Written by Chris Alexander Friday, 01 June 2012 12:01



If you're a serious, all consuming fan of Rod Serling's powerful and influential THE TWILIGHT ZONE (1959 – 1964, CBS) then you feel, as I do, that there were no bad episodes in its five season run. Certainly, some were stronger than others, but even at its thinnest, the dark, fantastical, moral and melancholy world sculpted by Serling and his stable of creative collaborators was infinitely superior and ahead of anything else on television at that time—and arguably, anything since its demise.

But controversial even among ardent ZONEheads is the entire duration of the fourth season, one in which Serling, under pressure from the network to reach a bigger audience, needlessly altered his crackerjack three act half hour formula to accommodate a 60 minute timeframe. The added running time often felt labored, and diluted much of the compact sting that made The ZONE so addictive and eerie.

But that's not to say that season four was without its masterpieces. Some of the shows took advantage of the extra space and took on a more cinematic heft. Among the gems was legendary writer and major ZONE contributor Richard Matheson's sensitive and scary drama MUTE, starring a child actress by the name of Ann Jillian as an orphaned little girl named llse, who is rescued from a burning blaze and soon discovered to be, yes, mute. Even more alarming, she may be the key to a cabal of secret mediums groomed to communicate with the dead.



## Ann Jillian on "THE TWILIGHT ZONE" episode, "MUTE"

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It's a classic piece of Matheson existential supernatural fantasy, fueled by Serling's morality tale spine and directed with detail by Stuart Rosenberg (COOL HAND LUKE). But its real power lies in the performance of young Jillian, a child who would grow to become a celebrated actress in film and television (she even played a ghost in the short lived early 80s sitcom JENNIFER SLEPT HERE), as well as a beacon of strength to women worldwide after she underwent a double mastectomy during a battle with breast cancer.

Jillian spends most of her time as a motivational speaker these days but takes time to discuss her varied body of work with her fans and was more than receptive to hearken back with me to that fifth dimension, vast as space and as timeless as infinity.

Here is Ann Jillian remembering a moment in childhood spent walking with genre giants in THE TWILIGHT ZONE....

**FANGORIA:** MUTE is a deceptively simple role—especially for a young actor— yet you give a fully fleshed performance without dialogue, all inner voice. Do you have any memories of how Stuart Rosenberg directed you?

**ANN JILLIAN:** I have a recollection that Stuart Rosenberg's direction was quiet and encouraging. I suppose that, as a child, I would naturally gravitate toward what I needed, as a young person and as an actress. So, if I remember "calm " and in addition, what I best can describe as "trust", it's probably what I needed then. So he was intuitive as to what a child actor needs. I appreciated that. He liked to take an actor off the actual set, away from the camera and lights, and talk to him or her privately. That was another thing I appreciated. In later years I looked for that in a director. I have only positive memories of that episode.

**FANG:** The story stems from the pen of the great Richard Matheson. Do you recall ever meeting him?

**JILLIAN:** I met a number of people at the interviews/readings for the part of Ilse. Richard Matheson and Rod Serling were among them. These meetings were usually courteous and somewhat lighthearted (to keep it from being too intimidating for kids). I grew up with older parents and I liked their company. So speaking to adults was not something I needed to get used to. Because my performance would require mainly reactions without dialogue, the

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interview was mostly to see how expressive I was.

FANG: Was Rod Serling kind to you?

**JILLIAN:** Rod Serling, Stuart Rosenberg, and all of the people connected with the episode (cast and crew) were all kind. I rarely had a bad experience. Parley Baer, a fine veteran actor whom I've worked with in numerous projects throughout my long career—GYPSY, KILLER IN THE MIRROR, WAGON TRAIN, WINNER TAKE ALL; to name a few—was very kind to this young actress.

**FANG:** Did you have a full comprehension of this character and the story itself?

**JILLIAN:** Yes. I remember thinking it was an awesome and mysterious concept. I was a smart and curious child and looked up anything I needed to know. While I was, and still am, a private person, I wasn't shy about asking questions. I wouldn't describe myself as "ultra precocious", but you can't do well in this industry if you are truly withdrawn.

**FANG:** How long was the shoot?

**JILLIAN:** I want to say the shoot was about one, or two weeks long. I recall that was the norm for a "principal" player in a half hour to hour television show, respectively. I don't think that has changed much over the years. Made-for-television movie shooting schedules have become shorter over the years (even during the time I was making them), but the series shooting schedules stayed pretty much the same.

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