



DADDY'S LITTLE NIGHTMARE:

Calico Cooper Reveals Her Plans for World Domination

BY WILLIAM WRIGHT

She is the daughter of the ultimate rock 'n' roll nightmare. The eldest of the infamous and influential rocker Alice Cooper's three children, twenty-seven-year-old Calico Cooper is surprisingly well-adjusted to be the offspring of a man whose decadent musical excesses during the 1970s made him the progenitor and reigning king of what would come to be known as "shock rock", as well as a universal symbol of youthful rebellion. Unlike many children of celebrities, Calico Cooper sees no need to either distance herself or cash in on her famous parentage, nor does she seem likely to implode in her father's shadow. In fact, she embraces the association while maintaining her own distinct identity. For much of the past decade, Cooper has been on what seems to be a perpetual world tour with her father as the featured dancer, actor and "whip girl"

portraying on stage all of Alice's many female foils (and source of his inevitable comeuppance by guillotine or the gallows) including "The Nurse," "Britney," "Paris" and "The Death Dealer" in a position she inherited from

her mother, Sheryl, whom her father met while on the legendary Welcome to My Nightmare tour. On her rare respites from her father's renowned rock 'n' roll horror show, Calico has managed to find time to wash off the glitter and stage blood and hammer a promising career as an Independent film actress, appearing in everything from a rare dramatic turn in the award-winning 2007 exploration of the ecstasy-fueled "rave" scene *Rolling*, to "B" grade shockers such as *Bloodline: The Legend of El Charo* (2005) and the horror anthology *Scarlet Fry's Junkfood Horrorfest* (2006). After chasing the beautiful and talented actress and dancer around the world by phone and e-mail for over a year, I was lucky enough to catch Calico Cooper fresh from the Asian leg of the *Psychodrama* world tour with two sold-out shows in Japan.

"Japan was amazing," Cooper says of her recent stint in the Far East. "Before that we played in New Zealand with a band called Lordi and KISS and we had a blast! Between the three of those bands there was glitter and blood and cannons and fire and the audience was just dumbfounded!" Alice Cooper's touring schedule is notoriously long and grueling; nevertheless Calico somehow manages to maintain high spirits and a high level of enthusiasm about the current show. Sounding more like an Alice Cooper fan than a seasoned performer with the most physically challenging part in the

RADDY'S LITTLE NIGHTMARE:

concert, she remains excited even after months on road. "This year's show goes off! It's really great. We do the hanging and we have this great political satire at the end. It's a fun show—exhausting, but really funny," Cooper enthuses.

As a young woman forging her own place in the entertainment industry, it's easy to assume that Cooper would have long grown tired of answering incessant questions about her father, however she takes it in stride thanks to her solid and grounded upbringing. "It's interesting because when I was a kid, I wasn't really hip to what was going on," Cooper says. "We had such a normal upbringing. We had chores and normal kid allowances straight out of the gate. It wasn't until I was in junior high and high school and making friends that their parents would tell them, 'You know who her Dad is, right?' And then I realized that not everyone's dad put on makeup and wielded a snake!" Cooper laughs. "I guess I really don't get tired of talking [about him] because people are curious and he's an interesting character. The character he's created is legendary and I respect him so much for that, but as far as my career goes, maybe a little!"

Cooper's self-described "normal upbringing" at the hands of both the man who wrote "Dead Babies" and the original Nurse Rozetta, went far in helping her avoid the pitfalls that many children of famous people fall into. Cooper credits growing up outside of the circus of celebrity for keeping her grounded. "Honestly, I didn't have a lot of celebrities' kids for friends. When I was growing up, I went a public school and I had public school friends. I just never felt entitled. I don't think that anybody owes me anything and I actually like deserving something. I like breaking a sweat and getting a couple of bruises and knowing that whatever it is I'm working for, I earned that. It really makes you realize the value of a dollar when you don't have it just thrown in your face. I am a little jealous, though. Sometimes I wish I could play that card and walk into an audition and say, 'Don't you know who I think I am?'" Cooper laughs.

At any rate, don't expect to see

Calico Cooper in the tabloids ala Hilton, Spears and Lohan any time soon.

