

“PARANORMAL” Girl

Written by Michael Gingold
Wednesday, 09 February 2011 17:47



In *PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 2*, just out on DVD and Blu-ray from Paramount Home Entertainment, Kristi Rey, the sister of original heroine Katie, and her family come under attack by the strange, unseen forces that caused so much trouble in the original movie. Playing Kristi’s teenage stepdaughter Ali is Molly Ephraim, a young actress with significant stage experience—which came in handy for the improvisation this particular fright franchise involves. She went into depth on her *PARANORMAL* stint for Fango, so read on...

FANG: What went into landing your *PARANORMAL ACTIVITY 2* part?

MOLLY EPHRAIM: I auditioned, like with every other job I go in for, although on this one there wasn’t any information attached, because it was mostly improvisational and they wanted to see what we could come up with on our own. Also, it was very hush-hush, and once I booked the job I had to sign a non-disclosure agreement. I just knew my character’s age, that I had a stepmother and a baby brother, and that was about it.



FANG: Did they even tell you it was a horror film?

EPHRAIM: I didn’t know that, no—just that it was a Paramount movie, and that was it. They called me back later in the week, and that weekend I was flown out to test with some other actors. Then I think I got the job about a week later. It all happened very quickly, without a lot of

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time to obsess or think about it.

FANG: Were you familiar with the first PARANORMAL ACTIVITY when you got the role?

EPHRAIM: I had heard about it, obviously, but I hadn't seen it. I actually didn't get around to seeing it until I was in a hotel room in LA right after I found out I had booked the sequel, and thought, "Oh, I should check that out!" I had seen bits and pieces and I knew it was part of a cultural phenomenon, and was pretty excited to be involved.

FANG: Were you scared when you first watched it?

EPHRAIM: Well, I'm a real scaredy-cat, so... Of course, I was watching it from the perspective that I had gotten this job, and I watched it in broad daylight in my hotel room—but I guess I forgot to put the "Do Not Disturb" sign on the door, because the maid entered and I nearly jumped out of the bed and screamed. She was a little freaked out too [*laughs*]!

FANG: Did you have a lot of time to work with your co-stars before shooting started?

EPHRAIM: We did a bit of rehearsal, but we shot everything; I don't know how many hours of footage there was, but it had to be hundreds. We have footage from the rehearsals where I'm hanging out with my dad, we're talking about a vacation we took once, or I'm asking Kristi how she met my dad. All of that was taped so we could get a sense of how to use the camera—I operated a Handicam a great deal, so I had to become comfortable with how it worked and how not to make people nauseous, because apparently I was waving it all over the place and people were getting a little sick from my footage [*laughs*].

FANG: When you weren't handling a camcorder, and it was just the cameras mounted on the walls and out of sight, did that free you up as an actress?

EPHRAIM: It did. I come from a theater background, so that felt really easy and natural to

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me—more so than having a camera up in my face that could see my every little emotion. We had the full amount of space since there were cameras all over that house, and in some scenes they'd be running more than one at once to get the different angles. We did some scenes over and over again, but it wasn't as if we had to hit our marks exactly and wait for a camera to zoom, or to get an over-the-shoulder shot. It was a more natural process. Then when they would scare us and spook us, they could really get us; we weren't reacting to a greenscreen. It wasn't like a scary alien movie where we'd have to make a scared face over and over again [*laughs*

]; there was actually something in the walls or falling around us to scare the crap out of us. It definitely helped us get into the right vibe.

FANG: How much of that scary stuff did they tell you about, and how much did they leave to just happen and really scare you?

EPHRAIM: There were a few times where I didn't know something like that was coming, and one of those shots didn't actually make it into the movie; it's a different version in there. It's after my boyfriend has been over, and I'm going up to go to bed, my door's open and I hear a thump after I close the door. Things like that—I would know I was going to hear sounds, but I wouldn't know exactly when. So even if I knew the framework of the scene—"You go up to bed, you hear a noise, you get freaked out, you hear another noise"—there was still no way to really prepare myself for that, because it was going to be a surprise. One time early on, nobody told me they were going to make a noise, and pictures on the landing even fell off, and it freaked me out [*laughs*

]. There was another time when the director told Brian [Boland, playing her father] to throw me into the pool; I didn't know that was coming.



FANG: Was the movie shot in chronological order?

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EPHRAIM: No, not really. We shot so much; it was interesting to see it in the theater because there's this huge mythology of other scenes and other things we tried out, and it was interesting to see what made the cut and what didn't. In the beginning, when we were all getting our bearings, we would try a scene and say, "Well, let's branch off of this, what's wrong with this idea?", or, "Just in case we go in another direction, let's try that." So it became this massive tree of plotlines and ideas and footage, and they got it all on tape just in case.

