

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: A look at the evolution of Underground Digital Cinema - A discussion of some of my experiences, insights and perspectives - Part 6 – April 2008
(Note: See the October 2007 TFTM for Part 1 of this continuing column, the November 2007 TFTM for Part 2, the December 2007 TFTM for Part 3, the February 2008 TFTM for Part 4, and the March 2008 TFTM for Part 5).

This month we move squarely back into the realm of Underground Digital Cinema (after last month's foray into the world of underground mixed and fem vs. fem wrestling videos). And as promised, the discussion will now turn to examining movies from some prominent underground cinema production companies. These are companies that produce movies in different and varying film genres, ranging from horror to exploitation to campy comedy. * In the November 2007 installment of this column I provided an intro to this topic with some conversation about the extreme rape-revenge film ***Psycho Sisters*** and New Jersey-based W.A.V.E Productions, and I plan to look at more of their output in future installments. However this month I'd like to focus on one of the biggest and arguably most widely known independent production companies to come out of The Garden State - namely EI Independent Cinema (recently renamed POP Cinema). This company produces all three of the aforementioned film genres, with some of their titles crossing or blurring these category lines. They're a company that has become familiar to underground and independent cinema audiences worldwide, and also one that has gradually grown to a level where their output now reaches large mass, mainstream audiences as well. This is evidenced by EI movies appearing alongside Hollywood offerings on video store and retail shelves, and being broadcast on pay cable outlets such as Cinemax, among others (in addition to being widely available for sale on DVD and through video-on-demand over the internet). ** EI Independent Cinema is a company I remember first becoming familiar with back in the mid 1990's when I discovered ***Psycho Sisters*** (they distributed the film on VHS) at *Fangoria's Weekend of Horrors* convention in New York City. And since the mid-90's when digital video first

started to emerge, EI has moved from marketing underground movies primarily through mail order to these wider distribution outlets. Let's now take a closer look at the various cinematic product lines the company offers before examining some of the individual movie titles.

*** POP Cinema (to use the new company name) basically specializes in producing two flavors of independent movies - horror-themed and erotic-themed. These flavors are represented by their Shock-O-Rama Cinema and Seduction Cinema lines of movies, respectively. (Both movie divisions also have "Retro" lines as well - Retro Shock-O-Rama and Retro Seduction Cinema - which consist of older movies from decades past which are representative of the appropriate category. Sometimes the company will remake a film and then market both the original title and the remake together on the same disc.) Generally speaking, most releases from this company fall somewhere under the blanket umbrella category of exploitation films, although as stated titles from each product line lean in decidedly different directions. Also, POP Cinema movies have become particularly notable for featuring a lineup of beautiful and talented actresses, many of whom appear in a plethora of films released by the company. This type of repeat casting is similar in nature to strategies employed by some lesser-known low-budget production companies (Very Scary Productions included in the list), who highlight their own recognizable faces in movie after movie. POP Cinema though has arguably taken the concept to glorious, successful new heights by featuring a stable of lovely women who have become names in their own right within the independent film industry. Many of these sexy actresses have their own websites and regularly appear as guests at such star-studded film and memorabilia conventions as *The Fangoria Weekend of Horrors* show and *The Chiller Theatre Toy, Model & Film Expo*, among others. There the ladies promote and sell their own featured movies and sign autographs and photos just like any other celebrity. Some of these cinema sirens have become so popular in fact, they have garnered built-in audiences for their upcoming films, and this aspect has given the Shock-O-Rama and, particularly, the Seduction Cinema movies, brand recognition mostly unmatched in the underground/independent movie scene. And of all the POP Cinema beauties, arguably the most well-known is Misty Mundae, an actress who has starred in over 50 films and had her name grace the title of several Seduction Cinema releases. **** Ms. Mundae has in short become a cult, horror and erotic film phenomenon and reached a level of recognition rarely seen in the realms of independent, B-movie and underground cinema. So before delving into an examination of some individual POP Cinema movie titles, I'll first talk a bit about this most recognizable and popular starlet.

As mentioned, actress Misty Mundae has over fifty movies to her credit, which in itself is pretty amazing considering her first film credit only goes back to 1998, a scant ten years ago. I won't attempt to delve into her full film history here, as it would be beyond the scope of this column, and also because a quick trip to her Internet Movie Database (IMDb) page is a better place to go for those looking to research that long list of titles. However I believe it's safe to say she is one of the most notable representatives I've seen of the aforementioned New Jersey underground film scene. As evidence of this, some of her earliest movie credits beginning in the late 1990's include appearances in gritty exploitation pieces from New Jersey-based production company Factory 2000 such as ***Going Under***, ***International Necktie Strangler*** and ***The Vampire Strangler***. In fact back during this time when I was regularly attending Fangoria conventions in New York City, I remember seeing Misty featured in promotional ads for the company as one of the regular members of their acting troupe. With ***The Vampire Strangler*** the title says