Given her father's famous battle with and eventual triumph over alcoholism in the 1970s and early '80s, Calico is understandably cautious about the dangers of addiction even though she never witnessed Alice's struggle first hand. "I was unaware of it as a child and he had it pretty much in the bag by the time I was old enough to know what was going on," Cooper states. "I became sensitive to it more so as I was getting older when I was sixteen and seventeen when you start going, 'Well,

should I have a beer at this party? I know it's illegal...'" Wisely, her parents did not adopt a strict anti-alcohol stance as some might have in light of the severity of her father's alcoholism. Instead, they offered her sound, realistic and wholly non-judgmental advice and the room to make her own decisions for good or bad. "My parents never said 'Drinking is bad.' They said 'Being an alcoholic is not good.' They said just be aware that you have a genetic predisposition to being an addict so be careful whatever you decide to do. We have a very strong Christian background, too, and the people I was



...Cooper also has cinematic aspirations on the other side of the lens.



around just weren't into [drinking]." Nevertheless, Cooper finds that she must constantly keep her guard up. "I got older and moved to Los Angeles and started going out all the time and really, to this day, I've got to watch my intake because it is genetic. I'll go off. I turn into Jim Morrison—you have no idea! But, I'm always reminding myself that that can only happen once in a month, getting that silly. If that starts becoming an everyday thing or if I had to start drinking before the show in order to do the show or drinking before an audition to calm my nerves, that's when I would start worrying," Cooper says. Still, she maintains an ironic sense of humor (obviously a Cooper family trait) about a serious subject. "Luckily, [drinking] has not gotten there. Come to me in another five years and see how many rehabs I've been through!"

Although she first danced into the spotlight as the "whip girl" for 2000's Brutal Planet tour, Calico has been an integral part of the Alice Cooper show since the age of 16. Initially, her involvement was somewhat accidental, totally anonymous and owing mostly to her love of the stage. "I've been in the show since '97," Cooper says of her early days on tour. "That was just kind of a fluke. He was kind of coming back and starting to put together a more theatrical show. He started up this tour called the Rock and Roll Carnival. At the beginning of the show, there were these evil, twisted clowns in masks and they would come on stage and do these little bits and vignettes and you would never see their faces," Cooper explains, "I'm a theatre junkie—I'm a performer! So, I would beg him, 'Dad, let me be a clown tonight! Let me a clown tonight' and he would let me go on." Calico soon discovered that her occasional role as an evil clown was a vital and practical theatre education. "I learned how a stage show worked, where to stand, where not to be if I didn't want to get my ear cut off. I started picking up the bug of performing." Three years later, Alice Cooper had to look no further than his own family for a new whip girl. This time, Calico would not have to beg for the part. "Then he launched the Brutal Planet

tour and he came to me and said, 'Look, if you're interested, I'd like to put you in the show. You're a great dancer. You're a great actor. And we need somebody to put some new life into these characters,'" she recalls. "You know, my mom used to do it in the '70s and I thought her performance was amazing. My mom created a character that was so spooky and cool and there were other girls who did it after her and they all brought their own thing to it." Calico would also put her own spin on the characters her mother made famous. "I have a hambone the size of New York City!" she laughs. "He said he wanted something more vaudeville, more hammy. I said, 'Well, you came to the right place.' So, I got up there and did it and loved it and owned it. Every year we try to bring in new characters and the characters that I have keep getting bigger and more ridiculous." Although taking on such an iconic part of Alice Cooper's legendary stage show, Calico was not at all reluctant to step into her mother's dominatrix boots and ballet slippers. "No, not at all. Ever since I was a little kid I wanted to be up on stage. I wanted to have that command of so many people like my dad had." Although she was not at all intimidated by taking up the role and excited by the opportunity to give a fresh interpretation of the characters, Calico did turn to her mother for one very important piece of training. "We really wanted to start fresh and bring new stuff in, however, there's a piece called 'Go to Hell' and I had no idea how to work a bullwhip—as a whip-wielding, mask-wearing guardian of the gates of hell! My mom had to teach me in an alleyway in Phoenix how to whip a bullwhip around my head and crack it without knocking my teeth out! And if that's not humiliating enough, my mother's like 'No! You've got to swing it harder!' and she's just the most refined, beautiful woman and she's swinging this bullwhip going 'You gotta get your back into it!' and I'm like 'Ahhhhh!'" Cooper says. "So, she influenced me there and also in the ballet piece, I took sort of the vibe she had in the original 'Only Women Bleed' and tried to make it a little more tragic."

In addition to dancing and acting

in the show, Calico is also responsible for a sizable share of the stage direction; however, on the Psychodrama tour, she had some heavyweight help. "I choreograph all of the little vignettes, but actually on this tour, Rob Roth, who directed Beauty and the Beast on Broadway, directed this last show and it was definitely an experience because before that I had always just kind of thrown things together and gone, 'Well, this looks good . . . I think' and I've always had control of my own thing as far as what I do on stage, but he had some really interesting insight being an Alice fan himself. He came up with all kinds of ideas—'What if we do this here and this here?' and I was like, 'I never thought of that!' But, I do direct all of my own vignettes in the show and since I'm the only 'stuntwoman' in the show, I've got to direct it. I'd kill myself, otherwise."

