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Fashion History – Models talking : Scott Barnhill by Nadine Dinter

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This month, I am re-introducing the artist **Scott Barnhill**, who has been one of the few well-known male models of the 90s. I ran across Scott's IG a few weeks ago, after having spotted one of his latest portraits, taken by the iconic photographer couple Inez & Vinoodh. Let him take you back in time and share his personal story, plus an outlook on what's next for him.

Nadine Dinter : Short Introduction of yourself (Name, Country of Origin, Date of Birth, Star Sign, or whatever you want to include)

Scott Barnhill : My name is Alvin Scott Barnhill, I have always gone by Scott because from an early age the kids from Chicago, where I am from, would always make fun of me for my first name—Alvin—it wasn't a common name. I was born in the winter of '77. I am a Sagittarius. I was always sensitive to the world around me. Growing up, I'd like to think I was in-tune, connected to my dreams and reality—they always felt the same to me—interconnected, intertwined. It was something that caused me great difficulty for years, but now I am comfortable with it and I use it—similar to when someone says, "I just have a gut feeling." I am in hyper-tune with it. I spent years believing that I had native origins, but I found out much later that it was Slavic—and this made a lot of sense—if you know or have studied about tribes, origins, and different cultures, the Slavic people are in-tune and very spiritual.

When did you start out as a model?

I started out as a model when I was 17. I was scouted out by Cindy Cooper. She saw me out at Pleasure Island Walt Disney World, asked me if I was a model, and passed me her number and told me to call her if I was ever interested. I didn't think too much of it until I came home from work two weeks later and was watching tv. The VH1 Fashion Awards were on. I saw the runners-up and the male model who won, and I thought to myself, "I can do that," so the next day I pulled out the number and called. That was my start.

There was a big transition point in my life, just before I had met Cindy, and I can honestly say meeting her saved my life. I won't go into too much detail on that now, because this backstory will be in my book and documentary I am working on.

How and why did you enter the industry? Please share an anecdote of how, by whom, and where you were discovered.

See above.

What was your first booking?

My first couple of bookings were for teen magazines, like *Seventeen*, and with Anne Menke for *Bridal Vogue*. I also did a few German catalogs. I almost gave up on trying, and at one point I moved back to my town, working at a gas station pumping gas. Then a call came in to go down to Miami for a casting. I went and landed the job—that was the first big one—Diesel Jeans with Ellen Von Unwerth. Quickly after, I started working more, with Steven Meisel, then Herb Ritts, Richard Avedon, Karl Lagerfeld, Mario Sorrenti, and...I thought it was amazing that the photographers that I started with like Anne Menke and others like Scott Teitler still booked me for cool editorials or up-and-coming pieces, blurbs, and interviews for the teen bop magazines. I have been so blessed to have worked with everyone and more than once.

– runway

My first runway show was for Armani Exchange in Miami, a local show on South Beach, and then from there—went to New York and shot with Steven Meisel—and literally two weeks after that, I was in Milan for my first official Fashion Week.

– fashion shoot

I would say the first high-end fashion shoot I did was with Ellen—though I did others before—working with Ellen was the tipping point. It was hysterical, I was being shot in my underwear on the beach—finding a “dead ice skater” in the ocean—I still find it funny to this day. That was, and is, my first big shoot. Looking back, I understand now the real creativity that goes into a good production. The coolest part to that shoot was Ellen asking me if I had any friends that we could put in the shoot—she was looking for skaters and surfers. I just so happened to have a photo-booth picture with a bunch of friends crammed in it, showed her, and she pointed to my friend Brian. He ended up in the shoot with me, and now years later Brian and his kids are in my first commercial video. I love having those kinds of connections. He was in my first commercial model job with me, and now he is in my first commercial music video over 30 years apart, and still friends.

You have worked with the biggest names in photography (Inez & Vinoodh, Steven Meisel, Peter Lindbergh, to name just a few). Is there someone you didn't work with that you wish you had? Can you tell one favorite story from your early model years?