quite a mouthful, as this particular movie is a good example of raw underground cinema which emphasizes the two popular fetishes contained in its name, along with plenty of nudity and sex to boot. It is another example of the type of shock cinema I described when discussing ***Psycho Sisters***, however ***The Vampire Strangler*** pushes the sexploitation element even further. Ms. Mundaе would go on to star in several more sex and/or violence-filled Indies produced by Factory 2000 (and directed by maverick filmmaker William Hellfire) up through the early 2000's including the lesbian-themed movies ***My First Female Lover*** and ***Misty's Secret***, among others. She would subsequently move on to more high-profile starring roles as her indie film career began to soar in a slate of Shock-O-Rama and Seduction Cinema features. The Seduction Cinema movies in particular, many of them soft-core erotic, campy comedy spoofs of popular Hollywood films, have in recent years put Misty Mundaе on the map as a true indie movie starlet. It is these releases I'll first focus on, followed by discussion of some horror-themed Shock-O-Rama titles. But first a few more words on the Misty Mundaе indie film phenomenon...

It really is interesting how Misty Mundaе has become such a recognizable name in the underground indie film scene. With the plethora of low-budget movies being produced using digital video, and the large number of new actors and actresses involved in this emerging field, it would seem like a difficult task for anybody to make such an impact in such a short time like she has. Having watched some of Misty's earlier starring roles and some of her more recent work, I would describe her as a versatile actress with a very natural screen presence who seems to mold her acting style to the type of material she's starring in. For example in the extreme revenge-murder movie ***The Infamous Bondage Murders 2 (IBM 2)*** from Factory 2000 she gives a very stark and realistic performance playing a victim of a gang of ruthless killers. ***** Conversely, in comedic Seduction Cinema films such as ***Mummy Raider*** and ***Playmate of the Apes*** her style is (appropriately) more tongue-in-cheek. However such praise could probably also be given to other indie actresses as well, which means there must be something more to her mass appeal than just good acting chops. Other factors that I believe come into play and resonate with cinema viewers are a catchy stage name and very natural good looks. There's no doubt Misty has a very girl-next-door innocent quality about her which seems to work well in a variety of film roles, while at the same time serves to set her apart from many other actresses. Moreover I believe that often times in life circumstances come into play as well, and perhaps she was also the right person in the right place at the right time when EI Cinema decided to embark on producing their erotic comedy spoofs. Whatever the case however, there is no doubt Misty Mundaе has made quite a name for herself in the world of underground and independent films, and some of her movies are definitely worth examining in this column about underground digital cinema. Given that the Seduction Cinema line represents some of her best known work, we'll start with one of those titles... in the next column installment.

* Misty Mundaе appeared in two indie movies from ***Psycho Sisters*** director Pete Jacelone - ***Poetic Seduction: The Dead Students Society*** (from Seduction Cinema) and ***Shoot The Girls*** (from Factory 2000).

** See the November 2007 TFTM column to read about some of my early experiences at the *Fangoria Weekend of Horrors* convention in New York City, where I was first exposed to gritty underground indie horror movies like ***Psycho Sisters*** from New Jersey-based W.A.V.E. Productions. I also talk about *Fangoria* magazine in the March 2003 TFTM column, some *Fangoria's Weekend Of Horrors* convention highlights in the

February 2004 and October 2005 columns, and I discuss New Jersey's *Chiller Theatre Toy, Model & Film Expo* in the May 2003 and June 2006 columns (in the latter I give some Chiller Theatre convention highlights).

*** As I mentioned in past writings, the term "independent" is often used to describe both lower-budget Hollywood studio films and underground movies like the type I produce. Therefore it is a label more widely accepted by mainstream film audiences than is the label "underground", even though it can be confusing because of its multi-purpose use. See the May 2005 TFTM column for discussion on this topic.

**** Misty Mundaе has in recent years also found success outside the world of erotic indie cinema acting under the name Erin Brown in horror movies such as ***Shadow: Dead Riot*** (starring horror film icon Tony Todd), and the Showtime ***Masters of Horror*** television episode "Sick Girl". Additionally, this talented actress has also written and directed several movie projects. So it seems her star is still on the rise.

***** My own Six Degrees of Separation connection to indie film starlet Misty Mundaе is my having appeared in the independent horror films ***The Edge Of Reality*** and ***Shadow Tracker: Vampire Hunter*** from JB Productions (the latter of which was released on home video by El Independent Cinema in the mid 1990's). Filmmaker Bruce Hallenbeck, who I worked with on movies such as ***London After Midnight*** and ***The Drowned***, appeared in ***The Edge Of Reality*** and ***Shadow Tracker: Vampire Hunter*** as well and also appeared in ***Mummy Raider*** along with actress Misty Mundaе.