

The King's Screech

Written by Michael Gingold
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When you're talking the history of horror, there's no one better to chat with than Stephen King. And when you're talking genre-film documentaries, there's no one better to put one together than author/filmmaker Laurent Bouzereau. In the past decade and a half, Bouzereau has created over 250 cinema documentaries and featurettes for laserdisc/DVD/Blu-ray editions, including landmark pieces on the making of JAWS and PSYCHO and featurettes on the King films THE DEAD ZONE, CHRISTINE, CUJO and PET SEMATARY. Tonight, the two come together again for A NIGHT AT THE MOVIES: THE HORRORS OF STEPHEN KING, premiering on Turner Classic Movies at 8 p.m. ET/PT.

The hour-long special sees King waxing candid on the history of horror, talking about his favorite movies and discussing the screen adaptations of his work, including the long-controversial THE SHINING. (The program will be followed by an all-night TCM marathon of classic chillers like the original FRANKENSTEIN, FREAKS, NOSFERATU, etc.; there will be more, including rebroadcasts of THE HORRORS OF STEPHEN KING, each Monday this month on the network through Halloween.) Fango spoke to Bouzereau about his conversations with the master...



FANGORIA: How did this project come about?

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LAURENT BOUZEREAU: Well, I've been doing the NIGHT AT THE MOVIES series for a couple of years with Turner Classic Movies and DreamWorks/Amblin TV. I did epic cinema, I did the history of thrillers, and then we decided to do the history of horror films. And I felt that that has kind of been done many times, and I came up with the idea of, "Look, if we get Stephen King, and it's not so much the history of horror films but horror according to Stephen King, that would be a really novel and different idea." And to my great amazement—because Stephen is very busy, he had a new book coming out and I didn't think he was going to do it—he said yes overnight.

FANG: How long did you wind up interviewing him, all told?

BOUZEREAU: For two days—very long days! I was very well-prepared, as you can imagine; I've read everything he's ever written, I've watched every frame that has ever been shot, I've read his famous book DANSE MACABRE, in which he outlines his discovery of horror, and I came in with a plan. We had a really fun conversation; he could not have been more generous and more fun, and at the same time profound. I hope it comes across in the piece. He's just so smart about the genre, and has a very specific view about it, and I think people will be interested. Because I feel like aside from that book, which he wrote many years ago, we only know him through his fiction, you know? So I felt this was kind of a coup.

FANG: How did you handle the task of whittling down those two days' worth of interviews into the hour-long program?

BOUZEREAU: That's what gets me the credit for writing the show. My questions were very structured, in the sense that I knew we had to talk about certain things—we had to talk about vampires, we had to talk about zombies, etc. But he took things in different directions, and that made for a very distinct creative bent on certain aspects of the genre. But it felt very organic when I started putting it together. I knew the show had to be an hour long, and that feels very restrictive when you have hours and hours of material, but in a sense it forced me to be much more focused, you know? And to be a little more rigorous in my choices. I was like, "OK, this is much more iconic than that." Maybe one day we'll do the uncut version, because there's plenty of material, as you can imagine.

But overall, it was very...I don't want to say easy, because nothing ever is, but it came very naturally. I worked very hard with my editor, Andy Cohen, who is also a huge film buff and was instrumental in choosing some of the clips, because as you can imagine, there were so many

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movies that we had to find the truly iconic images, and we had very little time. We put it together in eight weeks, which is very short for a project like this.

FANG: Were there any surprises in the course of your conversations with King?

BOUZEREAU: Yeah, everything was a surprise, to be honest with you. I had met him in the past, and so I knew his tone; he has a great sense of humor, and you can relate to him on a very kind of non-star level—even though I've worshipped Stephen King since I first read his books. It was a little intimidating at first, but he quickly made me very comfortable. People always ask him the same questions, and have the feeling that he's weird because he writes about weird stuff, right? But I'm a fan, so I didn't come to him attacking the genre; I came from a loving place. And also a knowledgeable place, where...for example, *THE SHINING*, which I know he doesn't like, but I do; I love the book, but I also enjoy the movie, even though they're two different things. So he disagreed with me, and that made for a great discussion. And then with *THE OMEN*, I like the sequels and he doesn't, but we were able to have a very mutual respect for each other's ideas.

But I would say that the thing that surprised me the most was his words about the very short shelf life of the horror film—even the best ones—where the first viewing is really the one that defines whether it's a great film or not. The second viewing is a different experience, and the third viewing relies more on the memory of the first, you know? It's almost like, if you want to be morbid about it, the first dead body you see if you're a doctor must be kind of shocking, but the second time it's less and the third time it's less than that. You become numbed a little bit, but it's also easy to reach back to the very first time you had that emotion, and to be reminded of what it was like. That's my interpretation of what he said, and that was probably the biggest surprise.

FANG: Are you going to be tackling more horror-oriented projects in the future?

BOUZEREAU: I'm currently developing a number of projects, including fiction films. I would say that my taste definitely gravitates toward the horror genre, because it's very visual, and they're the movies that have impressed me the most, and I've been reading a lot of material recently in that vein. But I'm one to love suspense over horror; if it's just pure horror, it doesn't really attract me, and that's why I love Stephen King, because it's not pure horror; it's suspense, it's character-driven, it's many things, even as it has all those horrific elements to it. To use the example of *CARRIE*, that's a twist on being bullied at school; what if the kid being

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bullied has a supernatural power? THE SHINING is about writer's block; well, what if there's a ghost story attached to that? So that's great, because it comes from the characters, and that's what makes Stephen King unique. I continue to learn from him, just by reading and rereading his work.