

Exclusive: Larry Fessenden talks Chiller's "BENEATH"

Written by Michael Gingold
Monday, 13 August 2012 12:41



Having established himself as the Roger Corman of the New York area, producing a number of noteworthy independent chillers over the last few years via his Glass Eye Pix, Larry Fessenden is back in the director's chair for the Chiller channel original movie BENEATH. Fango spoke to the East Coast auteur to get the details on the film, currently rolling in Connecticut.

"Chiller wanted some Glass Eye productions," Fessenden tells Fango, "and I went in and I pitched them a couple of movies. They said, 'Those sound great, and we love your production model'—which is low-budget but classy—and they said, 'We do have this script that we'd like you to consider for your company.' It was a very spare story about six kids who end up in a rowboat on a lake with a giant fish attacking them. And I said, 'You know what? I'd like to do this one,' just because I'm a huge JAWS fan, and I love the challenge of working on the water and trying to create something very contained, like Hitchcock's LIFEBOAT or any number of other classic examples of a single-location scary movie. So we just went down the rabbit hole and started to put it together, and [Glass Eye's] Peter Phok came on as a producer."

BENEATH stars Danny Zovatto, Bonnie Dennison (from Glass Eye's STAKE LAND), Chris Conroy, Jonny Orsini, Griffin Newman and Mackenzie Rosman, along with veteran actor Mark Margolis (whose credits range from Stuart Gordon's THE PIT AND THE PENDULUM to Darren Aronofsky's BLACK SWAN). The original screenplay was written by Tony Daniel and Brian D. Smith, and Fessenden explains, "I made some slight revisions; there was a whole backstory involved that would cut away from the lake, and I felt the important thing was to be contained and just stay on that boat—that's the entire dilemma. I made it an even simpler story, and I hope that'll pay off. My model is to make a movie like DUEL, which is one of my favorite made-for-TV movies—Spielberg working with a quick shoot. I just love that kind of filmmaking."

Having directed for TV before on SKIN AND BONES, one of the best episodes of NBC's FEAR ITSELF, Fessenden is used to the form, and has no compunctions about working under someone else's umbrella. "Chiller's been very respectful of what we've done and where we're

Exclusive: Larry Fessenden talks Chiller's "BENEATH"

Written by Michael Gingold
Monday, 13 August 2012 12:41

coming from," he says. "At the same time, what I enjoy about making movies is working with a parent company to get into a zone where they're comfortable, so it's been a back-and-forth. I really tailored the script in my final revisions to their concerns in terms of act breaks and other issues. We're trying to deliver a very ambitious movie for just a little bit of money, especially given that we'll be out on the water with a giant monster. It isn't every day you pull that off. They've been very respectful of our concerns, and we've had a perfect relationship so far."

And that monster will be a physical FX creation, he assures us. "I don't do CGI. I mean, I have—I used it on *THE LAST WINTER*, much to many people's chagrin. I've also seen it used very subtly by Jim Mickle; lots of the stuff we did in *STAKE LAND* I'm very proud of, and that's a great example of how CGI has now become a way to enhance what you shoot, with subtle choices like replacing the sky and putting in better clouds. But as far as building a complete monster out of CGI, until I've got Steven Spielberg's money, I'm not gonna do that. I don't even think...I mean, if he remade *JAWS* with a CG shark, that would be some kind of a ripoff. So my FX will look more like Bruce the shark, and that works for me."

As for being on the water, has his experience as producer of James Felix McKenney's upcoming *HYPOTHERMIA*, which deals with a monster in a frozen lake, helped him with *BENEATH*? "Well, I was just a producer, so I didn't have to suffer through the real hardships that Jim and his crew went through. And of course, we're in the lovely summer sunshine—which is its own problem, because we want to make the lake feel atmospheric, and we're combatting the warmth and bright sunny days. But I think we'll manage to create something frightening. Every movie has its challenges."

Fessenden also reveals that depending on how *BENEATH* turns out, the movie may hit theaters as well; "we'll certainly do festivals." And while the full creative team has yet to be announced, he has intended to bring a number of Glass Eye regulars onto the project. "We're talking to [composer] Jeff Grace, and we're hoping he'll be on board. [Sound designer] Graham Reznick has many projects in the works, so I don't want to presume that he'll be involved, but as much as possible, it's gonna be the usual team." Check out some pics from the location [here](#).