

The rise and fall of the horror movie

By F. T. Morris
Of The Print

It started with "Halloween."

Horror movies have been around for a long time (even Thomas Edison did an early version of the Frankenstein story), but no single scary movie--not even "The Exorcist"--has inspired more rip-offs and "similar" kinds of movies than John Carpenter's "Halloween," made in 1978 on a small budget of approximately \$300,000 (about one eighth the cost of the average movie). It was clear, watching the picture that Carpenter's highest aesthetic ambition was to simply scare the audience (I first saw "Halloween" in New York City in late '78 and, being not only in a strange theater but in an entirely new state, I was doubly terrified--for that reason, my anxious, spooky feelings about the movie are not entirely the result of what I saw on the screen).

The success of this one film, which even managed to make *Time Magazine's* "10 Best List," sent every producer scurrying to crank out an imitation. Many surfaced, and most were low budget enough to recoup their production costs and show a small, tidy profit. Therefore, horror flicks became the current Hollywood fad.

Of all the post-"Halloween" scares, "Friday the 13th" was the biggest success, and it influenced much of what was to follow. The bad thing

about this, aside from the fact that "Friday the 13th" sucked, was that what most of these films imitated were the worst parts of "Halloween": the sexuality of the (usually teenage) victims and the bloody carnage.

The victims were usually women who had either just had sex or were preparing to do so. It's a rather facile psychological excuse for murder, though, and said more about the directors' hangups than it did the killer's. But there was really very little explicit sex or nudity in "Halloween", and the violence was suggestive as opposed to graphic--which made it all the more effective because one had to rely on one's imagination.

Is there anyone out there who doesn't cringe at the memory of that ghastly scene in which Bob, one of the babysitter's boyfriends is brutally stabbed through the chest while the camera shows only his curling toes? It was a brilliant way to handle a bit of necessary but grotesque violence.

Nobody thought to copy that, of course. Instead, audiences were forced to witness the explicit axing (in the face--ouch!) of a young girl ("Friday the 13th"), a young boy stabbed through the mouth and throat with a shishkebob poker ("Happy Birthday to Me") and one man's body rammed onto a shower nozzle so the spray came out his dead, gaping

mouth ("My Bloody Valentine"). They were all either about to have sex or had just finished--or didn't you guess?

As a true horror aficionado, I have personally seen some of the most disgusting moments in cinematic history. The lowest-of-low points had to be the sequel to the one that started it all, "Halloween II." This movie fell into the same trap that all the others had: one saw stabbings, shootings, a nurse's face scalded beyond recognition in a hot tub (she and her boyfriend were naturally in it together) and a horrible death scene where a man slips in a huge puddle of blood, falls and cracks his skull.

I must say, to be fair, that occasionally these two elements of horror genre--the negative gross-out and the positive suspense--can melt together semi-successfully. "Friday the 13th--Part Two" had as many onscreen murders as its predecessor, but it also had some suspense that was well-generated. This year's "Hell Night" was pretty silly and brutal, but it gained some momentum as it knocked along, and there was genuine tension that had little to do with people being savagely killed. Instead, the suspense arose because of the fear that they would be killed. Everyone (save the heroine) died, but the onscreen deaths were surprisingly few (only four).

The more cruel these movies got, the more fed up people became; even the indiscriminate can reach a limit when it comes to trash. The horror genre has, on the whole, been dying down. Audiences stopped showing up long before producers ran out of holiday themes for their hack/shoot/stab shows. I think Thanksgiving, April Fools Day and Ground Hog Day are the only three to remain unscathed.

Well, I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but there are only two real horror films (as opposed to sci-fi/horror or fantasy/horror) currently out. They are: "Satan's Mistress" and "Halloween III: Season of the Witch." I have not seen the first--and I never will--but, oh, have I seen the second.

This is the worst piece of dreck thrust at the public since the unbelievably sick (I almost threw up) "Don't Go in the House," which actually showed a chained-up, nude woman burned to a literal crisp with a blowtorch. "Halloween III" isn't really a sequel to the first two (there are no returning characters and the setting is in another state), and it has what must surely be the dumbest plot someone ever dared to write down--one can only hoot, except when trying not to gag (snakes and bugs crawl out of heads). The only good thing this junk has going for it is some

fine night photography by Dean Cundy--and that's all (and it is a pity to see the wasting of Dan O'Herlihy--an actor with the richest tones ever to be heard--who can't even begin to rise above his pathetic material).

