost people. People would come in when they were 21 but once they got to 30... There wasn't the newer younger generation ready to come right in.

I guess what strikes me as so unique about your situation is you do represent what some people might say is the traditional or old school goth, which I think is a misnomer, honestly. But you represent something that so many younger people are striving to get closer to, which probably comes from a sense of displacement, yearning to be connected to people that have a different mentality than what is seen in the current world. So here you are, this female creative that's doing her thing and is supporting the community around her. That has a huge impact and I think that's the full circle of the cyclical nature of why artists create. To have somebody like you still being out there and still being the person you are with a very positive and welcoming reputation, that's incredibly powerful. Do you 'carry that torch' consciously?

**SRF** : I think so. I'm modest and don't have a crazy ego. I really don't think my influence or impact goes beyond my little corner of the world, Chicago, or even extends to the Midwest. I guess I can see that because I've had people telling me that and because I've been doing it so long I have generations of people coming out. Now, since I've been DJing for 33 years there are people who used to go and then stopped because they had kids and now their kids are adults so they come out again. And on top of that, there's also the younger people who are now 18, 19 to 21 who come to me and say, "My mom used to go to Nocturna." That was mind blowing. I feel like I'm in some kind



**WE'VE DONE NOCTURNA TWICE NOW. IT WAS A FASCINATING LEARNING EXPERIENCE. SO JULY 17 WAS OUR FIRST NOCTURNA BACK AFTER LITERALLY 17 MONTHS AND IT WAS ONE OF THE FIRST BIG CLUB NIGHTS IN CHICAGO, NOT JUST AN ALTERNATIVE NIGHT BUT CLUB EVENTS. IT WAS TREMENDOUS.**

—Scary Lady Sarah

of a tube! I'm just me. I'm just doing what I do and I love what I do. I hope to make a living doing what I do. I can't imagine doing anything else. I can't imagine retiring. But I'm the same, it's like everybody else outside is rotating and changing so there's these different generations.

**I think you're defining what creates longevity. You have to have love for what you're doing and you've been consistent.**

**SRF:** I've been consistent, that I would say for sure. I love what, to me, the scene is. I love all the different elements of it even though maybe younger generations don't know all the different elements, it's fine that they're there and they're having fun and like music. I want to create a haven.

**What has the transition back to in-person events looked like for you? Have you noticed larger shifts in how/who comes out to events now?**

**SRF:** We've done Nocturna twice now. It was a fascinating learning experience. So July 17 was our first Nocturna back after literally 17 months and it was one of the first big club nights in Chicago, not just an alternative night but club events. It was tremendous. We had over 650 people, which is about what we do for Halloween. Pre-pandemic normal Nocturna would be like 350-400 people, which is still fine, I was happy with it. So in July, everyone had to show proof of vaccination but a mask mandate was not yet in effect. People could wear them or not; it was optional. We had a tremendous, tremendous turnout and the energy was fantastic from start

to finish. We did another on August 21. Chicago reinstated the mask mandate the night before. Also, there's the fear of the Delta variant. So we had one of the slower nights we've had in many years and I think it is primarily those two things. People didn't want to club with a mask on, even though they were all vaccinated. Going to a concert wearing a mask is one thing. Yes, you're standing and watching it. But going to a club is a social thing where you're interacting with people, not just watching one thing, and you're dancing. People are very much afraid of the Delta variant. It's just one more difference between the two.

**What are you finding inspiration in these days? What are you listening to and what are you into?**

**WF:** The things that do inspire me I'm always super vocal about. So there are bands out there that I think are doing stellar work, bands like Actors and Bootblacks.

**SRF:** Great people aside from the great music.

**WF:** Yeah, I just did a remix for [Bootblacks] that is coming out soon. Also, Rosegarden Funeral Party out of Texas. And then there's the classics that have been sitting around forever that I'm always big on like The Soft Moon, an example of a band that is doing what I would call goth really well and it's his own unique take on it. This is tilting back to what you asked earlier, but a friend of ours in London, Michael Johnson of [the webzine] *Nemesis To Go*, said "all of the most interesting goth bands that have been coming out are from bands that are not goth bands." They are from outside of that and

so they end up with their own idiosyncratic version of it and that's the stuff that blows my mind. This ties in to your art question: people that are harkening back to the generation immediately preceding theirs and drawing on that, rather than going several generations back to the root of it, the source of it—those things are far more interesting. Sarah and I, when it comes to music, the core of things we love but there's a lot of things we will endlessly argue about. She thinks like a DJ first and I think somebody else hit it on the head saying "there's breadth of enjoyment and there's depth of enjoyment." She's looking for what's new and what she can turn people on to. I will find one thing and talk about it for six months and I will keep playing it over and over again because I think people need to hear it.

