

Back in the “DAY”: Lori Cardille & Gary Klar in Chicago

Written by Brian Kirst

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Long considered by more cerebral horror film fanatics to be the most powerful of George A. Romero’s original zombie trilogy, DAY OF THE DEAD celebrates its 25th anniversary this year. Highlighted by the intense performances of (well-regarded theatrical actress and installation artist) Lori Cardille as heroine Sarah and (former pro football player and current memoirist) Gary (a.k.a. G. Howard) Klar as Steele, DAY will be honored by a special screening at Chicago’s Terror in the Aisles 3 this weekend, with Cardille and Klar in attendance.

Terror in the Aisles 3, which takes place this Friday, December 3 at the Portage Theater (4050 N. Milwaukee Avenue), will also feature screenings of the new horror films BLACK DEATH and IF A TREE FALLS (see more details [here](#)). Cardille and Klar will do a Q&A session after the DAY showing and will also be available in the historic theater’s lobby for further interaction and free autographs. The duo recently took a few moments to talk exclusively to Fango about DAY OF THE DEAD’s lasting impact and their excitement about appearing in Chicago to celebrate its anniversary.



FANGORIA: As Gary likes to say, you two are not one-trick ponies. You’re writers and stage actors, and besides DAY OF THE DEAD, you’ve both appeared in other horror-related projects. Gary, you were in FRIDAY THE 13TH maestro Sean Cunningham’s A STRANGER IS WATCHING.

GARY KLAR: Well, in films, I never got the girl. I was always undercover or the narcotics cop or the killer. A STRANGER IS WATCHING was probably my fifth film. I was the captain of the prison guards, so it was a short scene for me. It was scary in the sense that we actually filmed at Riker’s Island. There is nothing like shooting at a working prison. You’re cordoned off, but you can still hear the prisoners shouting.

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FANG: You jumped to the other side of the law as the truly ominous hitman in LEGAL EAGLES with Robert Redford and Debra Winger.

KLAR: You know, I think that’s a truly enjoyable film. Director Ivan Reitman didn’t know whether to make it funny or serious, so it’s a bit of a mixed bag—but it’s still much underappreciated in my book. Daryl Hannah played this mysterious performance artist, and she would run in and say, “He’s out there!” And then you see me in the streetlight, in the rain, with my matted hair AND the smoke of my cigarette billowing upward. I also did every stunt in that, and there were some pretty heavy ones. I think that also pushed Robert Redford to do more as well, so that was a nice working relationship—a lot of give-and-take!

FANG: Lori, you were in the third-season TALES FROM THE DARKSIDE episode “Florence Bravo.”

CARDILLE: I loved doing that. That was a lovely part. It was about a woman who’s losing her mind, seeing ghosts—another one of those strong roles. Breakdowns, very emotional, the works! It was cool.

FANG: What some fans might find as unusual is that you both had regular roles on daytime soaps, too.

CARDILLE: [*laughs*] I played more conflicted women! On EDGE OF NIGHT, I was the ex-porn star with the heart of gold, and on RYAN’S HOPE, I was the ex-hooker with the heart of gold. It’s wonderful training, especially concerning how the camera works, but I left EDGE for personal reasons and when RYAN’s HOPE offered me a contract, I turned it down. I was so young in my career and didn’t want to get stuck in one genre.

KLAR: I played the boyfriend of screen legend Gloria DeHaven on RYAN’S HOPE. She was wonderful to work with—just beautiful. I believe the rumor was that she gave Frank Sinatra his first onscreen kiss. But I left to go do a Broadway show with good old Archie Bunker himself, Carroll O’Connor.

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FANG: Speaking of which, do you both feel your training and stage work helped you create such specific characters in DAY OF THE DEAD?

CARDILLE: Well, George cast me because he saw me in a play, Craig Lucas’ RECKLESS. The character I was playing just took it and ran with it. He knew I could hold the stage after seeing that, so he asked me to audition and started to write the role for me. Because of budget reasons, the DAY OF THE DEAD script had to be rewritten, so he was in the process of trimming it from more action-driven to more character-driven.



KLAR: I’ve always said that great actors make great choices. I myself have always been a grinder. I’ve never had any natural talent. I’ve always had to work at it. I took intense scene-study and acting classes for two or three years, and did tons of bad off-off-Broadway plays where I was just as bad as everything else. But this allowed me to make smart choices. There was nobody who hated zombies more than Steele. He’s outwardly foul-mouthed and offensive. But I tried to use my eyes a lot. In the scene where Joe Pilato’s character, Captain Rhodes, tells me to shoot Lori’s character Sarah, it’s all in my face. I was thinking, “I don’t want to kill Sarah, I like Sarah.” But this is a direct order from a superior. So I was wracking myself, as an actor, trying to figure out how to deliver my line. Finally, I realized I had to deliver it as a joke. It was the only way it would work. So I spoke it with that corny, lampooned accent—and it worked.

