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: Independent Filmmaking and the Information Age - Some random thoughts... and reminiscences – March 2007

Being an independent digital filmmaker to me means not only using digital technology resources like DV cameras, computers, computer hard drives, and non-linear editing software, but also staying up to date (or at least attempting to) on the latest technological gadgets, trends and news. For example recently I've been reading about the battle raging between the new high-definition DVD formats Blue-Ray and HD-DVD, and how several factors will determine which one, if not both, will ultimately be accepted by the public. These factors include prices of players, acceptance by major Hollywood movie studios, and titles available, to name but a few. What often occurs to me is how in this age of instant information fueled by the Internet and the World Wide Web, among other things, predictions about new technologies such as these are made and discussed by the public well before the products become public successes or failures. In past decades such widespread, instant information wasn't so easily accessible. (For example, years ago the battle between VHS and Beta to become the consumer standard was decided before I really knew much about either format). Right now I'm researching and reading reviews of the latest line of HD and HDV cameras heading to the market, anticipating a purchase before I begin making my next movie. While studying products like these I also reflect back on how things have progressed, and how relatively simple they were when I started on the glorious endeavor of independent filmmaking. Although I have always been a big movie fan, I first learned about the process of video production in college when VHS was the established consumer format and a few very fortunate individuals were able to work with Super VHS. At the time I thought linear VHS editing machines were amazing technological wonders I was fortunate enough to be learning and using. * When I worked with a friend editing early short films shot in the 8mm video format, we used the "pause and record" method for getting our raw footage into finished form on VHS. The memories of the excitement of those early editing sessions are still with me,

and looking back it's really amazing how well we did and how happy we were with the results. I wonder how many other filmmakers started this way as well.

Today there are many columns where different writers talk about what's happening with, and what will happen with, leading technology companies and individuals on the cutting edge of the industry. Other columns discuss the ever-changing state of digital communication and digital media, with rising emphasis on how media is being created and distributed by an increasing numbers of individuals. This is being fueled by web video sites and media creation software, and is becoming more and more important as consumers have more and more choices, and major media companies work to adjust and adapt to these new frontiers. (** As it relates to independent filmmaking, I've often referred to this empowerment of individuals to create and distribute their own content as "the Democratization of Filmmaking"). When I want to watch a video now I first turn to the internet and revel in the number of choices available for any given subject. Looking back once again I can remember in the 1980's when I would come home from school and eagerly switch on the new cable channel MTV. Watching a few dozen or so music videos grace the screen made me feel like part of a wondrous new trend. Never then would I imagine that I'd some day be creating my own content and sharing it with the world. Oh how far things have progressed.

* The "pause and record" method of editing, as I call it, is the practice of connecting a camera to a VCR in order to edit onto a tape in that VCR. As mentioned above, early in my filmmaking career I used the then-currently widely available 8mm video format. After shooting was completed our post-production process would entail hooking up the 8mm camera to a VHS VCR using a composite cable, playing the raw footage in the camera, and pushing the pause button on the VCR to initiate our (cuts-only) edits. This was delicate work, both because the edit points were not incredibly precise, and because we needed to edit the entire movie from start to finish in one sitting. Stopping and starting again often meant glitches and other mistakes. That's one reason I smile looking back at some of our earlier productions and think how well they came out considering our resources available at the time.

** I've written previously on what I call "the Democratization of Filmmaking". For further discussion on this topic read my May 2005 TFTM column entitled "Criticizing the Critics - A discussion on "Indie" Cinema, Underground Cinema, and the "Democratization of Filmmaking".