Written by Michael Gingold
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Fango caught up with Australian director Mark Hartley (pictured), creator of the amazing documentary NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD: THE WILD, UNTOLD STORY OF OZPLOITATION!, while he was in NYC grabbing interviews for his follow-up, MACHETE MAIDENS UNLEASHED. This project is in a similar vein, covering the history of genre filmmaking in the Philippines—though not so much homegrown product, he points out.

“It looks not so much at Filipino exploitation movies, but the Americans who went over there to shoot films,” Hartley (pictured) tells Fango, “so it’s kind of a fish-out-of-water story. It covers Roger Corman’s productions, Cirio Santiago’s movies, the BLOOD ISLAND series and Eddie Romero’s other pictures and Bobby Suarez, who literally just died two days ago. Bobby made CLEOPATRA WONG, THE ONE ARMED EXECUTIONER, BIONIC BOY II and things like that. They were films that tried to take on Hollywood and be mainstream, but were kind of beyond mainstream in trying to do it.”

MACHETE MAIDENS will showcase interviews with quite a number of B-movie stalwarts, including several Fango faves. “We’ve spoken to lots and lots of cast and crew,” Hartley says. “We talked to Joe Viola, who went over there with Jonathan Demme and made THE HOT BOX. We’re interviewing Eddie Romero in the Philippines and a bunch of cast from the Corman and Santiago films who have never really spoken about this stuff before, so it has been really, really interesting. Sid Haig and Joe Dante, Allan Arkush and Jon Davison, who were all working in the trailer and promotion department at New World when these films were getting made; Jane Schaffer, who produced Jack Hill’s films, and Hill himself. It will be pretty definitive, and this is an era that has never been documented much, so it’s in the same vein as NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD—another untold story.”

Having completed his Los Angeles interviews and wrapping up his New York stint, Hartley next heads to London, Manila and Singapore, aiming to have MACHETE MAIDENS ready in time to play the major festivals this summer and fall. Director of photography Karl von Moller and co-editors Sara Edwards and Jamie Blanks (the latter doing the score this time) are returning from NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD, and Hartley, who says the new docu will be in the same spirit, is still enormously gratified by the response to that movie. “I was absolutely amazed by the goodwill toward NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD; the feedback from people and the reviews were beyond my wildest dreams. The fact that it has inspired many people to go and seek out the films [it covered] is truly rewarding for me, and for all the filmmakers who told their tales. Those movies have been dismissed for so long, and suddenly the only places you can see them is at festivals!”

One Down Under chiller spotlighted in NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD was Richard Franklin’s PATRICK, and Hartley reveals that he’s bringing a fresh take on that tale of telekinetic terror to the screen. “After we finished NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD, I had discussed this with PATRICK’s producer, Tony Ginnane, and we decided we’d take a crack at reinventing it. So Justin King and I wrote a treatment and Justin’s working on the script at the moment, and hopefully, as soon as MACHETE MAIDENS is finished, we’ll get right into it.”

The original PATRICK, written by Everett De Roche, is the Hitchcock-influenced story of the titular young man, who goes into a coma after electrocuting his mother and winds up in a hospital being tended to by Dr. Roget and nurse Kathy Jacquard, who discover that despite his inert physical state, he now possesses deadly psychic abilities. For the update, “We’re sort of giving it a creepier, Gothic flavor, very much in a similar style to THE ORPHANAGE,” reveals Hartley, who will direct. “There’s much more of a backstory for Dr. Roget, and Patrick has dream sequences and flashbacks where he’s out of the bed. We don’t want to turn Patrick into Freddy Kreuger; we like to think of it as a love story with a body count. The great thing about the original was the fact that here’s a guy with unlimited powers, but all he wants to do is use them to manipulate the events in that nurse’s life to make her fall in love with him. So we’ve kept that central premise and really upped the ante.”

Other elements will be altered, however. “The first PATRICK, as much as it’s a really interesting film, is very much of its time. It’s predominantly set in one hospital room, and we’re trying to open it up. To be honest—and I’ve said this to Tony—it’s not that scary when you watch it now, and we’re all about giving it those jolts. Obviously, I’m a fan of PATRICK, and I want people who’ve seen the original to appreciate the remake, so we’re certainly putting nods to the first one throughout the film, but we’re not doing a Gus Van Sant PSYCHO. I believe Jamie’s remake of LONG WEEKEND [released in the U.S. as NATURE’S GRAVE] suffers because they used the original script, and when people love these films and know them so well, there’s no way that they can embrace a film that’s so similar. We learned a lesson there, and we’ll try to tailor our PATRICK for modern audiences.”

Ginnane is currently seeking funding and working on pre-sales for PATRICK, and Hartley is hoping to start shooting before the end of this year on a budget around $4 million. Clearly, he’s got a lot on his plate this year—and couldn’t be happier about it. “I’d been trying to get a feature going for a long time, and then NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD, which I had worked on for 10 years, got out there,” he says. “I was just so amazed to get brought in on MACHETE MAIDENS; I was a gun for hire on it at first, and I changed the concept to suit the story I wanted to tell and the people I wanted to meet. So that has really taken over my workload, but if that comes out and I jump right into PATRICK, I’ll be very, very happy.” (Thanks to Arianne Ayers)