

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: Highlights from my trip to the Chiller Theatre Summer Extravaganza 2006 - June 2006

The last time I wrote a column about the *Chiller Theatre Toy, Model & Film Expo* was May 2003, so I thought another one was due. This past weekend (the first weekend in June) I attended the *Chiller Theatre Summer Extravaganza 2006*, and I must say that an extravaganza is definitely what it was. The twice-a-year *Chiller Theatre* show is usually unmatched in sheer number of guests, and the lineup this time around was especially impressive to this film aficionado. The guest count totaled around 75 and featured actors, musicians, models, wrestlers and more, including Michael Gross, Michael Rooker, Megan Gallagher, David Hess, PJ Soles, Kane Hodder and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* alumni Jonathan Frakes and Brent Spiner (just to name but a small few). This show also marked a change of venue for the convention, with the proceedings being moved to the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Secaucus, New Jersey, and a change from the month of April to June. The festival organizers had a good setup for the dealer and guest rooms in this hotel with everything being easily accessible, and I especially appreciated the fact that the Crowne Plaza has a large two-story parking garage which made parking quick and easy. I'm told that many years ago this hotel was actually the original location for the convention, so this change in venue was probably just a return to a familiar place for many convention devotees.

On this trip I drove to New Jersey with a friend of mine and met some other friends at the show. After getting our tickets my buddy and I first headed to one of the guest rooms where we spent awhile talking to singer Annabella Lwin, lead vocalist for 1980's pop sensations Bow Wow Wow. As I mentioned in my previous column on this East Coast convention, one thing that distinguishes the *Chiller Theatre* show from other Horror-themed conventions is the fact that they have guests from outside the horror genre as well, including singers, classic television stars, wrestlers, etc. I'm a huge 80's music fan

in addition to being a horror film fan, so for me meeting Anabella was a great experience because it brought back memories of the early days of MTV when videos such as the Bow Wow Wow hit *I Want Candy* ruled the airwaves. Ms. Lwin was very friendly and personable and it was a pleasure talking with her and posing for pictures. She was also nice enough to tell us about the cover artwork for the Bow Wow Wow EP *The Last of the Mohicans*, which was interesting to say the least. Hopefully I'll get to hear more great music from this talented singer in the very near future.

Next we made our way through some of the other guest rooms where highlights included seeing live bats courtesy of the NJ Batman, and speaking to veteran actor Tom Bower, who played the gas station attendant in the recent remake of ***The Hills Have Eyes***. For some reason I must have missed seeing the NJ Batman exhibit at past shows, so it was really interesting to see live bats up close. The nice folks in charge were good enough to tell us a bit about the particular species of bats they had with them, while I got some great photos as well. * In another room actor Tom Bower was joined by what might be called a row of movie bad guys from such films as ***The Hills Have Eyes*** remake and ***Land of the Dead***. It was interesting to note also that genre favorite Dee Wallace-Stone was on the other side of that same room. I'd almost forgotten that along with films such as ***The Howling*** and ***Cujo***, she was also in the original version of ***The Hills Have Eyes***. I'll have to watch the 1977 original again sometime soon. As I mentioned before the number of guests at *Chiller Theatre* really is amazing, and one can easily spend a whole day chatting with all these diverse, talented people.

After going through the guest rooms my friend and I headed for the dealer rooms where I purchased a couple independent films on DVD at bargain basement prices as well as a very cool ***Friday the 13th*** t-shirt with a design I hadn't seen before. There were in fact several t-shirts on display that I can't recall having seen in the past, so it was a tough choice picking out that shirt. (I definitely have a couple ***Nightmare on Elm Street*** shirts and one ***Carnival of Souls*** shirt in the back of my mind as possible purchases for my next trip to New Jersey.) And speaking of DVD's, it really is amazing how this format has almost completely taken over the floor space at the show nowadays. I remember years ago when I first started attending how it was mostly VHS tapes, however now the discs dominate. This of course just mirrors the market in general, with DVD's dominating sales at retail stores, and VHS surviving mainly in rental sections (alongside DVD) in some video stores. A good thing about this is that dealers at the convention now offer some great bargains on VHS tapes.

We spent the last couple hours at the convention basically going through the rooms a second (and sometimes third) time in order to compare prices and make sure we hadn't overlooked some hidden gem among the merchandise. After meeting back up with the rest of our group we then headed out of New Jersey back towards Upstate New York, but not before stopping at a favorite New Jersey diner on the way to discuss guests, movies and everything else that makes up the *Chiller Theatre* convention. All in all it was a fun-filled day. Anyone who loves horror movies, television stars, famous wrestlers, models, etc., should really head to New Jersey for this one-of-a-kind event.

* To read my review of ***George A Romero's Land of the Dead*** see the August 2005 TFTM column.