FANG: You had a past relationship with Romero as well, Lori?

CARDILLE: Yes. George actually, very generously, attributes his career to my father. My father was Bill Cardille, a famed vaudeville performer who became Pittsburgh’s famed “Chilly Billy,” founder of CHILLER THEATER—which was huge in Pennsylvania. My father promoted NIGHT

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OF THE LIVING DEAD on the show by playing it all the time. He’s also in the film, essentially playing himself.

FANG: Of course, that was the beginning of Romero’s reign of sobering, intellectually bloody horror. So if you go with the theory that intensity breeds humor, then the DAY OF THE DEAD set must have had its moments of hilarity, correct?

CARDILLE: Well, the cave we were filming in had bats. They were everywhere in that damn place! Yet for some reason, we were using these prop bats that were always malfunctioning and getting caught in the frame. My daughter and George’s daughter were both learning to walk at that time, as well. It was amusing to watch them both running around with all these monsters milling about. I was also tall—5 feet 10—and Joe Pilato was shorter than I was, so they put him in these huge lift shoes. He was hardly able to walk around, they were so big. It was so funny! Talk about breaking tape! We were all in the trenches together, and you also find a lot of humor in that. I am also very proud that this was the first job for [makeup FX artist] Greg Nicotero. He was a lovely, lovely man and has gone on to be so important to the genre.

KLAR: I love George’s subtle political agenda in the film, as well. About two-thirds of the way through the film, people start rooting for the zombies. It’s brilliant. We were cooped up, there was a lot of tension. We went to work in the mine for three to four weeks, with only Sundays off. People got sick from being in there—it was so dank and dark. So to have that film as the end result is amazing.

FANG: Due to those tight space issues, Lori, did you have any anxieties about being the primary female on set?

CARDILLE: No. I loved the crew. They were a great group of people. And I was playing such a strong character. I’m really proud to have played such a strong woman in a truly independent horror film. But I did get sick from the conditions. I particularly remember that scene where Sarah meets Terry Alexander’s character, John, at the trailers and he is just pontificating. I was so sick that day.

FANG: So, through a bit of hardship, this classic horror film with legendary character prototypes emerged.

CARDILLE: You know, I always thought it would have been great to play it like it would have truly been—teeth knocked out, disheveled, but I kind of had to surrender to the genre. There are certain critics who feel it was played too over-the-top and people who think it wasn't realistic, but it is all truly part of that certain style of horror-film acting. It was what was needed for the project.

KLAR: I went to George about my death scene. Originally, it was written so meekly that I thought the audience would have been disappointed. George said, “OK, what's your idea?” I said I wanted to save one bullet for myself. He gets bit on the neck, you see it, and Steele does not want to become what he hates the most. Then, before I take myself out, I make the sign of the cross. I made this foul-mouthed, hardnose character a Catholic. He truly believes that his God will forgive him for this suicide, because he doesn't want to be in his own version of hell. George went for it. Fans call me on that moment all the time. It's great to have contributed that.

FANG: Do you have any final thoughts about DAY and its honored place in the annals of horror?

CARDILLE: Well, it's wonderful to be a part of cinema history. I love the horror community. They are a highly interesting and highly intellectual group of people. There is something about the horror genre and the people who love it. They've often been hurt by life, feel like the outcasts. They are so sweet. [*Laughs*] All my lesbian friends love Sarah. They think she is so hot!

KLAR: I always love talking about DAY because of George Romero. He's the godfather of the genre. He's so good at what he does. One of the big tragedies is that Hollywood has never given him that big payday. He's a kind and patient man and as good as a director as I've ever worked with. DAY, also, legitimized my career to my family for me. Years ago, Tony Timpone invited us to a FANGORIA convention. After our talk, Tony asked us if we would be willing to sign autographs. We had nothing then—no photos or memorabilia—but we signed for over six hours! My kids were teenagers then and they kept running up to me, saying, “Dad, the line is all the way down the hallway and down the stairs!” So, forget Broadway or QUICK CHANGE with Bill Murray or working with Redford; it was DAY OF THE DEAD that truly legitimized me to my kids, and I will forever be grateful for that. I also can't wait to see Lori in Chicago. She is just the sweetest thing, and I never get to see her enough.

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CARDILLE: I adore Gary, too! I also love that Movieside Productions is using this 25th-anniversary reunion in Chicago to benefit Vital Bridges, an AIDS organization. My generation of actors was just devastated by AIDS. We lost so many beautiful people. It truly was our World War III. I will always be present for events like that!

For more info on *Terror in the Aisles 3*, click [here](#), and go [here](#) to order advance tickets.



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