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## Richard Griffin

By *Christian Sellers* on February 27, 2011

Richard Griffin is amongst a select few of independent filmmakers working outside the major studio system who have built their own empire of trusted collaborators and outrageous concepts. Making his feature debut with 2004's *Feeding the Masses* (from a script by Troma alumni Trent Haaga), Griffin has gained considerable acclaim through his work with his production company Scorpio Film Releasing, resulting in such delicious titles as *Nun of That* and *The Disco Exorcist*.



Richard Griffin reveals his thoughts and feelings on the film industry...

### **Do you recall your first ever attempt at shooting something and how did you get turned onto filmmaking?**

"When I was thirteen years old my father bought a Super 8 camera for me from a yard sale. This was before camcorders and before even basic video cameras were readily available to the public.

I shot dozens and dozens of short Super 8 films with my friends and learned the basics of camera angles and editing (which was done mostly in-camera). Shooting Super 8 was a great way to learn discipline, as film and developing was very expensive, so you really learned to plan your shots out in advance.

That camera, and the fact that my father was a huge film buff (mostly foreign films, which he would take me to go see at our local 'art house' cinema), really turned me onto filmmaking."

### **Do you feel that a lack of budget is just a poor excuse for lack of talent, as no amount of money can be a substitute for a good imagination?**

"I have a motto on the set, which is "A good idea can trump an expensive one." I find so many indie filmmakers these days learned how to make movies by watching the DVD extras of *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Matrix*. They think they need a huge budget or a giant crew to make a good movie, and that's not true.

What it takes to make a good movie is, obviously next to talent, a lot of hard work and a willingness to do your homework. Going out and finding the best talent you can for your money. Writing a quality screenplay. Getting exciting and visually interesting locations. This all takes time and energy, but it pays off in the long run.

That being said, you need to have SOME money to make a movie. You need to feed people. And you need to have production insurance. So many low budget filmmakers forget the need for insurance... it's crazy. Most locations will not allow you to shoot on their property if you don't have insurance. It's a worthwhile investment."

**With titles such as *Nun of That* and *The Disco Exorcist* under your belt, what would you say are your main inspirations and what scene or genre do you feel has made the greatest impact on you?**

"It's hard for me to really list my inspirations. I grew up before cable television or the internet. There was only really five channels to watch, so I watched every movie that was shown. It didn't matter if it was a film noir from the forties, a screwball comedy from the thirties, or a Hammer vampire film from the sixties, I watched it.

I guess all those things show up in my work. I love a good Marx Brothers film as much as I love a good John Carpenter movie. Everything from Godard to Russ Meyer!"

**Your films often boast simple-yet-ingenious hooks, such as a nun with a gun. How do you usually develop these ideas and do they usually begin with a one-sentence pitch that you build on?**

"Sometimes they just start with a title like *Nun of That*. It just gets your imagination going. Sometimes, as in the case of *The Disco Exorcist*, it's just the seed of an idea.

It's really difficult to describe the creative process in which a screenplay is written. Typically, I come up with the basic idea of the movie, and then hand it off to a screenwriter (as was the case with *The Disco Exorcist*, which Tony Nunes wrote), or I'll write a complete first draft and then hand it over to a writer for either a polish or a complete page one re-write (which was the case with *Atomic Brain Invasion*, which Guy Benoit co-wrote).

Typically, I just come up with something that I believe will be fun to shoot, be somewhat exploitable and audiences will enjoy. In that order."

**Most first-time filmmakers often make the same mistakes, such as including too much dialogue or unnecessary nudity or violence. Is this something you fell for as well and what advice would you offer to a wannabe director?**

"My advice would be strictly technical. I think a first-time director, or even a tenth-time director, should just follow his or her heart and make the movie they want to make. Don't try to really follow a trend. I think we've seen enough zombie and vampire films to last a lifetime. Don't make a *Twilight* rip-off, just because it's done well at the box office. You'll just be making a ultra-cheap knock-off.

That being said, you really shouldn't make a 'navel-gazer.' A self-indulgent film only you, your mother and your shrink will understand. You're making movies for an audience at the end of the day and mostly they want a good story, well told.

As for technical advice I would say three things – 1. Stop with all the hand-held bullshit. It looks cheap and lazy. Use a dolly, tripod, Steadicam or whatever you can use to keep the camera steady. You're not making a documentary, you're making a fiction. 2. Make sure to hire a good sound recorder/boom operator. Most indie films are destroyed by bad sound. 3. Don't tint your films green, blue or orange. It's a tired cliché and, once again, just looks lazy."

**Which of your work to-date are you most proud of and which represents you best as both a filmmaker and an individual?**

"I'm proud of them all. At the end of the day, if you can finish your movie and get it distributed, you've done your job and done it well. So many films, especially indie fare, just end up either unfinished or on a shelf somewhere. I call them 'Milk Carton Movies.' You know, 'MISSING: Have you seen this film?'"

If I was going to tell someone who wanted to get to know my movies... I would probably tell them to watch (in no real order) *Atomic Brain Invasion*, *Nun of That*, *Beyond the Dunwich Horror* and *The Disco Exorcist*. They're all good, each one is very different and they all have high quality acting."

**What projects do you currently have in the works and how do these differ from what you have produced in the past?**

"Right now we're about two months away from shooting our newest film *Exhumed*, which is a really dark, claustrophobic movie about loss, written by Guy Benoit. It's a dark fairy tale. It's a little different from what I've done in the past because it includes almost no humour, which is rare for me. It has an amazing line-up including Sarah Nicklin, Debbie Rochon, Michael Reed, Ruth Sullivan, Rich Tretheway, Michael Thurber and Jonathan Thomson.

After that, we're shooting *Mutants of the Apocalypse*. A sci-fi/action/horror film inspired by the spaghetti 'after the bomb' films of the early eighties. That one should be a lot of fun!"

**Whilst filmmaking is now easier with digital cameras and home editing software, the industry is currently dominated by remakes and 3D movies. How difficult is it for an independent director to land his first shot with major studio?**

"I have no idea about major studios. I don't care one bit for the product they've put out in the past ten years and they probably don't care for me either.

As for 3D, it's a cheap gimmick. It was a gimmick used back in the fifties to get people from watching TV and back into the movie theatres, then in the early eighties it came back to lure people away from cable and VHS, and now its reared its ugly head again to get us away from the internet. But it's still a pointless gimmick no matter how much money you toss at it.

I just would like to say that a young director shouldn't worry too much about landing a big Hollywood film. Just enjoy the process, love what you do, treat your cast and crew with respect and, most of all, if you do get your big break in showbiz... don't cast Michael Cera. He's the Hep-C of acting."

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