

Q&A: "NIGHT OF THE COMET" star Kelli Maroney talks her career

Written by Brian Kirst
Friday, 27 April 2012 15:11



Beloved genre actress Kelli Maroney (NIGHT OF THE COMET, CHOPPING MALL, ZERO BOYS) hit Hollywood in the early 80s with a dazzling smile and a flirty shake of the pom-poms as a vivacious cheerleader in FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH. Soon after, the vibrantly talented Maroney worked not only with such low budget drive-in mavericks as Roger Corman and Jim Wynorski, but many of the old school legends of the silver screen as well. On the eve of an upcoming appearance at Chicago's popular [SCI FI SPECTACULAR 6](#) and with excitement building about her role in Wynorski's THE GIANT GILA MONSTER remake GILA!, Maroney recently joined Fangoria to look back on her varied career, with much humor and grace.

FANGORIA: One of your first appearances was as a feisty psychotic in the 1983 crime thriller SLAYGROUND. What do you recall about that project?

KELLI MARONEY: Well, a lot of people think that was my first credit, but it's not. I was still on [soap opera] RYAN's HOPE when I did that. At the time, I thought it was a stretch to play a character that was so psychotic and crazy, but it's funny in retrospect. My character Kimberly, on the soap, was so similar. She lost it a lot, and even killed another character, but at the time I thought it was a stretch. So, when I got to the audition, I went for broke. I really went for it and when I was through, I said "That's what you want, right?" And the director said, "Not exactly." But, he hired me anyway! So, I asked him, "Why did you hire me, after that audition?" He said, "Well, I figured if you could do that, you could do anything!" Which is not an acting lesson from Kelli Maroney, folks! [Laughs] I don't think they take chances like that anymore. Now, it's all about DNA or who you know. It's a different world. Back then, although it was the 1980s, everyone was still acting like it was the 70s, probably the greatest era for filmmaking. They were still taking risks. I think almost everyone who got into the movies back then, did so because of the great things that were going on in the 1970s!

FANG: Was that era of filmmaking an influence for you, as well?

MARONEY: You know, for me, I think it was actually watching old movies with my mom. Bette

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Davis was a favorite, and I'm still working on my film education. You could watch a movie or two a day for the rest of your life and still not see everything that you want to, or that has been recommended to you. I am, always, finding out about different films.



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FANG: Sharon Farrell, who played your evil stepmother in *NIGHT OF THE COMET*, worked a lot of 70s cult productions like *IT'S ALIVE*, *THE PREMONITION* and *THE STUNT MAN*. Do you have any specific memories about working with her?

MARONEY: You know, she came in and I met her that day. We slapped each other around and she left [laughs]! But, that kind of contentious mother and daughter relationship was easy for me. I had played it for years on *RYAN'S HOPE*, so it was old hat. I was used to that whole operatic nature of things. It wasn't my first rodeo [laughs]! I think more than anything with that sequence, it was getting the fight stuff choreographed. I'm of the nature, if the moves aren't working, just go for it; hit me! Otherwise, Sharon and I would still be there, filming that showdown. If I remember correctly, we did have a little trouble when my character was supposed to fly over the couch. I think I remember telling her to just take a sock at me, and that she was really reluctant to do it. I'm not quite sure, but I don't think that she ever did, even though I kept on reassuring her that it would only help the scene and me. Anyhow, we got through it all and despite that one instance, it went pretty swiftly. In fact, we couldn't believe how quickly we shot it. Then, she split!

FANG: You've probably said everything there is to say about *NIGHT OF THE COMET*, but is there something that occurred on that shoot that hasn't been discussed as much?

MARONEY: Hmm, I want to think of something special for you. Well, during that time period, I still lived in New York. I came out to California and did *FAST TIMES AT RIDGEMONT HIGH* and came right back. *NIGHT OF THE COMET* was just one of the things I auditioned for when I was filming that. I didn't know anything then, so I didn't contact anyone, I just left when I was

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done, and the people involved with NIGHT were like, "where is she?" They eventually got in contact, so I flew back. I think it may have even been on my own dime. And my life at that time, while filming COMET, really did reflect the emotional life of my character, Samantha. I didn't know anyone. Everyone that I knew was gone, and all I had was Cathy [Mary Stewart, co-star]. I kind of clamped onto her. She was my only friend. I couldn't even drive then. So, the world of that movie really was my life. All the people on the set were the only people that I knew. That was all she wrote. I truly didn't know what my future was. I wasn't even 100% sure that I was moving to California. So, my world then was very much like the world of NIGHT OF THE COMET. And, I actually don't think I've ever talked about that before.

FANG: Thank you. Career wise, you hit at a time when a lot of old school Hollywood was still working. You've worked with JOAN FONTAINE (Hitchcock's REBECCA and SUSPICION) and Angie Dickinson (DRESSED TO KILL). In that same vein, do you recall anything about working with Angela Lansbury on MURDER, SHE WROTE?