**When vocals were added more prominently to The Soft Moon I think it caught a lot of attention from the dark alternative community because Luis Vasquez's voice is so expressive and emotive atop sometimes very industrial-leaning sounds.**

**WF:** What I love about it is when it first came out there were so few vocals but then he described something that absolutely just switched it up for me. Originally I was like, "oh, they are primarily instrumental with just sort of vocal textures." Then he explained what he was trying to convey was the feeling of being in a nightmare, trying to scream and get out of it and not being able to. When you go back and listen to some of that, you will hear exactly what he was talking about and then watch the evolution of it over several albums. Then you get to *Deeper* (2015) where he is really singing and the verses are amazing. That was one of those bands where I just love what he does, what he is about, and his approach to it.

**SRF:** His live performances are great.  
**WF:** Then bands like Drab Majesty. Love their music.

**Talented musicians behind the music, which is so important.**

**WF:** I want to see a friend's band and hadn't heard anything by Drab Majesty that really wowed me and based on what

they were wearing [at that show] I thought they were taking the piss. As soon as they started playing I was like, "Holy fuck."  
**SRF:** And I said "I told you!"

**WF:** Bands that are doing work like that are absolutely my bread and butter. I love what they do and I will trumpet from the rooftops about it. Another point we were making earlier: any time an opportunity presents itself for you to talk about your friends or convey something that you are personally enthused about, that you believe in and find value in, I think it is incumbent upon you to do it. In the same way, I've been fortunate enough in my career to have any modicum of success. It is essential and I think the only decent thing to do is reach your hand back and help others out and try to make your contacts available to help. That's always been my approach and still is. All those bands I mentioned are part of a very cool community of people and have the whole package: I go see them and I see everything I want to see up on the stage. I hear great songs, I see great musicianship, I see a show. They put effort in and uniformly they are really sweet people. So all that stuff together, these are the things that make me really happy. When I catch a band that's doing that, I guess ultimately it's the things that I miss from the scene of yore so when I see a band that is doing it now that has all of this put together, I can't talk about it enough.

**SRF:** The bands that I am really excited about now—I love so much music so it is really hard to narrow it down. A band I'm really excited for the new stuff coming up is Autumn. I've been a fan of theirs since the 90s of course and their very first output. The album that William produced, the last one *Chandelier* (2018).

**WF:** Clovis does the artwork and we do Set Records together. It's the two of us.

**SRF:** That album still is everything I want goth to be. They are working on the new album and William is already helping with a handful of the new songs. I cannot wait for that. Another one I love, but have not seen them live, is Delphine Coma. Again, everything I want in goth club songs. Black Angel, I love. It's funny, through Twitch I got to know some bands that I wasn't super familiar with like Hallowed Hearts and Black

Rose Burning. The guys from those bands have been such supportive community members. I love their music and I play it all the time. I'm really excited to see both of them play at some point. Push Button Press, their stuff is cool. I love La Scaltra from Germany. I got to see them at the last [Wave-Gotik-] Treffen.  
**WF:** Then Comes Silence.

**SRF:** They are so great. Love them.

**WF:** We are meant to be doing some touring together next year. They are one of the ones that are doing it right.

**SRF:** I've not happened to see them live yet, even though they are from Chicago and they are still fairly new, is French Police. They are really cool. All I do is listen to *new music!*

**What are you excited about for the future? Can you share any updates on the next The Bellwether Syndicate album?**

**WF:** We have a single dropping. Then we have two more singles ahead of the album.



**And a tour for the album?**

**WF:** Our agency at this point strongly recommended pulling the rest of the dates. They were all southern dates. We had four shows in Texas, New Orleans, Nashville, and Florida. At this point, honestly, we talked about it: the idea that people could come and see us and get sick and get someone sick as a result of that.



**SRF:** It's not worth it.

**WF:** I've been watching the clock ticking by and tours cancel, just one after another.

**SRF:** Even bloody Garth Brooks cancelled sold out arenas.

**It's scary because with venues potentially going dark again there is that question of whether they will come back or not.**

**WF:** We will not survive a second shutdown. That much I am sure of, venue wise. If people can take this seriously and do what's required. I understand the economic concern that it's doing your business but what is better: reduced numbers or zero numbers? Those are your choices and it seems like pretty simple math to me. We will be focusing on getting subsequent videos out.

**SRF:** In March [2022] we have scheduled touring but we'll see how it goes.

**WF:** As of right now for 2022 we have 60 dates.

**SRF:** Wait and see.

**WF:** There's nothing more that I love than doing live and it can't come soon enough but we cannot hurt anyone in the process.

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Check out Sarah and William's band The Bellwether Syndicate on Instagram @thebellwethersyndicate and go to William's full-service design and education firm Genius Loci Permaculture at [www.geniuslocipermaculture.com](http://www.geniuslocipermaculture.com) for more information about permaculture.