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: Responsible Movie Criticism in the Internet Age - December 2010

In my May 2005 TFTM I discussed how some critics are dismissive of the digital filmmaking revolution, regarding it as an amateur activity "everybody is doing". Here I'd like to touch upon the somewhat related topic of movie criticism, and in particular online movie criticism. Being an independent filmmaker who has had his movies reviewed, as well as a writer who reviews movies made by others (here in Thoughts For The Month), I have some distinct opinions on this subject. So off we go…

I believe that movie criticism can be a useful tool in providing valuable feedback to producers, filmmakers and artists about how their productions are perceived and how they can improve upon different aspects of them. Reviews can of course also be valuable in helping potential viewers make more informed entertainment choices. With movie criticism it's important that writers always strive to stay focused on the material at hand, employing as much objectivity as possible, which can of course be difficult considering opinions are subjective by their very nature. With the rise of websites, blogs, forums and other (often free) online communication avenues, everyday people are able to express their opinions on any subject with little restriction. This is a good thing because it advances discourse and the free exchange of ideas. However with great freedom comes great responsibility, and in the case of movie criticism this is especially true because reviews essentially pass judgment on the work of others. Movies are such an ingrained part of our popular culture that they are often taken for granted and undervalued; and with the rise of online movie criticism via the internet, online bashing of films is just too easy.

It may be assumed that movie bashing is an activity only undertaken by amateur online movie critics. However such is often not the case. * I remember reading a print review back in the mid 1990's of the movie **Wes Craven's New Nightmare** from a mainstream movie critic in which the writer spent most of the column personally insulting the actors in the film (their looks, personalities, etc.), and barely mentioned the plot of the movie. In fact it's a good bet that this writer never actually watched the film and just dismissed it off- hand because of a dislike for the

horror genre, or the **Nightmare on Elm Street** series, or whatever. Hollywood movies are indeed often taken for granted, regarded as nothing more than disposable pop entertainment. ** And with the case of the new underground digital cinema, reviews can be even more scathing. This is because true indie filmmaking is often undertaken by passionate people with big dreams but small budgets or limited resources. And their productions are simply different – not always better, not always worse – than Hollywood fare. Given these facts, I think it's especially important to take into consideration what resources the producers-directors appear to be working with, and review such productions with those considerations in mind. In other words underground cinema should not be judged by Hollywood standards, because doing so is like comparing apples to oranges. However this does not mean giving micro-budget filmmakers a free pass when writing about their films. (For example technical aspects such as good lighting, sound, etc. need to always be present whether one is working with a budget of a million dollars or a hundred. And when they are absent it is more than fair for the movie reviewer to point it, while still being respectful to the filmmakers). Rather it may simply mean keeping in mind that one is not watching a multi-million dollar Hollywood epic and considering it accordingly. Taking this responsibility seriously as a writer can prove extremely valuable when giving feedback to the micro-budget producer, as well as to those working in Hollywood. The bottom line in movie reviewing should be to educate, inform, encourage and advance the art of cinema creation. And movie bashing (whether online or via traditional media) does none of those things.

* This particular movie review sticks in my mind primarily because **Wes Craven's New Nightmare** is among my favorite horror movies.

** Being one of these underground artists, I acknowledge I am not completely unbiased on this subject.