

diversions

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thursday, february 21, 2008

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IT'S BACK...
... AND IT'S THIRSTY FOR MORE

NEVERMORE IX

ONE WEEKEND ONLY!



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STAFF WRITERS

Durham, N.C.: The Bull City. Home to baseball, tobacco and medicine.

And this weekend, the city also plays host to all sorts of ghosts and ghouls, monsters and psycho-killers as the ninth annual Nevermore Film Festival brings some of the year's best independent horror films to the Triangle.

The festival, which will be held Feb. 22-24 at Durham's Carolina Theatre, will feature 10 feature length films, including "Highlander" and Dario Argento's "Tenebre," as well as a collection of short films that claim to range from the darkly humorous to the outright horrifying.

But what is it about the often maligned, usually violent horror genre that makes successful festivals, such as Nevermore, a possibility?

Searching Google Scholar for "attraction to horror" reveals almost 50,000 scholarly reports looking for the motivations horror fans have for viewing their favorite films.

A 1995 report by Deirdre D. Johnson, of Hope College, titled "Adolescents' Motivations for Viewing Graphic Horror," divides the horror-movie audience into four major segments: gore

watching, thrill watching, independent watching and problem watching.

Gore watching, according to Johnson's report, is typified by viewers who are interested in viewing physical violence on-screen.

Thrill watchers, however, prefer the elements of suspense in movies.

Independent watchers use horror films to test and overcome fears, and lastly, problem watchers often report anger and loneliness both before and after viewing graphic horror films.

But maybe there's an even simpler answer.

"People just enjoy a good scary film," says Jim Carl, Senior Director of the Carolina Theatre, and one of Nevermore's organizers. "They're fun. They're profitable for the studios."

"The audience that comes for those shows has no real social or economic background," he adds, noting that there is no clear cut way to typify horror fans.

Filmmaker Norbert Caoili agrees, saying of horror films, "People scream the whole time, while laughing the whole time ... It's the fun of escapism from reality." His film, "Frayed" will make its N.C. premier at Nevermore.

The festival aims to include films that will appeal to horror fans of all stripes,

along with films that will be new to most members of the audience.

"A typical Nevermore submission is an independent, mid-budget horror film that is making its premiere in N.C.," says Carl.

And with more than 130 submissions this year, the juried selection process was forced to omit many films, allowing only the best of the best to make the final cut.

"Frayed" surprised me the most," says Carl. "It's a retelling of 'Halloween,' but I thought it was very well done from beginning to end."

And then for the shorts, I think 'Zombie Love,' which is actually a musical about zombies, completely caught me off guard."

Another off-beat title slated to be shown is "Brain Dead," a zombie-themed horror-comedy that uses excessive gore and nudity to give the audiences more laughs than scares.

"What we wanted to do was give the standard horror fan every thing they wanted to get in a horror film," says Kevin Tenney, the director of the movie, adding that many horror movies only provide audiences with mindless gore and nudity.

"What we wanted to do was give them those elements, and then go above and

beyond and give them interesting characters, a good story and rapier-sharp dialogue."

Tenney says that horror-comedy is often a hard trick to pull off.

"Bad horror-comedy is just like bad comedy: it's not funny," he said. "Good horror comedy can be 'Evil Dead,' 'Dead Alive' or 'Re-Animator,' and can achieve cult status."

Tenney adds that the genre also can be an outlet for excess.

"I'm a big believer in that when you're trying to make something truly scary you can't go too gory," he said. "If you want to make the kind of film that has that kind of gore, it makes more sense to take a kind of comedic slant to it."

"Let the humor come out of the characters and the excessiveness of the gore."

Caoili aims for a different tactic with "Frayed."

"Let the scare be the star of the movie," he says.

"Our goal was to just capture some of the style that has been lost in a lot of ways in the horror genre. A lot of the movies today just go for the gore and are less about the scares."

He calls his film, "more of a suspense movie; more about the scares and what you don't see."

But the commonality between the filmmakers is that both make horror films because — as Caoili puts it — "They're just fun to do."

And, Tenney would add, underappreciated.

"You look at the Academy Awards, you rarely see a thriller, a comedy or a horror film even nominated. They make them because the one movie you can depend on to make money is horror," he says.

"Let's start making festivals to honor the horror films. 'Cause there are good horror films and bad horror films and if you're going to lump them all together, then you're not doing the good horror films justice."

But the fact remains, not everybody enjoys watching horror movies of any kind.

That might not be a bad thing, though, as Nevermore has already built a loyal enough following to make it a consistently successful event able to attract quality films.

"I don't think horror is for everyone," says Carl. "The true horror fans — they know who they are, and if they're interested in Nevermore, they already know about it."

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