Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: "Trendy Casting" & Generic Movie Posters - August 2002 *My Very First Column!*

For my first TFTM page, I'd like to discuss the pros and cons of a continuing trend in the horror genre that seemed to start with Wes Craven's movie **Scream** back in 1996. The trend I'm referring to is not the self-referential nature of many movies, which has worn thin, but the seemingly compulsive practice of loading these movies with "hip and trendy" teen stars. Now, before I discuss what I think is a negative aspect of this whole trend, let me first say that I'm very glad **Scream** happened, both because Wes Craven deserved another major smash after all his years of toiling in the horror field, and, more importantly, because it gave new life to a genre that appeared to be running on fumes. (Although admittedly none of this is new discussion material, I felt I needed to acknowledge it). However, I believe that the downside with these movies is that they are so geared around personalities that most pictures just become vehicles for hot young actors and actresses. The horror element, what there is of it, is usually muted and/or spoofed, and the movies are so stylized and concerned with being hip that they often differ only slightly from teen comedies (which feature the very same small group of actors and actresses)! I say this not in disrespect to anyone, as there are a lot of talented young actors and actresses seen on screen, but just out of concern that the horror film for many has become yet another passing trend and in many respects has lost the edge it once had in years past with films like **Night of The Living Dead** (the 60's), **Halloween** (the 70's) & **A Nightmare on Elm Street** (the 80's). Being that I'm in my thirties now, I do have a bias toward the movies of my youth - mainly 80's films - which always brings to mind the fact that in 80's movies horror could be scary and effective without any name actors and the movie could focus primarily on the story and the horror element. While many may criticize the 80's slasher films for being low on characterization and overly concerned with gore effects, I would still argue that many of these seminal films cannot be matched today. In the 80's there was always still some doubt as to whether that "final

girl" would make it to the end of the film, whereas with many of the 90's horror pictures you just knew they wouldn't dare kill off that young television sitcom cutie (or when they did it was usually done very quickly or off-screen). Some relatively recent proof that personalities seem to be almost all that counts was found in a review I read for the monster movie *Jeepers Creepers*. Within the first two lines of this critic's review he mentioned that the brother and sister featured in the movie (the main characters) were played by unknown actors. Maybe I take things too seriously at times, but this bothered me. The thought immediately came to mind that this reviewer was probably taking that fact into heavy consideration in his assessment of the film and that he wanted to caution anybody thinking of going to see it about this possible negative aspect (meaning none of the familiar faces were present here so it might not be worth seeing). I just felt like shouting when I read this and when I thought about how many decent horror movies are relegated to videotape (not the worst fate in the world but just unfair) just because they don't have any popular teen names in them. It seems the movie industry is often telling horror fans like me that movies I can appreciate are second-rate and should be relegated to this lowly status. Sorry, but we all can't be so trendy.

As another example of the trend of focusing too much on personalities, I submit that ever since *Scream*, most movie posters and video/DVD box covers for teen horror movies have looked almost identical. Have you noticed that for movie after movie they just line up the attractive teens in a v-shape or straight across the picture with the best looking/most popular actor or actress in the middle and the others slightly behind him or her? And the horror element (again what there is of it) is either not present or is in a dark shadow lurking above/behind them. Once again, all this is probably not the worst thing in the world, because horror is definitely hot and more pictures are being made than ever before. And the 90's did produce a lot of good movies like *Scream*, the first *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Final Destination* just to name a few. As I said at the beginning of the piece, like most things there are pros and cons to this trend.

Wouldn't it be an idea to get about a dozen of these posters, line them up side by side on a wall, and have all these model types staring ominously back at you? Now that would be funny!