

## 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!

### Movie Review - *House of Wax (2005)* - Better than one might expect – June 2005

I know I've mentioned in previous columns how I'm not generally a big fan of remakes of classic horror films, and how I'm hoping to get away from reviewing them, but it seems like there is just no end in sight to the trend. The latest title to hit the big screen in 2005 is *House of Wax*, a remake of the 1953 Vincent Price film. In this new version a group of teenagers driving to a football game decide to pull off the road and spend the night camping out in the middle of nowhere. Overnight they are rudely disturbed by an ominous truck with blinding headlights. The unseen driver stays long enough to unnerve everyone before disappearing into the forest. Soon after this the group finds out one of their cars needs a new belt before it will run again, so a couple of the teens get a ride to the nearest service station with a very redneck-type local man. They then arrive at a mostly abandoned town which has a very impressive wax museum at its center. Following this is when the carnage begins. The movie stars Elisha Cuthbert, Chad Michael Murray, Brian Van Holt and Paris Hilton.

First, for those familiar with the classic Vincent Price film, it's quite obvious even from a short plot summary that this new film bears little resemblance to the original except for the wax museum setting. From the trailer the picture looked to me like another teen slasher story and I have to admit that I really wasn't expecting much walking into the movie theater. However I'm happy to say that while the movie was certainly not perfect, it was quite a bit better than one would imagine.

Throughout at least the first half-hour this film really doesn't work. A group of stereotypical characters are placed in the very familiar horror movie scenario of driving through the middle of nowhere only to stop and be terrorized by some unseen menacing figure(s).\* We have the standard attractive young people bickering over this and that and generally being portrayed in the way one familiar with these films might expect them to

be. From the outset one young girl is given the most attention and is obviously destined to be the Final Girl in the picture, while her disagreeable brother is either intended to turn into a hero, or meet a quick and gruesome end. The rest of the group isn't spotlighted very much except for a couple sex scenes, and one can probably guess their fate from the outset. Additionally, one character is constantly filming everyone with a video camera, and this view is used quite a bit early on in the film. These **Blair Witch**-style footage shots really don't add anything to the proceedings and in fact I found them quite annoying, leading me to think early on that I was in for a long night.

Fortunately the second half of the film improves dramatically. When we get to the impressive looking wax museum in the middle of town things get exciting. There is a lot of nice detail in the wax figures and the whole atmosphere of the place is downright creepy, immediately bringing to mind the Vincent Price classic of the same name. Things get even creepier when we find out that the wax figures in the museum aren't the only things made of wax, and that a man and his separated Siamese twin run the town. These brothers are well-portrayed, especially the mysterious and brutal Vincent, and their back-story is interesting enough.\*\*

There are also many intense moments in this latter half of the film highlighted by some fairly gruesome and creative deaths scenes. For example I thought it was clever how the film featured a fairly elaborate wax-centered demise for one character, while offing others with vicious **Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>**-style slayings. Paris Hilton's well-publicized final scene was a standout in this latter category. In short gore hounds should not be disappointed here, just as I wasn't disappointed by the impressive, action-packed ending. Add to this the overall decent performances by the lead heroines and villains, and the **2005 House of Wax** becomes worth watching despite a rough start.

\* As I said at the start, the **2005 House of Wax** is better than one would expect. Often times however I was too strongly reminded of other films I've seen. For example, besides the truck with the blinding headlights mentioned earlier, the police at the end of the movie offer us a very **Texas Chainsaw Massacre**-type explanation for what has previously taken place.

\*\* The use of the name Vincent for one of the Siamese twin brothers was a nice touch in paying tribute to the 1953 Vincent Price classic.