FANG: Was it difficult keeping the secret of what you were making?

EPHRAIM: Yeah, it was. We didn't tell my dad, because we were afraid he'd get really excited and want to tell everyone at work. And then, totally unbeknownst to the rest of us, he saw an early trailer and recognized me in it, and he asked my mom, because I had told her what the movie was. My dad knows what I look like in profile, that's bizarre! [*Laughs*] It was tricky, and it was hard because my friends were excited for me, and they wanted to know what the movie was and would try and get it out of me and use all kinds of tricks to trip me up. But I had to just say, "Oh, you'll see, you'll see."

FANG: They say you should never work with children and animals, and you had a baby and a dog to play off of in this movie. I imagine those must have been the trickiest scenes to do.

EPHRAIM: Usually, but no! I mean, the babies weren't trained, they were just babies, but they reacted naturally; they were great actors. They were twins; there were actually triplets, but these two, William and Jackson [Prieto], are identical, so we used them about equally. There would be times when they were just not feeling it, and they were crying and ready for a nap or a bottle or something, so they would switch them back and forth. We were able to hang out with the babies, and I've done a lot of babysitting in my spare time, so I liked being around them. And Abbey the dog was just a sweetheart. She's kind of famous—she was the dog in I AM LEGEND—and she's really well-trained and super-sweet, and I like dogs too, so I was happy [*laughs*] and comfortable. I had a great time working with all of them.

FANG: This is about as close as a film experience can come to a stage play, given the way it was shot. Did all your theater work inform the way you played this part?

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EPHRAIM: Well, yes and no. I'd never done improv before, and I was even hesitant to go to the audition because I thought, "I don't know, this isn't really my bag." In my mind, I equated improvisation with comedy, which is where Brian comes from; he has a background in that in Chicago. So I was apprehensive, because I thought, "Well, I guess I can be funny, but I don't know if I can be funny on the spot..." But once I learned what the project was, the process was just mostly figuring out who our characters were. Of course, they're not exactly us, but there's a lot of them in us, because it had to be the way we would naturally react. If you scare the crap out of me, I'm going to react the way I would react. So yes, my theatrical background came into play and helped inform some of my choices, and the way that I moved in the space and against the other actors.

But there's nothing really like what we were doing here, even in theater, because we would be given a framework for where to go in a scene, and then we would play with it. And any time we had any input, everyone was super-responsive. So we felt like we had a hand in shaping the film. What's cool about theater is, you get a new audience every night, and you can't play last night's shot to tonight's audience. But in shooting this movie, if we tried one thing a certain way, we knew we had it down, and that gave us the leeway to say, "OK, let's try a different angle" or something.

FANG: Are there any great outtakes you can think of?

EPHRAIM: Oh, there are tons and tons of them—if we only had a blooper reel on this movie... [

Laughs

] I know I shot one bit really late at night, and this was after I had taken a red-eye out from New York and had been shooting all day, and I was taking another red-eye home to New York. So I was a

little

tired. I was doing a scene, and all of a sudden there was a huge bang on my bedroom door. It was only me shooting inside the room, and maybe the director. And it was the producer, Jason Blum—he was on all fours, cackling, with this really devilish grin on his face, and he just wanted to scare the crap out of me—and that's on film.

FANG: When did you first see PARANORMAL 2 with an audience?

EPHRAIM: I saw it at one of the Thursday midnight shows with some of my friends, and it was pretty wild. It was funny to hear the audience responses, because I wasn't expecting some of it.

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You mentioned outtakes before—sometimes all of us [actors] would say, “Oh, take out the camcorder,” and we would tape each other telling stupid stories and funny anecdotal things. And I was surprised to see some of that goofy stuff in the beginning...oh God! [*Laughs*]
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FANG: Did you get frightened watching the film for the first time?

EPHRAIM: I wasn't scared; I felt pretty nostalgic, because I had such a great time working with everybody over that summer. Being there in that house, on my days off I would use the pool, the fridge was actually stocked with food, and we would hang out after shooting. I actually spent the night in my character's room once, because I decided it would be an interesting experiment and maybe I would freak myself out. So it was great to watch, and my friends were screaming like 6-year-old girls, so it made me feel like we accomplished something!

FANG: Are you interested in doing more horror films?

EPHRAIM: Yeah! Frankly—and I don't know if this makes me sound like a real wuss—but I haven't seen a lot of horror movies. When I have, I've watched them in broad daylight, with my friends and maybe a lot of snacks around to keep me distracted. [*Laughs*] But yeah, I had a really good time, and now that I know what goes into them, and that they're not real and I can rest assured of that—yeah. I look forward to whatever comes my way.

{comments on}