

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: Movie Review - **Halloween (2007)** - A look at director Rob Zombie's new re-imagining of a horror film classic - September 2007

Besides being a gifted musician, rocker Rob Zombie also has quite a talent for putting together some of the most amazing casts around. * In his previous films **House of 1000 Corpses** and **The Devil's Rejects** he had some diverse talents on board including the likes of Bill Moseley, Priscilla Barnes and Geoffrey Lewis. In his new remake of the 1978 John Carpenter masterpiece **Halloween** however, he has what I can only describe as a dream cast made up of some of the coolest horror and cult films stars working today. While sitting in a darkened movie theater watching the film on its opening weekend, I couldn't help but constantly tap my buddy on the shoulder to point out the likes of Brad Dourif, Richard Lynch, Clint Howard, Danny Trejo, Dee Wallace, Ken Foree and Danielle Harris (who starred in **Halloween 4 & 5**). (It occurred to me during the film just how much of a horror film geek I am at heart, and as such I must also admit to completely missing Udo Kier until seeing his name in the end credits). Having these people together in one film should equal good results, or at least a good time. Unfortunately however, I found this remake to be neither, and quickly began wishing the director had chosen to produce another original creation instead of reworking a classic.

In Rob Zombie's new re-imagining of **Halloween**, ten-year-old Michael Myers (Daeg Faerch) is seen growing up in a lower-class suburban household with his mean stepfather (William Forsythe), stripper mother (Sheri Moon Zombie), promiscuous older sister (Hanna Hall), and baby sister. His stepfather is abusive to everyone, especially Michael and his tough but good-hearted mother, and this only serves to further alienate an already withdrawn kid. At home Michael hides his face under a clown mask and begins killing small animals while avoiding his stepfather. School isn't any better as he's bullied by other kids and constantly dragged to the principal's office, much to the irritation of his mother. He's also asked to see psychiatrist Samuel Loomis (Malcolm

McDowell), however this turns out to be too little too late when Michael suddenly turns on his tormenters with deadly violence. After killing a school bully he systematically slaughters his stepfather, older sister and her boyfriend, before his mother returns from work and finds him sitting on the front porch in his Halloween mask cradling his baby sister in his arms. After this he spends the next fifteen years under the supervision of Dr. Loomis in the now familiar **Halloween** back-story, before escaping and returning to his hometown of Haddonfield, Illinois to kill again. Unlike in the original version however, his fifteen-year incarceration is played out on the screen in agonizing detail, rather than simply mentioned in dialog by the good Dr. Loomis.

On the plus side, Daeg Faerch gives a good performance as tormented young Michael Myers, alternating between being eerily sympathetic and downright scary. The scenes where he almost nonchalantly kills the aforementioned family members are creepy and disturbing to watch, with the brutality and blood in this new version adding to the shock value. That having been said however, the fact that Michael's childhood is played out in full makes this story seem ordinary. In fact I kept thinking while watching that this could've been (or should've been) a film about some other serial killer. What made Michael Myers chilling to watch in the original version (and its sequels) was that it wasn't spelled out what was driving him or how he came to be the way he was. Rather he was a blank slate with the cold eyes of a shark that moved in an inhuman, robotic way. Here it's basically the simple math of $A+B=C$, or, put another way, a withdrawn kid plus a bad environment/tormentors equals a psychopath bent on revenge against everybody. I really feel that painting Michael's back-story took away one crucial element that made the original **Halloween** great. It also unfortunately eats up a good deal of screen time (especially the scenes with Michael in the institution), and as a result the events of the 1978 version don't start until well past a half-hour into the movie.

Another thing missing in the remake is the role Dr. Sam Loomis should've played in the story. I believe a second element that made John Carpenter's film great was the importance of this character. Dr. Loomis' mad pursuit of Michael in the original version anchored the film and gave it depth. (Donald Pleasence's unforgettable performance also added greatly to this factor). When I heard that Malcolm McDowell had been cast in the role of the good doctor I had hope. Unfortunately in the new version Dr. Loomis is reduced to nothing more than another in a string of peripheral (and disposable) characters. This is not any reflection on McDowell though, who is a great actor and here does his best with an underwritten role. However because this film is focused almost exclusively on Michael, he's just not given much to do and is consequently not really a central part of the proceedings despite spending a lot of screen time examining the young killer.

In the latter part of the movie we revisit more familiar proceedings as Michael returns to Haddonfield to pursue teenaged Laurie Strode (Scout Taylor-Compton) and butcher her family, friends and anyone else he encounters along the way. Being that it's a Rob Zombie film, it's not surprising we get trash-talking teens, blood, nudity and sex, brutality and more blood. And while I have no problems with any of these exploitation elements (and am in fact a big slasher film fan), the film no longer bears any resemblance to **Halloween**, despite the character names and setting being the same, and numerous scenes from the original being reenacted in detail. Basically at this point it becomes an exercise in parading characters across the screen so they can then up the body count. ** Even more than this complaint however, is the fact that I didn't identify with Laurie Strode like I did in the original, which also detracted from my enjoyment of the film. And

while it would be very unfair to compare Scout Taylor-Compton to Jamie Lee Curtis, suffice it to say that watching the new Michael chase the new Laurie around was akin to watching any movie psychopath in a mask chase around any hapless victim. In other words there wasn't much that was special about Laurie in this re-imagining. Even a scene where Michael suddenly and very unexpectedly dropped his weapon and sank to his knees in front of Laurie felt pointless because her character just didn't seem that important. This I believe was more a result of the writing as a whole than anything else.

As I said in my previous columns (about Rob Zombie's earlier films), I greatly admire the man for always having his own unique vision, which he has thus far managed to keep intact and deliver to the big screen. He has his own style and it shows. He also is obviously passionate about the horror genre and can never be accused of putting out generic or derivative films. One look at the great Michael Myers mask he used in his film makes this apparent. In fact I'll also go so far as to say that had the director named this movie something else and/or not in any way associated it with **Halloween** I might have liked it a lot more. After all, it does have some good qualities such as being gritty and uncompromising, and is at times (as mentioned earlier), scary and disturbing. As a remake of **Halloween** however, it totally misses the mark and negates just about all that made the original John Carpenter film the unforgettable classic that it is.

* See my June 2003 TFTM column for a review of **House of 1000 Corpses**, and the September 2005 column for a review of **The Devil's Rejects**. Also look at the November 2006 column to read about my experience of seeing the 2006 theatrical re-release of the original **Halloween**.

** Beyond what I've previously mentioned there were also some other detrimental elements in this remake that could be called nitpicky, but are worth mentioning nevertheless. First, I found the music choices and placement to often be off-kilter. Specifically, the classic rock songs from Rush and Blue Oyster Cult used in the film did nothing to compliment the scenes or enhance the mood. *Don't Fear the Reaper* (from Blue Oyster Cult) was used on more than one occasion and somehow didn't work well, perhaps because it's a song that has been employed similarly and more successfully in the past (such as in the case of the cover version used so subtly and effectively in Wes Craven's **Scream**). And the **Halloween** score also proved ineffective, and to me seemed to have been dropped in at awkward times.

Besides these musical quibbles, one visual that struck me as nothing short of crazy was seeing Michael change from a short, pudgy little kid into a hulking giant of a man who could easily have been a professional wrestler. Even in the time span of fifteen years this seemed to me to be unlikely to impossible. Only in the movies I guess.

And finally, I might also add a third, lesser criticism about many of the female death scenes being almost identical, with the bloody/undressed victim crawling on her hands and knees and Michael walking slowly behind her. The movie could've done with a little more variation in these scenes.