Ohhh I have many... Yes, I worked with—I feel in some sort of capacity—with everyone that I could have, I feel like I worked with literally everyone. I would love to be able to work again at some point with most of them that are still living. Rest in light the ones we have lost and that have passed away. I feel I have something that I learned, that directly reflects with my life, from working with each of them. They were all part of my journey, being influenced and surrounded by them. I learned a lot about life, light, and character work—and I learned about myself. I recently worked again with Steven Meisel, and also Inez & Vinoodh, and absolutely loved catching up with them. I would really love to work with Sean Ellis again—though he does film now—and Guzman. I'd also like to work with NP Novak, and Van Alpert—they do more video and film work—but with today's medium, and the fact that I also do music, it seems like it wouldn't be too far a stretch—and I absolutely love acting, so I would absolutely love it. Never stop dreaming! I also absolutely love working with new photographers, as well.

In the 1990s, you reached the zenith of your career, doing runways and ads for Jean-Paul Gaultier, Versace, Fendi, and Helmut Lang. What is your favorite memory from that decade and what was the most memorable photo production (shooting, campaign, runway)?

I have a lot of memorable moments, no one more than the next, but I will say—I will always remember meeting and working with Gianni Versace. It was a Spring Summer show—I was not placed in line-up yet—and we were doing a rehearsal. He had a group of guys lined up and he told me to line up with them. I didn't know who all the guys were, really, and it didn't matter to me—but I was told to just walk out, stop in the center of the stage, and make a body movement and the music would stop when I did, then make another movement to start the music again. I did what came natural to me, and after I did my movement—he stopped the whole rehearsal—and was so excited, he used me as the example for the rest of the group. I think it was at that point I was put on everyone's radar, to say, "Hey—who is this kid?" I was told later that the group of guys I was walking with were the top-of-the-top, and here I enter—the skater kid from Chicago.

How do you perceive the fashion industry today? What's your take on modeling nowadays, and is there a different feel to it, compared to the 1990s/2000s?

I am going to say same-same, but different. The whole process is still the same, and I am seeing a lot of clicky groups, and the underlying feeling of jealousy and judgment is still there. That is something that most models will not talk about or admit, but I see it.

Back in the late '90s and early 2000s, there were a few top male models that just had a bad attitude. Once, one of them spit in a hallway down a flight of stairs at me for no apparent reason, and there was this other model who always would say to me, "Man, you took that job from me," like I was stealing from him, like I had control over who booked me and when. It was just bullying and anger, so I see that now still happening, but on a grander scale because of the internet. I laughed the other day when someone called me the skull emoji—that was a pretty funny one that I won't forget.

I see changes from within the industry side, the client side—when you do a show now, it is just one or two looks max for the guys—and they are using more models, which I think is a great thing, because they can showcase a bigger line with more personality and diversity. In the '90s and 2000s, you could have up to five or six outfit changes, but most of the time it was around three to four, on average. Now it seems like upwards of 70 models per show, and before it would be 30-50. One thing that hasn't changed is once you're on the runway or in front of the camera—it is go time. The bright lights become the story of your life.

Your advice to aspiring fashion models?

Go for it—and work on movement—everything has a movement to it, even if it's just the world moving around you, and support your community, and be ready for travel at a moment's notice. Even when things seem slow and down—stay healthy, or as healthy as you can—and most of all, enjoy it—because if you're not, then why do it? Also grab a camera and start shooting, or your phone, because you can learn a lot from both sides of the lens.

You are also well-known as a musician. Tell us a little bit more about how you keep all those activities flowing—and whether they inspire one another or whether you handle them separately?

Up until this year, I handled everything separately. I didn't think people in the music industry would take me seriously, but as with the changing times and industry I see that to not be the case anymore. I have decided to put it all together this year and I am doing a run at mixing fashion with my music, and a brand as well. I am launching my first single October 15th, 2024 called "Unstable," by Scott and the 1015. It will launch on all platforms, with a music video as well. It will also coincide with the launch of our first shirt for our brand.

