

SCRATCHPAD

'Ghost Adventures' lots of fun, except ghost part



ERICK BENDEL PHOTO

From left: Michael Guggino, Jay Wasley and Devin Lawrence — all involved in the Travel Channel series 'Ghost Adventures' — play blues at Workers Tavern in Astoria in April 2018.

By **ERICK BENDEL**
FOR COAST WEEKEND

When I met some of the "Ghost Adventures" crew last April, they were playing the blues at Uniontown's Workers Tavern — a sound engineer on guitar, a writer/editor doing vocals and harmonica, a cast member pounding the djembe.

They seemed like the nicest guys in the world, very patient with the questions of a reporter who had never seen their TV show and was intent

on distracting them from their drinks and jam session.

And indeed, in the first episode of the show's four-part miniseries, "Graveyard of the Pacific," that debuted Saturday, they come off as an affable gang, almost childlike in their eagerness to scare themselves stupid in the dead of night.

The episode, which takes viewers beneath Gulley's Butcher Shop and the Liberty Theatre, makes good use of Astoria's grim, gray palette. Ah, those wet sidewalks ... that creeping fog bank ... the pilings on the riverfront peeking through the mist ... the macabre, maritime atmosphere. The wonderfully eerie port town I love.

My enjoyment was dimmed by one tiny, nagging quibble: Ghosts probably don't exist.

There likely are better explanations for bumps in a basement and subterranean tangles than, say, spirits lingering from the Astoria Fire of 1922. At one point, host Zak Bagans speculates that an ancient curse is sabotaging the filmmakers — elevators getting stuck, internet connections crapping out, as if someone, or something, doesn't want these stories told. Uh-huh. It's hard to tell how much the cast buys into this and how much is pure histrionics. I don't know about you, but whenever their ghost-o-meter starts to ping, so does my BS detector.

(Question: Why does almost every supposed haunting in our area only involve people and events of the last 100 to 200 years? Native American tribes occupied the region for thousands of years, yet no one around here seems especially wary of souls who, say, perished in the great earthquake and tsunami of



THOMAS ROTT PHOTO

Features Editor Erick Bengel.

1700. Just sayin'.)

I wonder about the cultural effect of shows like this. Though useful as escapist entertainment, does such programming quietly corrode truth as a value, lowering standards of evidence for claims that demand a much higher threshold, offering caricatures of the scientific method to a public whose grasp of science is already dubious? Don't such shows tend to make viewers more credulous, giving them permission to indulge their fantasies rather than question their premises?

I suppose that's not the point. It's "Ghost Adventures," not "MythBusters."

To the extent that I could set aside the wet blanket of

my skepticism and simply savor the great cinematography — what magnificent drone shots of Astoria! — the endearing earnestness of the cast, the nods toward Astoria's sketchy past and the glee of pointing out sites that are personally meaningful (Hey, my apartment! Hey, I bought a sandwich there once!), it's a fun show.

But I must tediously aver that the evidence for ghosts is thin at best, and it should take a lot more than the "Ghost Adventurers" investigations to make someone a believer.

In any case, Astoria has a rich history of perfectly real-world horror sufficient to freak people out; no need to embrace murky metaphysics. **CW**

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