

An “AMERICAN WEREWOLF” in 2011

Written by Brian Kirst

Wednesday, 19 October 2011 14:52



Best known for his raw performance in modern horror classic AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON, currently celebrating its 30th anniversary, classically trained actor David Naughton has actually been delivering the scares in multiple genre projects for years now. On the eve of a rare Midwest appearance for a screening of WEREWOLF at Chicago’s Terror in the Aisles 9 (details below), Naughton sat down to talk with Fango about his long, storied and often fright-filled career.

FANGORIA: How did this long and occasionally terror-strewn journey begin for you?



DAVID NAUGHTON: Well, it all started in high school. Then, after I graduated, I studied in London. I got to see all the greats—Laurence Olivier, John Gielgud, Paul Scofield, Alec Guinness—both on stage and just out and about and partying. They didn’t act like legendary figures; They were nice and more than willing to tell you their stories. So I had all this classical training and a dream of making a living doing Shakespeare in New York. Which I did, but then the Dr. Pepper commercials [in which Naughton was the soda’s singing, dancing pitchman] happened, and that changed everything.

FANG: You did another TV project that has received a bit of notoriety. Can you talk about GODDESS OF LOVE, starring WHEEL OF FORTUNE’s Vanna White and featuring the magnificent Betsy Palmer from FRIDAY THE 13TH?

NAUGHTON: That was fun! Television comedian David Leisure and I just went wild with that. It was really campy. I mean, we had Little Richard in it. The whole idea was for it to be tongue-in-cheek. It was Vanna’s television film debut! Ratings went through the roof; I guess everyone tuned into watch the train wreck! But I did some strange things in those TV films. I

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just flashed on [the vampire movie] I, DESIRE, with the amazing Barbara Stock. She was quite the thing, and there I am in a morgue, supposedly studying. Crazy stuff.

FANG: 1987's KIDNAPPED also featured some genre regulars: Karen Black (TRILOGY OF TERROR, BURNT OFFERINGS) and Barbara Crampton (RE-ANIMATOR, FROM BEYOND).

NAUGHTON: I just remember that as a strange project. I was still pretty new, and Karen Black and I had a love scene. Every time I saw her, she was asking if I was getting ready for our scene. The day before we shot it, she kept on talking about how tomorrow was the big day. Then when it was time to shoot it, she locked herself in her room and wouldn't come out. They had to coax her to come to the set. Which just goes to show you how incredibly difficult those scenes are—no matter how experienced you are as a performer. They're always torturous. They need to be done on the first day before relationships are formed and people get to know each other. They never get easier. Never!

FANG: You also appeared with Black in the 1990 stalk-and-slash thriller OVEREXPOSED, featuring LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM's Catherine Oxenberg.

NAUGHTON: I don't recall a lot about that one, except for how lovely Catherine Oxenberg was, of course. She truly was a really nice lady, and I enjoyed working with her.

FANG: Another 1990 horror feature, THE SLEEPING CAR, has lately gotten some attention as an underappreciated gem.

NAUGHTON: Really? Well, that's nice to know. That was a small independent film, and it stands out in my memory because it was my only opportunity to work with the late, great Jeff Conaway. We filmed that in Malibu, and they had the car built in this weird, overgrown field there. It looked creepy right from the beginning—and I had to act like, yeah, I'd live there! Which lacked some credibility, because who in their right mind would want to live there? But there were some pretty cool special effects in that one. Oh, and Kevin McCarthy was in it. How legendary is that? He was a spry old guy with lots of stories. I loved listening to him and watching him try to steal the movie from everyone—which he practically did!

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FANG: You took a long ride in the rickety-sequel station wagon with 1993’s AMITYVILLE: A NEW GENERATION.

NAUGHTON: There’s not a whole lot I can say about that. It kind of missed the mark. I was excited about it at first and thought there were a lot of great ideas, but the scenes ultimately went flat. But that was another great cast—Richard Roundtree, Julia Nickson-Soul.

FANG: You had a better time working with John Carpenter that same year in the “Gas Station” segment of BODY BAGS, then?

NAUGHTON: Ah, John Carpenter. He was really special for me. I always admired his work. He was a subtle director. He didn’t say much, and I was always kind of wondering if he was getting what he wanted. But he was. It was a pretty neat segment. That fight sequence with Robert Carradine, who was a wonderful guy, was something, though. It was a long, drawn-out thing. We shot it and covered it and then shot it and covered it some more. It began to feel like someone could have been hurt. In a fight scene, you never know how skilled your partner is, if he’s trained. And people kept coming up with ideas. “Now, why don’t you throw him over your shoulder”—stuff like that! I was tired after that!

In a funny note, the actor who played the guy in the Cadillac in that sequence was a friend of mine. We never worked together, though, and didn’t realize we were in the same film until the wrap party. That’s something that kind of happens a lot in the business, actually.



FANG: You spoke of the classical English actors you’ve met, but you’ve also worked with a lot of great and eclectic American performers, as well. Do you have any thoughts on Clint Howard and the 1995 horror/comedy ICE CREAM MAN?

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NAUGHTON: Clint is such a sweet, sweet guy, and the opposite of that character. That's another one of those shows with a big cast where you never saw each other.

