Written by Marla Newborn Friday, 23 November 2012 10:51



Alan Rowe Kelly and Anthony Sumner's anthology flick GALLERY OF FEAR recently screened at the New York City Horror Film Festival. Amidst the accolades the movie received, viewers could not help but notice how actor Jerry Murdock shines in all three segments—to the point where one could dub the movie "GALLERY OF MURDOCK."

What is it about Murdock that makes this New York City schoolteacher's acting chameleonic enough to star in such different parts in GALLERY's trio of short chillers? Since both Murdock and I are from New York, we were able to meet at a café on the west side of Manhattan, where I got the chance to sit down with him and find out.

As we each grabbed a Stella Artois beer, Murdock began by telling me that he grew up in a small village right outside Cooperstown, New York. It was while growing up in this rural farm country that his aspirations to act were born. "I always dreamed of being an actor from as far back as I can remember," Murdock says. "Whenever I watched TV shows like STAR TREK, THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN or even comedies like HAPPY DAYS or THREE'S COMPANY, I remember watching the people very closely: their behavior, reactions, the way they spoke. The process of mimicking characters on TV fascinated me.

"I can tell you exactly when I knew I really wanted to act, though: 1977. I went to see STAR WARS, and was immediately drawn to the man who to this day I feel led me on this path: Harrison Ford. He was so cool in that film, and I wanted to be just like his character Han Solo. I literally became obsessed with him. I tried acting like Han Solo, re-enacting scenes as best as I could remember, trying to integrate his mannerisms into my 9-year-old personality. It's funny to think of it that way now, but that really made me take it seriously. Later on, his work in THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, BLADE RUNNER and WITNESS just reinforced it. I wanted to be an actor like Harrison Ford someday."

Written by Marla Newborn Friday, 23 November 2012 10:51

Having Ford as an idol is quite a jump to independent horror, since most of Murdock's acting roles have been in that world. What came first, those parts or a love of the genre? "I've loved horror films from as far back as I can remember: monsters, all the scary, dark stuff," he explains. "My family was concerned about my fascination with horror. Even my art teacher in school was troubled by it. I was doing these disturbing drawings, paintings and sculptures. Really horrific stuff. I remember doing a collage of gore scenes from splatter movies in art class with clippings from FANGORIA. I had to go talk to some school counselor about 'what it meant.' I still laugh about that."



That fascination with horror is paying off, as he continues to be an important figure in the New York indie genre scene. However, it wasn't easy at the beginning. After a few modeling gigs and some small parts on the soap opera ONE LIFE TO LIVE, Murdock was about to give up on acting when he got a call from director Alan Rowe Kelly, back in summer 1999, to audition for Kelly's film I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW (pictured above). "I hadn't even remembered submitting myself for the part," Murdock admits. "In those days, I was sending out dozens of headshots and résumés each week. Still, when I spoke with Kelly, I played it off like I knew exactly what he was talking about [*laughs*]. "I hit it off with Alan on the phone and decided to audition, and got a call from him a few days later that I had landed a part. I thought to myself, 'OK, do this film, and when it's done, you move on. At least you'll have a film to show for your time in New York.' This was a reasonable thought, since Alan told me at the time that we would be shooting for two months. Little did I know that we would be filming for a year and a half!"

Since I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW, Murdock has also appeared in Kelly's THE BLOOD SHED, Bart Mastronardi's VINDICATION and a number of short films. "I won the 2010 Dark Carnival Best Supporting Actor award for my work in Mastronardi's VINDICATION. By that time, I had been doing films for about 10 years, and I don't think I had even been nominated for anything, let alone won anything. I was honored to finally be nominated, but I really had no expectations of winning. I received a call from Alan one evening around midnight. He was at the Dark Carnival award ceremony, and I could hear cheering in the background. He told me I

Written by Marla Newborn Friday, 23 November 2012 10:51

had won. I was shocked, and happy.

"I immediately thought of my dad, who had passed away five years earlier and had never seen any of my work except for I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW," Murdock reflects. "I know he was really proud of me because of that film. My mom told me he watched it many, many times. He would tell everyone he knew about my work on the soap opera and I'LL BURY YOU TOMORROW. I couldn't help thinking of him at that moment when I heard the news, and that's what really brought a smile to my face. Not so much the award, but what that award would have meant to him. He would have been so happy. I've won additional awards since, but because of that thought of my dad, I'll never forget the award from Dark Carnival."



We ordered a couple more beers and began to talk about GALLERY OF FEAR. Since each short film stands alone within GALLERY, and Murdock plays very distinct characters in each one, I wondered which was the most challenging, and for which did he have to push himself the hardest. "They each were a challenge in different ways," Murdock explains. "In BY HER HAND, SHE DRAWS YOU DOWN [pictured above], Joe is very conflicted and has to show a range of emotions: He loves Cath and is protective, but is also disgusted with her. He's angry, sad and also worn out by the life they're leading. Anthony Sumner really guided me well throughout, and I think in the end, those feelings are conveyed.

"For DOWN THE DRAIN [pictured below], I had to play Stanley Moffatt as a lovable loser. He had to be pathetic, and the audience had to laugh at his ridiculous behavior but also sympathize with him as well. They needed to connect with him on some level. The whole film is kind of kooky, and I could have easily fallen into slapstick territory, and the result would have been a one-trick pony, but I think Kelly did a great job of reining me in to find the right balance.

Written by Marla Newborn Friday, 23 November 2012 10:51

