

Capitol Pains: The Spooky Movie Festival

Written by John Porter

Friday, 28 September 2012 09:38



Curtis Prather is one of the busiest men on earth. Despite the pull of his writing, producing, and directing chores on documentaries (including one on horror host Count Gore De Vol), every year he manages to find the time to put on one of the premier horror events, The Spooky Movie International Horror Film Festival.

The fest kicks off the Halloween season every year in Washington D.C., and always offers up something new and exciting; it runs this year October 10-18. If you can make your way to the nation's capital, this is the time to do it. Prather recently took a couple of minutes out of his schedule to talk to Fango and give us a taste of this year's festival.

FANGORIA: How would you describe the Spooky Movie Festival?

CURTIS PRATHER: It's the Washington, D.C. area's first and only genre-based film festival. This year we will screen 53 shorts and features from independent filmmakers from all over the world over the course of nine nights at the legendary AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center in Silver Spring, MD.

FANG: When did you start the festival, and what sets you apart from others?



PRATHER: Spooky Movie was founded in 2006 as a noncompetitive event, similar to Telluride or Mill Valley. We remain committed to our mission of treating all of our filmmakers and films with equal respect. What sets us apart this year is the venue: the AFI Silver Theatre and Cultural Center is one of the best theaters on the East Coast—in the entire country, in fact, in my opinion. It's a real first-class place, and we are so proud to be partnering with them this year for the whole fest.

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FANG: What is your lineup this year?

PRATHER: We have 21 features and 32 shorts from over 10 countries, stretched over nine nights, making this the biggest festival we have done yet. We start out with two dark comedies on opening night—EXCISION and SOME GUY WHO KILLS PEOPLE—and move into the spectrum of British horror with THE HOLDING and the North American premiere of NAZI ZOMBIE DEATH TALES the next evening. Right in between those two films will be PLAY DEAD, which is one of about seven or eight of our films which played this summer at Fantasia. On Friday the 12th, we get super dark with the U.S. premiere of Jennifer Lynch's CHAINED, the story of a serial killer who "adopts" the son of one of his victims, and the documentary ZERO KILLED, which explores the fascination people have with imagining how they would kill someone. Saturday is going to be very full, starting with two festival hits that take different looks at the "cabin in the woods" subgenre: A LITTLE BIT ZOMBIE and RESOLUTION. That night is a modern-grindhouse-themed double feature: MANBORG and PRESIDENT WOLFMAN. And we're not even halfway done!

On Sunday the 14th, we go right into two world premieres: A SWEET AND VICIOUS BEAUTY and NINJAS VS. MONSTERS (pictured right), the latter from the same folks who did NINJAS VS. ZOMBIES and NINJAS VS. VAMPIRES. And then, for the final four nights, October 15-18, Spooky Movie will keep giving more: more flesheaters with BEYOND THE GRAVE and ZOMBIE 108, more psychos with GUT and 247° F, more nonfiction with NIGHTMARE KINGDOM, more mind-trips with MOTION SICKNESS, more thrillers with CRAWL and more gore with the U.S. premiere of NERVO CRANIANO ZERO. Almost all of these features include shorts running before them. A full schedule can be found at the [official website](#).

FANG: Will there be any special guests? Special activities?

PRATHER: Many, many, many of our filmmakers are coming to the fest this year, some from as far away as Brazil and Germany. I just got confirmation yesterday that Jennifer Lynch [of BOXING HELENA and SURVEILLANCE] will be here with CHAINED, a film I love so much. She's flying right on in from Sitges and coming to us; this is very exciting for me. I've been a fan of hers since she wrote THE SECRET DIARY OF LAURA PALMER back in the early '90s.

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In addition, we are also thrilled about Teller, from Penn and Teller, coming to town with Todd Robbins and Shade Rupe with *PLAY DEAD*, the “concert film” of the live spook show (pictured below). People today don’t realize how much is owed to those classic shows! From television horror-hosting, to haunted-house attractions, to late-night horror movies, to genre film festivals—all share DNA with the original spook-show carnies, and having two of the best in house that night is going to be something very special. On opening night, Richard Bates comes back for a hometown screening of his Sundance and festival hit *EXCISION*. Eduardo Sanchez, of *THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT* and *LOVELY MOLLY*, also returns to Spooky Movie this year, this time to moderate a wonderful roundtable with filmmakers of the Mid-Atlantic on Sunday, October 14.



