

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG HORROR MOVIE DIRECTOR

A conversation with Henry Weintraub

BY RICK LEVIN



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

Local writer and filmmaker Henry Weintraub suspects that the horror genre has come to a dead end.

“Modern horror movies don’t really capture me too much,” Weintraub says. “It’s so formulaic. I don’t love a horror movie that’s come out in the last 20 years.”

This, coming from an independent filmmaker whose first full-length feature movie was a zombie flick (*Melvin*, 2009) followed by a gritty noir thriller (*The Darkest Side of Paradise*, 2010) and a dark comedy about a wanna-be serial killer (*Killing Me*, 2012). With these films, promising as they are for such a young talent, Weintraub feels that he’s gone about as far as he can go in a genre that is now dominated by big-budget rehash, like the *Saw* franchise.

“What got me into horror in the first place is that horror is the easiest genre to do because you can fuck it up and it still works,” he says. “It’s just the most forgivable genre,” he adds, noting that what always drew him to horror was an emphasis on storytelling as well as an ability to mix

comic elements with serious scares, as happens in two of his all-time favorites horror films, *American Werewolf in London* and *Re-Animator*.

“I feel like most horror movies have a lack of story,” he says. “It’s become more just an idea. You’re just completely limited by what you can do with horror movies.”

Not that he’s given up on the genre altogether. As a producer for Shout Factory, Weintraub is still very much involved in film, having recently helped with the editing of a new Shout Factory TV show called *Horror Hunters* as well as creating promotional material for the company’s Blu-ray Disc release of such films as *Return of the Living Dead*, John Carpenter’s *The Thing* and *They Live*, as well as the cult classic *Buckaroo Banzai*. He’s also written the recent published comic *Demonized* for Hard-Case Comics.

When asked about his other favorite horror films, Weintraub likes to draw a distinction. “That brings up the question, ‘What is a horror movie?’ To me, there’s huge difference between horror movies and scary movies,” he says. “The horror movies I like aren’t scary at all —

they’re ridiculous and fun,” such as the 1958 version of *The Blob* and *Night of the Creeps*.

On the other hand, he says, “movies that are scary to me I really wouldn’t consider horror movies, if that makes sense. Scary movies portray what humans and their minds are, or aren’t, capable of. Horror movies are alien slugs turning people into zombies or a giant blob eating an entire town,” Weintraub adds.

Among the films that really scared him, Weintraub includes *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer*, *Psycho*, 1955’s *Night of the Hunter*, *The Thing* (a perfect horror movie that doubles as a sci-fi thriller, he points out) and *Miracle Mile*, a tense apocalyptic drama that follows a small handful of characters as the world counts its way down to nuclear holocaust.

“Doesn’t get much scarier than that,” Weintraub says.

“When it comes to a truly scary movie,” he adds, “I like the feeling of no hope — people like you or me being put in unthinkable situations that no one could come back from and having to deal with people that are not like you or me at all. I think that’s what makes a movie actually scary.”

(LEFT TO RIGHT) STILLS FROM WEINTRAUB’S FILMS *MELVIN* AND *THE DARKEST SIDE OF PARADISE*