This is where we are now. It is a shame, because I love scary movies and I'm sure many others do, too. Not gross-outs, not sex/stab epics, but movies that work at the viewer's nervous system and make one squirm with dread (and anxious delight). "Eyes of Laura Mars" is the last truly great horror movie made, one with real tension and flair, but that was four years ago! The saddest part of all this is that, since horror flicks are starting to slip at the box office, Hollywood might typically turn away from them and release an avalanche of whatever the next trend turns out to be. (Did you notice how quickly the sword and dragon epidemic came to an end? After only a few movies, "Excaliber" is being re-released!)

What the executives don't seem to realize is that it's their own lack of judgment and taste that has forced the public to take a stand and stop being insulted with too-graphic violence when all we want is a rich, satisfying shudder or scream. If Hollywood does shun the horror genre, there won't even be that occasional fun chill.

Gold medal violinist holds Tchaikovsky concert

Elmar Oliveira, the first American violinist to ever win a gold medal at the famed Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow, will make his debut with the Oregon Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Music Director James DePreist on Sunday,

November 21, 7:30 p.m., and Monday and Tuesday, November 22, 23, 8:30 p.m., at Portland Civic Auditorium. The concerts are sponsored in part by the National Endowment for the Arts.

The all-Russian program will open with "The Tempest"

by Peter Ilich Tchaikovsky, receiving its first performance by Oregon Symphony. The work is one of three fantasies based on the plays of William Shakespeare, written by

Tchaikovsky between 1869 and 1895. The work paints a musical picture of some of Shakespeare's most fanciful characters: the magical Prospero, the monstrous Caliban and the sprite Ariel, and Miranda, the lovely maiden who falls

in love with Ferdinand, a handsome youth who has been washed ashore on their enchanted island.

Oliveira will join DePreist and the orchestra in Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto, one of the composer's most beloved and beautiful works. The second half of the concert will feature the mighty Sixth Symphony of Dimitri Shostakovich, written in 1939.

Elmar Oliveira has performed in the most prestigious

concert halls throughout the United States, Europe and South America. He has been a guest soloist with such renowned conductors as Eugene Ormandy, Lorin Maazel, Erich Leinsdorf, Max Rudolph and Sergiu Commissiona, and has appeared with such distinguished American orchestras as those of Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Cleveland, Minnesota, Saint Louis, Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

Bluegrass founder visits area

Bill Monroe, recognized worldwide as the originator of Bluegrass music, will appear in concert with his Bluegrass Boys on Friday, Nov. 5, at 7:30 p.m., in Grant High School Auditorium, 2245 N.E. 36th. Opening the show will be Beverly Cotton, a nationally-recognized clogger who frails the banjo, dances, and sings all the at the same time. Also performing will be Sunny South and The Sawtooth Mountain Boys.

Bill Monroe forged the Bluegrass sound in the 1930's by blending the Appalachian string band music of his youth with other styles, most notably the country blues of Southern Black people. His first band in-

cluded Earl Scruggs and Lester Flatt, later to become Bluegrass stars in their own right. The band has always been the "graduate school" of Bluegrass musicians, and some of the notables who developed their styles while with Bill are Vassar Clements, Chubby Wise, Jimmy Martin, and the Osborne Brothers.

Monroe's mandoline style is definitive and his playing, at age 71, is as fine as ever. He has penned such songs as "Blue Moon of Kentucky," "Footprints in the Snow," and "Kentucky Waltz." In addition, Monroe is a recipient of a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for development of a

traditional folk art. A Pendleton saddlemaker was honored at the same ceremony.

The Bluegrass boys feature Kenny Baker, the dean of country fiddlers, who has many records to his credit as a soloist. Rounding out the band are Blake Williams on banjo, Wayne Lewis on guitar, and Mark Hembree on bass.

The concert is being sponsored by the Oregon Bluegrass Association, KWJJ, and Solar-dynamics Northwest. Ticket prices are \$7.00 in advance, \$7.50 at the door. Ticket outlets are G. I. Joe's, Pioneer Music, Green Grass Pickin' Coop, and Everybody's Records.

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