FANG: So you’re extending invitations to filmmakers from the area?

PRATHER: I really want the festival to help grow in its support and promotion of moviemaking in the Mid-Atlantic region and filmmakers from around here, and I’m hopeful that the roundtable can jumpstart that in a big, big way. Don’t get me wrong; we love getting great films from all over the country and the world, for that matter. There are a ton of talented visionaries out there. It’s just, as you know, this area has a lot to be proud of—from John Waters to Jeff Krulik to Kevin Smith to George A. Romero, and Bates and Sanchez too—filmmakers who went out and did it for themselves outside the system, creating the DIY underground or independent aesthetic. It’s why having both Ricky and Ed at the festival this year really helps make this both a world-class event and a local one. In addition, we have those world premieres and several shorts from regional talent, including *THE DUMP* by Fango’s own Rebekah McKendry, who is originally from here in the Mid-Atlantic.

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FANG: How long does it take to put the event together?

PRATHER: I will start thinking about the 2013 festival as early as November of this year, so it's almost a full-year process for me. This past spring I went to Tribeca, which introduced me to RESOLUTION. Submissions will begin coming in around January, and by April I can start to detect certain trends, and begin planning things out. The festival is still being tinkered with right up to the last moments, however, when filmmakers are notified.

FANG: Do you have any favorite moments from past festivals?

PRATHER: There are plenty. Oftentimes it can be simply experiencing a new classic with an audience for the first time, like last year with THE DEAD or in 2010 with TUCKER AND DALE VS. EVIL, or being in the moment of a special Q&A, like when Herschell Gordon Lewis was with us in 2009 or Lloyd Kaufman in 2008. Peaches Christ's "4-D" experience with ALL ABOUT EVIL in 2010 stands out as a fantastic throwback to the William Castle days of making the audience part of the show. Last year, when Ed Sanchez surprised us with a screening of a film he helped produce, MIDNIGHT SON, was also a thrill. Still, a clear favorite has to be the 2007 screening of the silent film DER GOLEM which had live music performed by a very talented musician who effectively blended 12 different instruments, including a theremin, banjo and upright bass, with the film. People still talk about that night all these years later.

FANG: Do you have any advice for anyone who wants to start up their own festival?

PRATHER: Venue is maybe the most important piece of the puzzle. There are lots of other things you need to account for, but venue should come first or second. We have been blessed with working with some of the best in the DC region, including Cinema Arts in Fairfax, VA, Artisphere in Arlington, VA and the Alamo Drafthouse Cinema in Winchester, VA, in addition to the AFI Silver. Each one will have different demands or expectations or realities, so you need to be mindful of that. A first-run theater, for example, may not be as flexible for your needs as some other venues.

But really, before you even do that, see what is currently being done in your area; are they

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meeting a need that has to be met, and if so, could you do it better? Then look beyond where you live and see how you can appeal to independent filmmakers. There are close to 100 genre festivals worldwide, with more and more every day; if this is the direction you want to go, keep in mind you'll be competing for attention from filmmakers who might be overwhelmed by the number of fests out there when they begin their own journey to promote their work. The fests themselves can be very cooperative—there are several of us who work closely with one another—but the truth of the matter is, if you're going to rely on submissions alone for your content, it's becoming a tougher path, as filmmakers have more options for their limited resources.

Finally, this is not a job for someone who isn't a fan of paying attention to details. There are so many moving parts all happening at once, including working with filmmakers, getting the word out to your audience, organizing volunteers, working with the venue, reaching the press, paying attention to the technical details, program guides, shirts, buttons and on and on and on. You need to have sea legs during this, and to be able to respond quickly.

FANG: How can people get tickets or submit their projects to you?

PRATHER: Tickets can be purchased through the Spooky Movie website, where submissions for 2013 will begin in December, or the [AFI Silver site](#).