

THE NORTH COAST'S FORGOTTEN MOVIE STAR

Astoria International Film Festival will highlight local legend

BY PETER KORCHNAK

A nearly forgotten local legend will be highlighted during the the 14th annual Astoria International Film Festival this weekend at Liberty Theatre.

Festival founder and executive director Ron Craig created the event to highlight-Northwest filmmakers.

"We like to show films that are educational," said Craig. "I like people to walk away scratching their head."

The local focus will come courtesy of Vampira, an American actress and television personality who created the campy 1950s gothic character, and grew up in Astoria.

Local roots

Maila Elizabeth Nurmi, the actress who became known as Vampira, was born in 1922 in Gloucester, Massachusetts. She moved to Astoria with her family as a teenager in 1939.



A scene from 'Plan 9 from Outer Space,' starring Maila Nurmi.



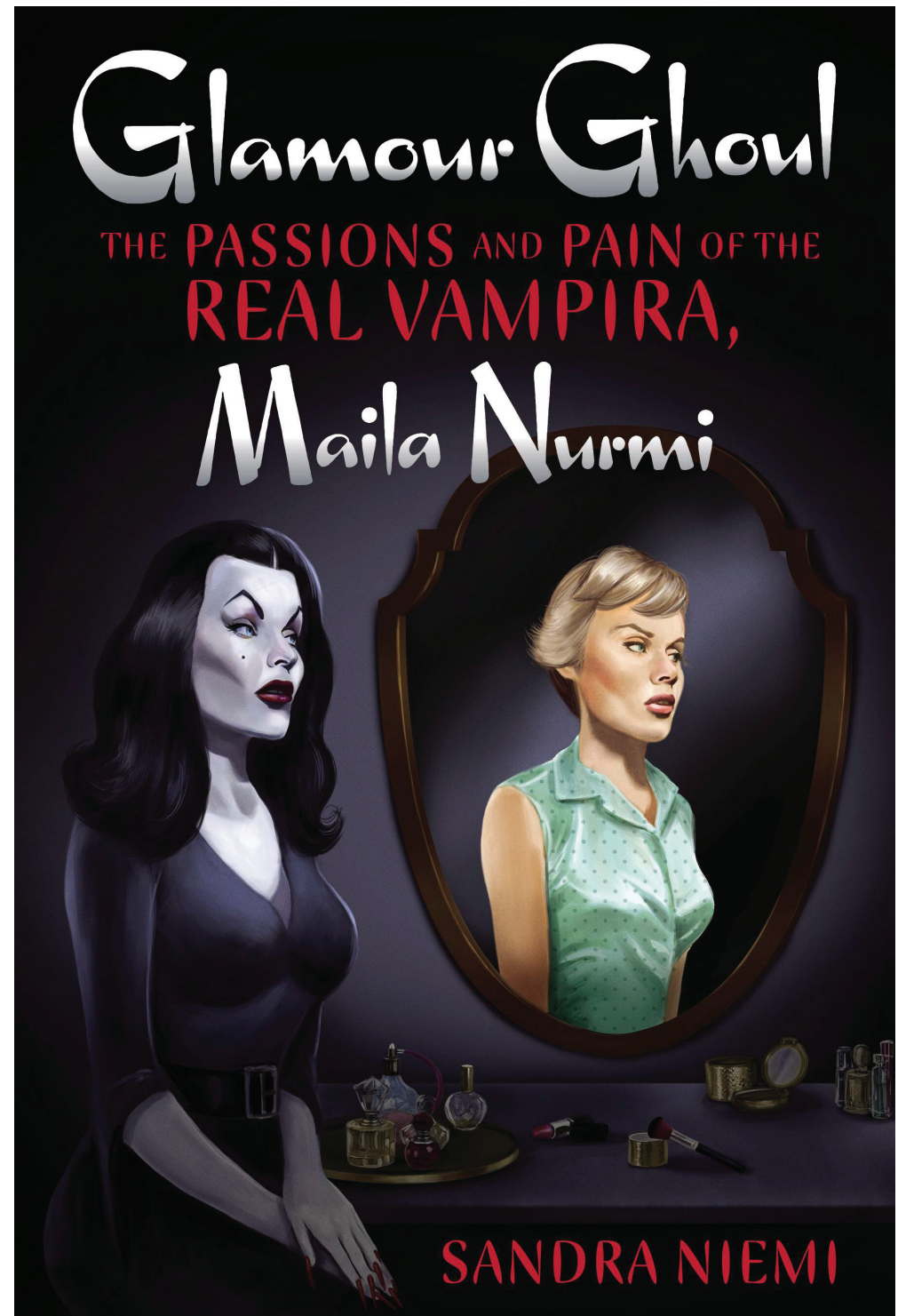
Actress Maila Nurmi lived in Astoria as a teenager.

Sandra Niemi, Nurmi's niece, dug extensively into her aunt's history to craft a biography called "Glamour Ghoul: The Passions and Pain of the Real Vampira, Maila Nurmi." The book tells the intriguing tale of her aunt's incredible rise to fame.

Nurmi graduated from Astoria High School and worked as a strawberry picker, bookmobile operator and tuna canner at the Columbia River Packer's Association.

While taking a bath in her family's Astoria home one day, Nurmi listened to Orson Welles on the radio. Animated, she told her mother he was a genius and she would befriend him one day.

"Her mother said, 'Don't talk like that, people will think you're crazy,'" Sandra Niemi said. "'You're Maila Nurmi and you work in a fish cannery and that's all you are.'"



The cover of 'Glamour Ghoul: The Passions and Pain of the Real Vampira, Maila Nurmi,' written by Sandra Niemi, Nurmi's niece.

According to Niemi, that's when the girl who would eventually become Vampira decided to leave and go to Hollywood.

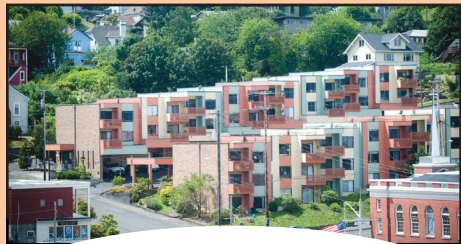
In October 1941, future Vampira took a bus to Los Angeles and never stepped foot in Astoria again.

"I'm not surprised she never came

back," said Niemi. "She was a free spirit, she wanted to fly."

Nurmi did end up befriendng Welles, an American director, actor, screenwriter and producer. According to public

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