FANG: We've spoken about your cinematic terrors, but you have been surrounded by some real-life horrors, as well. Rebecca Schaeffer, your young co-star in the sitcom MY SISTER SAM, was murdered by a crazed fan in 1989. Do you have any reflections on that incident?

NAUGHTON: All I can say is that it was incredibly tragic. She had a bright future and was such a nice person. It was anyone's worst nightmare. It was a great loss, and laws were changed because of that. The tragedy of it is that even now, people can still find you. There must be some service where people pay a certain fee and they get addresses, because I've been starting to get mail at my new address and I've only been there a few months.

FANG: So, you have a great many devoted fans, and you've surely been interviewed about AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON numerous times. Is there anything about that movie that you haven't spoken about in detail?

NAUGHTON: Not really. But here might be something: Going to all the different conventions and shows, I always pride myself on having original photographs for the fans. A long time ago, I had an 11x10 photograph of Griffin Dunne in full makeup, and me in partial makeup, walking through Piccadilly Circus on a break. The looks people gave us were just incredible! It was a great photograph, and I've been searching for it everywhere without any luck. So if anyone has a copy of that, approach me at one of the shows and let me know! I don't think that was what you were looking for, unfortunately, but it's kind of all I've got.

FANG: That's perfect. Of course, a stroll down Piccadilly Circus in costume was probably not the strangest thing you had to do during that production.

NAUGHTON: You mean like streaking—with live animals. They were real wolves, and I was naked! Come on! And we had to be out of there by 8 a.m.? Why? Because they only gave us the zoo for the night! It was the crack of dawn, freezing, and we had to be out of there and we weren't through yet. So I was hiding behind a park bench, naked, and I could see the zoogoers coming in. Not the most comfortable situation!

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FANG: In a full-circle moment, you later voiced a character named The Streak on a couple of episodes of the JUSTICE LEAGUE cartoon. Is doing voiceover work easier than performing with your whole body?

NAUGHTON: It's more challenging. The other actors are there; you're doing it like a radio play, and you can get caught up in the other actors' performances. You see this tiny guy, or what have you, and you wonder, "Where did that voice come from?" You've got to remind yourself that you are a part of it, that you're in the scene, too!

FANG: You also made a very fun appearance in the horror/comedy BRUTAL MASSACRE. What was that like?



NAUGHTON: [Writer/director] Steven Mena is very clever. The script was actually funny to read, which is always good. We filmed it in Bethlehem, PA when it was 20 below zero, though. I kept saying, "I'm a lot funnier at 70 degrees!" Gunnar Hansen was in that, and he was awesome. Who knew the original Leatherface could do comedy?

FANG: Do you find that young filmmakers like Mena are seeking you out because of their love for AMERICAN WEREWOLF and the other films you've done?

NAUGHTON: Not really, unfortunately. It's a double-edged sword. If you're well-known and experienced, they think they know what you can do and they reject you immediately if you're

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not what they have in mind. Then, if people don't know, they don't care. You have to go in and read, and they are definitely not showing their hand. It's frustrating. But, I'm just reminded of a story. We flew into New York City on September 10, 2001 to promote the 20th-anniversary DVD release of AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON. Of course, the next day, the world changed forever. It was so weirdly surreal and completely tragic to be in Manhattan that week. We couldn't get out for five or six days, and it was almost embarrassing to explain why you were there when people asked. “We're here for this DVD...oh, never mind!” A situation like that totally puts everything into perspective.

Naughton will appear in person for AMERICAN WEREWOLF's 30th anniversary at the Terror in the Aisles 9 fest, taking place this Friday, October 21 at Chicago's Portage Theater (4050 N. Milwaukee Avenue; 773-736-4050). In addition, DANCE OF THE DEAD will have its Midwest theatrical premiere, with director Gregg Bishop attending. Doors open at 6 p.m., and the schedule is as follows:

7 p.m.: TRAILER TRASH (classic horror/sci-fi/weird trailers and short films)

7:30 p.m.: Edgar Wright's SHAUN OF THE DEAD

9 p.m.: John Landis' AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON (with Naughton in person)

11 p.m.: Gregg Bishop's DANCE OF THE DEAD (with Bishop in person)

1 a.m.: Lamberto Bava's DEMONS

Short films include:

Jerome Sable's THE LEGEND OF BEAVER DAM

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Andrew Klass' T IS FOR TOUCH

Jason Eisener's TREEVENGE

Adrián Cardona, Rafa Dengrá and David Muñoz's BRUTAL RELAX

DEAD WEIGHT (trailer for John Pata's upcoming feature)

Daniel DelPurgatorio's OTHER

SCHOOL'S OUT 4EVER, presented by Lowcarbcomedy.com

Also, Scott Poole, author of MONSTERS OF AMERICA, will be selling and autographing copies of the book in the lobby. Plus: vendors, prizes, surprises, a live charity auction for [Vital Bridges](#) and more! Tickets are \$15 for pre-sale at [Brownpapertickets.com](#), or \$18 at the door on the day of the show. Come dressed as a zombie and get \$2 off at the door! For more info, click [here](#)

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