MARONEY: With that I liked the idea that you were supposed to think that my character was the killer, but she wasn't. As for Angela Lansbury, she was very polite and professional, but huge stars like that just come to the set for their scenes and then go back into their trailers. I thought Linda Hamilton, who was on that episode as well, was just great, though. We didn't work together much, but we hung out a lot. I don't know if you know this, but she has a twin sister, who isn't an actress; she's a real person, which I suppose is much better than being an actor, because we only pretend to be real people [laughs]. She did play in the dream sequence in THE TERMINATOR, though. She's the woman in the park. Anyhow, Linda was incredibly nervous because she wanted to get Angela's autograph for her sister. She was scared because she had to go knock on her trailer, and ask her. Which illustrates that division on a set, perfectly, I suppose. Van Johnson (Sergio Martino's THE SCORPION WITH TWO TAILS) was also a guest on that. He was one of my mother's favorites. He appeared on RYAN'S HOPE as well, and I called her and told her that I just met her boyfriend. Van and I had quite a connection, now that I think about it. We were both on RYAN'S HOPE and MURDER, SHE WROTE together and he was, also, in Woody Allen's PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO! I was supposed to be in that, but couldn't because NIGHT OF THE COMET wound up shooting at the same time. I was so disappointed about that.

But, more than anything, though, I appreciate the fact that I was at least a tiny bit aware of how lucky I was at that period in my life, with the guest roles and such. Careers, particularly in show business, never remain the same. You have a golden time period and then it kind of fades away a bit. Of course, I appreciate it even more now, in retrospect, but even then I was aware that I was privileged to be called into do things without having to audition. People would just ask me to do things. And, if they hadn't, I don't know if I would have had the confidence to go on, otherwise. So, I am very aware of and grateful for that period in my life.

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FANG: That period, also produced another cult classic for you, the much beloved CHOPPING MALL.

MARONEY: Well, there was only one robot for that and that was it! And it moved really slowly! Nobody gives the cast enough credit for that! It was like, "Oh, no, it's coming after me!" But, it really, really wasn't. We just got in there and did it! I do think that it's Chuck Cirino's score that really made the movie, though. With that score, everything just comes together perfectly.

FANG: A point that truly illustrates your love for cinema as a whole. Switching to the literary for a moment, you appeared in an adaptation of popular genre writer Dean R. Koontz's SERVANTS OF TWILIGHT. What are your memories of that project?

MARONEY: One of the producers from NIGHT OF THE COMET was working on that. He just called me up and said, "You wanna play the secretary in this?" I was like, "Yep!" I hadn't played anything like that before, and there was enough that was vague about that character that it could have gone anywhere. She could have turned out to be supremely evil, which I love. Ultimately, I am glad that my hero persona has won out in films, but I have gotten to play bad, here and there, and I love that.

FANG: Well, you definitely brought a sense of decency to your fun and helpful Nurse Oxford in the popular 1988 NOT OF THIS EARTH remake.

MARONEY: You know that is another one where I was sitting around my apartment wondering how I was going to pay my rent and buy groceries. Jim Wynorski called and said that he was doing this movie with Traci Lords and he thought it would be fun to put us both in the same nurse's outfit. Honestly, at the time, I was like, "Oh really..." But, he assured me and it turned out to be a lot of fun. But, just like everything else in business, who knew it was going to turn into what it did; this cult classic? That is probably my number one request from fans at conventions, as well. They all want a shot of Traci and I together in those outfits.

FANG: And things have kind of come full circle because you've recently appeared in Wynorski's THE GREAT GILA MONSTER remake, GILA!

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MARONEY: It is a full circle. I'm very lucky in that I am someone the fans want to see in these pictures. And, you know, I had never heard of the original, but everyone was very excited when I got it and now I know why. I'm just pleased that everyone still finds that it's a treat to have me in these things.

FANG: Everyone seems to relate not only to the strength and spunk in your personas, but your honesty, as well.

MARONEY: Wow. What I try to do as an actress is become as blank a slate as possible, so I can become whatever the audience needs me to be. You know, they were going to cut that scene in NIGHT OF THE COMET in the cop car where my character cries, but they tested it and ultimately kept it in. I believe that was one of the best scenes I've ever shot, and I am so honored that it still exists. One of the producers told me that it was the emotional heart of the film. It was honest and it told the kids we were scared. It helped them relate to us.

As far as Chicago's Sci-fi Spectacular 6, here's all details:

SCI-FI SPECTACULAR 6

Over 14 hours of Sci-Fi Movie Madness, April 28, 2012 Noon 'til Late. Doors open at 11 a.m.

Portage Theater (4050 N. Milwaukee Ave. Chicago, IL 60641, 773.736.4050)

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CURRENT FILM LINE-UP:

11:30 - Trailer Trash (Vintage Trailers & Short Films!)

Noon - LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS(Original Corman Classic!)

1:30 - THE LAST STARFIGHTER(80's Awesomeness!)

3:15pm - BRAZIL (The Ultimate Dystopian Future!)

6pm - NIGHT OF THE COMET (star Kelli Maroney in Person!)

8:15pm - 12 MONKEYS (Gilliam's Modern Masterpiece!)

10:30pm - ATTACK THE BLOCK (Monster Mayhem!)

Midnight - THE THEATRE BIZARRE (Midwest Premiere!)

SHORT FILMS & TRAILERS INCLUDE "Devil In My Ride" (Trailer for Gary Schultz's feature!)
and "Under the Table" (Darren Callahan)

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