

Working Like a "MANIAC"

Written by Sam Zimmerman
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Recently, we reported on a host of William Lustig-related news, including the upcoming new double DVD and Blu-ray debut of MANIAC, his second annual “William Lustig Presents” series at NYC’s Anthology Film Archives and the aforementioned cult slasher’s special screening at the Brooklyn Academy of Music ([see that item here](#)). Lustig is clearly having a busy summer—and he also has a MANIAC remake to talk about.

Fango was initially approached to talk to Lustig as part of a joint interview with C.A. Rosenberg, who’s credited with co-writing MANIAC along with star Joe Spinell. Having apparently disowned the film upon release, she also proved impossible to track down in time for this interview, so Fango was happy to grab a one-on-one with Lustig, genre veteran and head honcho of disc company Blue Underground. On the topic of Rosenberg and her involvement with MANIAC, he says, “My recollection is that she had virtually nothing to do with the film. She wrote a draft, but it was a different kind of a movie; it was more of a police procedural than the film ultimately turned out. What happened was, she was in the original announcements and her name sort of got grandfathered into the credits, but it was really a totally different kind of script. There still was a killer on the loose in New York, but it was a focus on cops chasing him vs. just focusing on the murderer. It was far more conventional.”

Either way, Lustig is happy and honored the film was being celebrated at BAM (it was programmed by BRONSON and VALHALLA RISING director Nicolas Winding Refn for a midnight screening), and is still talked about in a favorable light. “Who wouldn’t be?” he enthuses. “You create something 30 years ago and it still resonates today—it’s exciting. How many people can say that? I am of course honored. I’m thrilled—though I personally can’t stand sitting through the movie anymore. The torture for me is sitting through it, or even sitting outside the cinema listening through the closed doors. All I see is 90 minutes of mistakes. Every filmmaker, I guess, has the same thing; I’m sure there are some who look at their films like people look at themselves in the mirror and see a thing of beauty. I see it as a thing of, ‘Wow, I wish I could do it all over again.’ ”

In this era, when every recognizable horror title is primed for relaunching, Lustig could very well get his wish; unsurprisingly, a MANIAC redux is in development. While it’s still extremely early, Lustig did drop a bit of interesting news regarding who’s taking part, and notes how invested he

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is in this new incarnation: "I am and I'm not," he says. "My name is on it, and my company's name; it says, 'Produced in association with Blue Underground' and 'Produced by William Lustig,' but I'm really not involved at this moment. It's in the works, but I really don't have much information to report on it—other than that Alexandre Aja is involved and it's being produced by a very respected production company based in Paris, but anything further than that, I don't know. I haven't read a script, I haven't been involved with any creative decisions and we shall see, there could be a time when they get me involved. I just don't know at the moment."



It's unclear as to what Aja will be doing on the MANIAC remake, whether producing and bringing up new talent, or if it will be his next directorial venture after this summer's silly splatter flick PIRANHA 3-D (while it could be good to see him get back into grimmer, less campy territory, it would also be nice to see him tackle a non-remake). This could conceivably open the door for Lustig to step in and give it another go, but he doesn't seem too interested in heading down that path. "I'm not directing, and certainly not writing," he notes. "I have mixed feelings about it. On the one hand, I have the feeling that I should just kind of sign off on it and hand my baby over to someone, but then there's always the urge to meddle. I've been involved with this business for so long that I've realized you can't have too many chefs in the kitchen; one chef is all you need, and that should be whoever is directing the movie."

An interesting challenge in tackling a MANIAC reboot is that at first glance, the film seems so much of its time. After all, the New York it presents is worlds apart from the cleaned-up tourist and shopping hot spot it is today. Lustig disagrees, however: "Funny enough—I live in New York, and because of the recession, I'm seeing a lot of '70s New York creeping up into our surroundings. In particular, I'm seeing a lot of abandoned stores, a lot of 'For Rent' signs, a lot more homeless people. I also get the sense that crime is on the rise. So I'm starting to sense a lot of the elements that I had seen back in '70s New York. Next year they're going to be cutting back police, and God knows what's going to happen. What do you think is going to happen?"