The scope and theatricality of an Alice Cooper show is just as expansive as a big, Broadway musical and the rehearsal period before hitting the road is just as laborious. "Musically, the band will rehearse for quite some time. We pack in so much into the one hour and forty-eight minutes that you actually see." Particularly tricky to pull off is a mid-show medley of Alice's creepiest tunes. "There's a number that we call 'The Piece' which is all the really theatrical songs—we can't do them all at full length," Cooper explains. "The band has got to sit down and listen to what key every song is in and guitar changes and we manage to fit fifteen songs into this piece in the middle of the show. Once they've got that worked out, I come in and say, 'There's no way that I'm going to be able to change into this outfit from this outfit in twenty-eight seconds, so we got to stick something else in there!' It takes a lot of preparation."

To the audience, the show looks like an extremely dangerous and bloody endeavor and, according to Calico Cooper, it is. On occasion she has spilled some blood that didn't come out of a bottle. "We have to test all the stunts and things go awry all the time," she says. "At rehearsal this year, I got stabbed in the head. I almost called Child Protection

DADDY'S LITTLE NIGHTMARE:

Services!” Cooper jokes. But, the perils and legendary rigors of the road are all worth it in the end. “We did the entire world. We covered the entire world. We always joke that the first two weeks are fun and then it becomes a job where you’re like, ‘Oh man, if I have to fall down those stairs one more time!’ You come home a little tired, a little thinner, a little beaten and bruised, but with a sense of accomplishment that’s like, ‘Wow!’” Cooper states. “At my age, I got to see the world and perform for people in countries I can’t even pronounce but with such rich, amazing cultures and they enjoyed it; they were screaming for me and you just cannot buy that.”

Along with that sense of accomplishment and world travel, touring also allows Cooper to interact with Alice’s millions of rabid fans—an experience that is always gratifying, humbling and, sometimes, a little weird. “Alice fans are an animal unto themselves,” Cooper explains. “They are so wildly dedicated—I’m talking sleeve tattoos of different eras of Alice—and they live and breathe and know more about our show and about us than we do. The Alice fans are amazing. They’ve gone with him and us through glam rock and metal and any time that we change our vibe, they’re right there. They’re not snotty and they never say, ‘I prefer this Alice or that Alice.’ They’re just hungry for the creativity and the music.” However, stories about her father in his decadent heyday never fail to make for an uncomfortable moment. “I admire their dedication, but it can be a little much! He’s my dad, first of all, and it’s a little strange to hear someone say ‘Yeah, I saw your dad back in the ‘70s when he...’ and then launch into some story and I go, ‘Eww! Really? I didn’t want to know that!’ I’ve worked my hardest to avoid that, so let’s not bring it up now!” Sometimes, Calico’s encounters with Alice fans lapse into the just plain surreal. “I’ve been chased by ten men wearing my dad’s makeup and clothes down an alleyway screaming ‘Calico! Calico!’ I’m like, ‘This is like some horrible nightmare!’ I could pinpoint certain Alice fans, but because they’re so

dedicated, they would hunt me down. It would be like, ‘Hey! Way to embarrass me in print you jerk!’”

Through the endless long rehearsals, grueling world tours and bizarre encounters with Alice’s fan base, Calico Cooper has somehow managed to pursue her chief passion of acting. With an ever-growing list of credits in Independent cinema, she is definitely due for her big break in film and it is likely that that break will come in the form of a horror film. Needless to say, her role in the Alice Cooper show has led to a virtual deluge of horror roles. A fan of the genre (and how could she not be?), Cooper would welcome typecasting. “I could really see myself being a scream queen,” Cooper muses. “To be honest with you, I wouldn’t mind that at all—one of my heroes, come on, Jamie Lee Curtis. She rules! If I could have a career like hers, whew! She’s got this great thing going for her and I think Sherri Moon Zombie has it too—this scream queen presence where she’s so believable and that’s a hard quality to come by.”

