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Back Tracks ...

Track: Halo of Flies
Artist: Alice Cooper
Drummer: Neal Smith

When and where was that track recorded?

Neal Smith: "Halo Of Flies" was on the *Killer* album, our second album for Warner Bros — which was actually our fourth Alice Cooper album — recorded in the fall of 1971. We recorded *Killer* at the RCA studios in Chicago, where we recorded *Love It To Death*.

What drum set up did you use to record the track?

Neal Smith: For the "Halo Of Flies" session, I was recording on 14 drums from my 18 piece Slingerland silver sparkle set, an early 70's vintage. I had two 22" kick drums with only a single head, the batter head. There were four 13" mounted tom toms across the front and a rack of four additional orchestra toms: 13", 14", 15", and 16" on floor stands around two floor toms, 16" and 18". I used two Slingerland snare drums: one 14" X 5" chrome snare, and one wooden snare, 14" X 7", which I used in the solo section.

I played all Zildjian cymbals as usual, the only cymbals that I have ever used, even today. To my right I had a large 22" medium-heavy ride cymbal. In the center of the drums I had an 18" medium crash and on my far left I had a 16" medium crash. They had a rich, crystal clear tone to them. My hi-hats were 14" Zildjians. Cymbals were very important in this song. Some sections had a very Middle Eastern, exotic flavor to them, both theatrical and a bit James Bond-ish. When I wrote my drum parts, I would imagine how the music would fit into the score for a spy movie. That song is distinctive in that it seems to be made up of many very different parts, giving it an almost epic feel.

How was the song written?

Neal Smith: "Halo of Flies" was written by fusing different song ideas together. Everyone in the band — Dennis, Michael, Glen, Alice and I — wrote songs, so there were always a lot of song ideas floating around. I was recently speaking to Bob Ezrin (producer). He recalled that while working with us on the pre-production of *Killer*, one morning he and Glen Buxton were listening to tapes of uncompleted song ideas the band had written. All of a sudden, the idea hit them to combine these different song ideas together



into one finished epic piece. That's exactly what we did.

The continuity of the rhythm section, Dennis on bass and me on the drums, along with a great arrangement was the secret to making the song a success. Once the arrangement was complete and well rehearsed, we took the song into the RCA studios in Chicago and recorded it.

How was the drum solo portion of the song recorded?

Neal Smith: For the solo, I wanted to do something special and create a bigger-than-life drum sound. The solo was going to be overdubbed and mixed into the song once the bed tracks were recorded. On the bed tracks where the drum solo was to be played, all of the music and the studio drums dropped out while Dennis continued playing a galloping bass line going full speed ahead over the drum solo section. After Dennis played a pre-determined number of measures, I played a tight press snare roll on the bed track, silent to loud, which cues the band in for the rest of the song.

To get that over-the-top drum sound I was looking for to record my drum solo, we found a very live, loud and boomy room: a Women's bathroom just down the hall from the studio. The room's marble floors and walls made for an incredibly live, resonant sound. The drums were set up there and then the microphones were pulled in. I put on the headphones and recorded the drum solo right then and there for posterity in the ladies bathroom. What inspiration!

After our first couple of albums, music critics would say that Alice Cooper was all theatrics and props; they'd talk about everything except the music. By the time we recorded and released the *Killer* album featuring "Halo of Flies," any notion that the band couldn't play was set to rest. That's one of the reasons the band was especially proud of that song.