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"When you have all these abandoned stores," he continues, "you're going to maybe start to see more porno shops in neighborhoods you didn't seem them in before, because those are the places that people...everyone's got to rent their stores, and if they're not going to rent it to a shoe store, they're going to rent it to whoever's got money. So I believe you're going to start to see sleaze come back. You're going to see a lot more prostitution, all these things that are products of recession periods.

"A lot of what you see in MANIAC still exists today," he adds. "I was standing on 23rd Street just yesterday, in front of one of the buildings we shot the exterior of, and I remembered the subway station—not the interior, but where the girl went down the steps—was on the corner of 23rd and 7th, and it's still there. And there was the street where Spinell stopped the nurse, and I remember shooting that on 22nd Street. With maybe one or two exceptions, you could really shoot the movie [again] in the same locations. But what I've been told is the plan for the MANIAC remake is to shoot a week or so in New York, and the rest of it in Montreal."

Whether heavily entrenched in the remake or not, Lustig is spending plenty of time revisiting his original for this fall's packed double-disc sets for Blue Underground. "There are new interviews with Caroline Munro, the music composer Jay Chattaway, there's a new audio commentary by myself and my co-producer Andrew Garroni," he reveals. "There's also a new interview with Tom Savini, and we have tons, literally tons of material that I've had lying around on half-inch tapes and three-quarter-inch tapes of publicity and controversy that surrounded the movie on its release. I just decided that I'd put everything in my possession onto the disc. That alone is over two hours of material, and then we have things like Joe Spinell on THE JOE FRANKLIN SHOW—basically anything you could imagine.

"We've also done a new telecine of the film," he continues. "It's a 2K telecine; it's beyond high definition. It's as good as the film's ever going to look. We've upgraded the sound to 7.1 DTS, so overall it's a total facelift of the film as well as adding a ton of new extras."



The director, who has also taken wonderful care of other filmmaker's treasured genre classics

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through Blue Underground, is happy to be revisiting some of his old favorites this August at the Anthology Film Archives series. "William Lustig Presents" is in its second year, giving Lustig the chance to showcase over a week of films not yet on DVD in 35mm screenings. "It's great, I'm looking forward to it," Lustig says. "It's my little treat each year. I have to say, the heavy lifting is really done by Jed Rapfogel at the Anthology Film Archives. I just curate the titles we're going to show, but those are the guys who actually do the detective work."

One of this year's most exciting entries is the '70s vérité horror flick *THE TOWN THAT DREADED SUNDOWN*. "It's a very eerie film; there's something very frightening about that movie. The villain is somewhat similar to the Zodiac Killer, and yet it feels scarier than the Fincher film [*ZODIAC*]. Even though I love the Fincher film—I think it's a great movie—*TOWN* feels scarier; it just gets on your nerves. There's something about having the narrator talk about the murders, and it's got that almost quasi-documentary feel to it."

As far as today's fright features go, he finds himself mostly ambivalent, but concedes, "Every time I start to feel that there's nothing I find that's very interesting, all of a sudden I'll stumble upon a picture. Recently I saw *THE DISAPPEARANCE OF ALICE CREED*, and I thought it was terrific. I felt it was one of the best examples of a smartly made, cost-efficient movie that truly delivered. It was suspenseful; it was smart and had a terrific script. I mean, that's the kind of movie I would love to be involved with, whether as a producer or a director. I just loved the movie. I can say those are far and few between. I'll tell you another film I liked a lot: *MARTYRS*. I don't know if you call that a horror film, but I do. I loved *MARTYRS*; that's one of the best films I've seen, and funny enough, those are both contained movies; the majority of both takes place in one location."

Sadly, Lustig doesn't have plans to direct on his horizon. "I think about it," he admits, "and things get mentioned, but I really haven't committed to doing anything right now. As you may know, the independent business is really suffering, and when I hear some of the budgets of people making independent films and the fact that so many of them can't get released, it's not very encouraging to want to put aside my life and focus on making a film, which is what it's about. It's not appealing. I really don't know; I would like to direct again, but I'd like to hopefully find the right opportunity to do it."

{comments on}