The shirt is a limited-run 1015 Hypnotized Androgynous Skull T and there will only be 300. It is a hand-drawn piece of art that we screenprinted, that you can wear. We are launching this line of custom limited run Ts.

The music feeds the creative side when I'm not working in fashion, and it helps with character when I am working in fashion—so they all feed each other—and I love bringing them together. It has been my dream ever since I turned 18. It feels like I can finally mix them up and I do not have to have them separated anymore.

When did you start out as a musician? Was there one inspirational moment? And how has your own process developed over the years (how you work, what inspires you, etc.?)

I started out writing, that was what put me on the path to music. I wanted to write screenplays, but in doing so, it wasn't a fast enough turnaround on seeing your creations come to life, so I started writing songs—at first, poetic rhymes. I met a musician who showed me a few chords on guitar and I just never stopped playing. I knew I forever wanted to do music: it was my way. To be able to make the transition from modeling to music I thought I had to bridge a gap, and I decided to start DJing. I found early and fast success with this in the NYC nightlife, DJing some epic underground and high profile parties. This led to creating show music for a few fashion houses. I think from an outsider's perspective, the highlight would be opening up for Funkmaster Flex at Lotus Lounge back in the day, but for me, I knew it was only a small part on my path to what I really wanted to do. Now, over 30 years later, I feel like I have finally crossed

over and made it. For me, I have made it, because I am a musician and singer now. My dream has come true. The release of “Unstable” on the 15th of October will be the first of many to follow.

I will always remember my first opportunity to be on a stage and do a song. It was the friend that showed me the chords that got me on stage at the Bitter End, NYC. He played some chords and had his drummer busting out a beat, and he invited me on stage to do this piece of poetry that I had written called “The Six Guns Of Karma.”

What’s your main job/occupation today? What does your daily schedule look like? Do you have a daily routine?

My everyday job is doing everything I have mentioned, and also working full-time as a commercial electrician. I feel like I am constantly working, but it all flows well and it keeps me doing all the things I love doing.

I wake at 4:15am, have coffee, and check and respond to emails and messages from Europe. I leave my house at 5:30am, arrive at work at 6:30am. I work till 3:30pm and drive home, then I work on the brand and music. I respond to end-of-day emails. All working on the music, fashion, brand, the documentary, and book. Right now, I am handling everything. I just spent the last couple of weeks working a lot more on everything as we are getting closer to launching. I do not expect a lot to happen, but I want to be prepared for what could happen if that makes sense, and I am doing everything I can to make it the best I can.

You are currently working on a book/autobiography as well as on a documentary about yourself. Can you share some more insights about it?

Yes, I am working on a documentary and book, with a book deal at the moment. The book will cover from when I was a child, my first memory—and take you through my life from being a child survivor of sexual assault, to finding myself in prison, being addicted to heroin and pills, and my journey of taking my life back, sobriety, and how it’s possible to beat all the odds, living to be alive.

It will be the narrative for the documentary, following the story arc.

What’s next for you?

Playing live shows again will be next. I am really excited to be able to have the chance to get back out there and play live shows again.

That will be the next step, but for now—it is working on the release and launch of the music and the brand for the release on October the 15th, and working on some fashion jobs as they come in. Until they do, I’ll be doing electrical work, along with building the business infrastructure. I also mentor a few models. I have a side program that I started up, just to give anyone interested the ins-and-outs of the fashion industry. I feel that If I can help out someone that is getting into the business, then that would be great, keep it positive, and an opportunity to share my experience—I think it’s a win-win.

Current mantra or affirmation?

Live to be alive, I am not living to die. I won’t waste my time, I won’t waste my life.

In order to see & read more about Scott Barnhill, check out his instagram @scott.barnhills and make sure to download his new single “Unstable,” by Scott and the 1015, which was just released on October 15th.