For Cooper, successfully pulling off a horror role relies less on acting chops than an inexplicable air of believability in the face of a terrifying and often ridiculous situation. “You get serious Shakespearean actors doing horror movies and they’re just not believable. Horror movies are supposed to be a release from reality. There is no way that a giant hundred headed squid just landed in your backyard and is going to suck your brain out!” she exclaims. Above all, the actress believes that the genre should be fun. “If you make it campy, and you make it over-the-top, that’s fun. That’s what people want to see and to sell that is like being a great car salesman.” An avid horror film lover and collector, Cooper obviously credits her famous father with passing down a deeply rooted love of the genre. “I adore [horror]. I have everything. I have everything in languages I don’t even understand! Everything from Wes Craven to Dario Argento. I am a horror movie fanatic and that definitely comes from my father.” A true genre aficionado, she counts both American and Euro horror films among

the most effective. “Obviously, you have to go with your classic. I would have to say *The Exorcist* is one of my favorites. That was one of the first movies that ever kept me awake at night and *Suspiria*—just the music in that movie scared the bejeezus out of me.”

Cooper gives little credence to the idea that violent horror films have a detrimental effect on children. “We were brought up watching movies that people would see and go, ‘You can’t let your kids watch that!’ Well, yes you can, if you explain that the guy’s head isn’t really severed, then they think it’s funny and it loses all its scariness.” To illustrate her point, Cooper recounts one of her first behind-the-scenes encounters with a legendary cinematic boogeyman. “When my dad did *Freddy’s Dead: The Final Nightmare*, he introduced me to Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund) in makeup. Now, why would I be scared of some dude? He’s friends with my dad, he’s not going to be under my bed.” Cooper has aspirations to one day make her mark on the genre just as Englund did with his now iconic character. “He really created that character and that is something I hope to do. You asked me if I would mind getting pigeonholed as a scream queen, that would be an honor because it’s a genre I’m so interested in and one that I think is so appreciated, yet so underappreciated. The art of a good horror film—the math on that is unbelievable to tackle. It’s real easy to be cheesy, not so easy to be scary.” But, what real life horror instills fear in the Calico Cooper’s heart? “The Olsen Twins. They might not be human.”

Following a string of bit parts in a handful of “B” grade Indie shockers and an unfortunately deleted scene in Rob Zombie’s *Halloween* which, despite its omission from the final cut, earned Cooper her Screen Actor’s Guild card, the young actress has at last found success in, ironically, a dramatic role. “I did this movie called *Rolling*, which is this Independent film that is heavy. It’s all about the ecstasy culture. It won the audience award at the San Diego Film Festival. So far it’s sweeping the Indie film circuit.” Cooper found her role in

the film especially challenging but ultimately rewarding. “It was an amazing experience because it was one of the few times I’ve gotten to dig into a character rather than just play myself. I enjoyed that thoroughly.” Cooper even got to employ a bit of energy drink-fueled method acting. “For me, I’ve never done ecstasy, so to simulate the effects, I was pounding Red Bull like it was going out of style,” she states. “I drank about twelve of them. We were doing this big rave dance sequence. They did not need to spray me with water to look like I was sweating. I was flipping out. I was on a bad Red Bull trip. So, I’m dancing around like I’m on crack. It was an amazing experience.”

However, genre fame may catch up with Calico Cooper yet. In the upcoming horror movie *The Visitor*, in preproduction at the time of this writing, Cooper will at last have her chance to carry a feature film in a lead role. “The script is really super-cool. It’s spooky,” Cooper says of the screenplay. “I’m really excited to shoot it. When I read the script, I got little goose bumps up and down my leg. It’s about the demented twisted spirit of a serial killer. I get to play a very young mother, which is kind of nice. I’ve never done that before.”

Not content with merely acting in other people’s projects, Cooper also has cinematic aspirations on the other side of the lens. “I’m a writer by nature, so what I’m trying to do is start a production company and start writing and producing my own films because there’s only so much waiting around for other people’s material that you can do. At least I feel like I’m being proactive rather than just waiting for it to fall in my lap.” The company will also serve as a springboard for new talent. “Then, I can help out other artists that just have great ideas like if someone came to me and said, ‘I got this great idea for a horror movie where this worm appears out of nowhere and crawls in a guy’s ear and tells him what to do,’ I can say ‘Great! Here’s the money. Let’s do it.’ I’m shooting at having it up and



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-CALICO COOPER



running full tilt boogie by the beginning of next year.”

Aside from another tour kicking off in July in support of Alice Cooper’s new album, which is currently in the recording stage, Calico has big plans for the remainder of 2008. “I’m going to spend the next six months just pounding the pavement until you’re tired of seeing me. I want success in this industry so badly from a business standpoint and an artistic standpoint,” says Cooper. “I really want

to make an impact and be somebody who can stand on their own two feet in this industry which is hard enough. I promise you that before the year is out, you won’t be able to get away from me.”

Look for Calico in all her bloody glory on tour with Alice Cooper in a city near you (trust me, it is an experience you will never forget) and be sure to visit her at her official webpage www.calicocooper.com.