

The Newborn Dead: The Shock of the Irish

Written by Marla Newborn
Tuesday, 13 July 2010 11:58



Last fall, I attended the eighth annual New York City Horror Film Festival, one of the best places to meet and greet others in the horror world. The fest is just large enough to host a roster of terrific feature and short movies and panels, and just intimate enough to allow you to get to know the talented filmmakers from all over the world. Director Michael Hein has secured a perfect location: The Tribeca Cinemas, with two theaters and a large bar space that's perfect for mingling, making new friends and reconnecting with old ones. At last year's event, I was quite impressed with, and fortunate enough to meet, Rob and Edward Kennedy, two brothers from Dublin, Ireland.

The duo were in attendance with their short *WHEELS OF DEATH*, which successfully juxtaposes black comedy with horror—not an easy task. Now that the Kennedys have posted both *WHEELS OF DEATH* and another, superscary short entitled *TRICK OR TREAT* on the Internet, I decided I had to chat with them and share their talent with Fango readers. And so, as stifling hot as it may be right now in New York City, I can't help but pretend it's a cold winter's day in Ireland, I've just flown into Dublin and the Kennedys and I are sitting in a cozy Irish pub drinking Jamison whisky with a Guinness backup.



MARLA NEWBORN: The two of you work as a team—is this something that just sort of happened or was it by design?

EDWARD KENNEDY: When I was about 12, Rob and I made a short film on VHS with a friend of mine who owned a video camera. It was a horror film called *NIGHT OF THE LIVING GHOULS*, I think. A year later, our parents got us an 8mm video camera.

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ROB KENNEDY: We started making films consistently in summer 1995, so I would definitely say it just happened and it made sense. We caught the filmmaking bug pretty much simultaneously. Our dad is big into movies too, and he always took us to the cinema. Then, once we had the video camera, the urge really took over.

MARLA: When did you realize you would do better together than on your own?

EDWARD: There was a period while we were in college that we didn't work together, before we teamed up with Andrew Mahon to form First Quarter Films. We made some short films on our own; for instance, Rob made the horror short TRICK OR TREAT, and I made a ghost movie, LITTLE INDISCRETIONS. Then we got together to write and direct a short comedy, PARKING TICKET, which got a great response at the LA Comedy Shorts Film Festival last year. We decided to write and direct WHEELS OF DEATH together, and audiences have responded well to that too. So I suppose we realized we were doing well by collaborating in 2009, when those two films played successfully on the festival circuit in the United States and Ireland.

ROB: Aside from some college projects where we generally had to stick with colleagues, we've pretty much always worked as a team. However, certain projects might be predominantly one person, with the other taking a more backseat role. For example, TRICK OR TREAT was very much my thing, WHEELS OF DEATH was very much both of us, and then a short we've just finished shooting, TAXI AT MIDNIGHT, is mostly Edward.

MARLA: How is it being a filmmaker in Ireland? Is there much competition, and how does it impact your work?

ROB: Filmmaking in Ireland is tough, like anywhere else I suppose, with plenty of competition. We're from Dublin, and there are some good film courses there. I did a four-year degree course at the National Film School of Ireland at IADT-DL, and Edward earned a diploma at Coláiste Dhúlaigh and a master's degree at Dublin City University too. We grew up watching primarily American films, and I believe you see a lot more of that than, say, the Dublin community in our movies. However, we do try to draw on Ireland's great tradition of storytelling for inspiration, which has been a major factor in our latest collaborative effort, a feature script titled SLASHER GHOST MONSTER that explores an old Irish legend.

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EDWARD: I've always been an independent filmmaker, producing short films on tiny budgets with a small cast and crew. The Irish Film Board—a state agency that allocates public funding to filmmakers—has never given us any money to make movies. However, it's been nice having creative control over the projects and then seeing them do well at festivals. I suppose I've been influenced by the sense of humor in Dublin, and the atmosphere. I think Dubliners have a cynical sense of humor, and that probably comes across in our films.

MARLA: Tell me about TRICK OR TREAT? Despite it being your first short after college, you hit the mark with the scare factor. How'd you manage that?

ROB: The idea came to me very suddenly, like a lot of the best ones do, and I just wrote it down and thought it would make a nice, simple little shocker for Halloween. Fortunately, I've never had to overthink what might be scary; I just trust that what keeps me awake at night will frighten other people too.

MARLA: WHEELS OF DEATH has more of an emphasis on dark humor. What has the response been in the horror community?

EDWARD: There is a lot of black comedy in WHEELS OF DEATH, and when Rob and I were writing it, that's what made it fun. I consider it more of a comedy/thriller than a horror film. It screened at the Monster-Mania convention in New Jersey last summer, and it won the first-ever Sudden Death Killer Shorts competition. The audience voted WHEELS OF DEATH as their favorite, and it became the very first movie to gain an advance slot at the New York City Horror Film Festival. I was very pleased with the audience's reactions; they responded to the suspense and humor. The Nightmare to Remember Horror Film Festival also just screened WHEELS OF DEATH late last month.

MARLA: Do you guys change hats as far as production goes? How do you divvy up the jobs between you?

ROB: We both write and direct and end up wearing a lot of hats. Edward sometimes produces and records sound. My other roles tend to be shooting the films and editing them. Andrew, our collaborator, also does some writing and plays a big part in assisting with lighting on set.

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MARLA: Is there any competition between you?

ROB: Honestly, no. I'd be thrilled if a project that was more Edward, or entirely Edward even, got recognition. To me, it would actually feel like I was getting it too, in a weird way. That said, we certainly do argue and disagree on set...

MARLA: What advice do you have to young filmmakers just starting out?

EDWARD: Get your hands on a camera of any kind and make a short movie. Stanley Kubrick once said, "The best education in film is to make one." If you can't afford one yourself, borrow one from a friend or save up and rent one.

ROB: This is funny, because that's what we are. I say, try and write your own stuff and work with what you've got, and never give up!

MARLA: What's next for the Kennedy brothers?

ROB: The next big thing is our feature script, which we've just finished and are sending out now. My latest short shocker, [IN THE NIGHT, IN THE DARK](#), just premiered at the Galway Film Fleadh, a great film festival here in Ireland. Hopefully it will hit the North American fest circuit this coming fall.

EDWARD: I'm about to start editing my new short, TAXI AT MIDNIGHT. I'll make one more horror/comedy short after that, and plan on directing a feature film some time in 2010.

With that, we finish our drinks—and you're now in for your own treat, watching WHEELS OF DEATH and TRICK OR TREAT below. You can find out more about the brothers and their movies at the official website <http://firstquarterfilms.com> of First Quarter Films.

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