



A NEW DOCUMENTARY  
CELEBRATES THE WORLD'S  
MOST UNSTOPPABLE

# HORROR HOST Count GORE DE VOL



# King of the CARDBOARD CASTLE

by Eric Veillette

**H**ORROR HOSTS WERE NOTHING NEW TO THE TELEVISION AIRWAVES OF THE 1970s. Since the early 1950s, with the likes of Vampira and Zacherley, and into the 1960s, with Sir Graves Ghastly and Ghoulardi, they provided late-night creature comforts for horror fans both young and old. But while most of their shows have come and gone, one show, *Creature Feature*, which debuted on WDCA out of Washington, DC in 1973, continues today. Its host, Count Gore de Vol, played by Dick Dyszel, finally gets his due in BrinkDVD's recently released documentary, *Every Other Day Is Halloween*.



The Transylvanian-accented Count – whose name is a play on satirical author and political essayist Gore Vidal – is an amalgam of various pathos-driven characters derived from Dyszel's childhood: Jackie Gleason, Red Skelton and the great clown, Emmett Kelly.

"Gore is the kind of vampire with great ideas who never succeeds," jokes Dyszel, 63, speaking to *Rue Morgue* from his home in Washington, DC. "We just finished editing a movie that's going up on Saturday, and once again, the tables turn on him. He's the Homer Simpson of vampires."

Before Gore, Dyszel experimented with a prototype, M.T. Graves, at WDXR-TV in Paducah, Kentucky. Then, when he took a gig at WDCA, he started with a character named Captain 20, a Spock-eared, jumpsuit-wearing sprite who hosted an afternoon show of cartoons and serials. Dyszel also played Bozo the Clown, and turned the venerable kids' variety program into a game show. Soon, like scores of other entertainers at local stations across the US before him, he was given his own horror host gig with *Creature Feature*. The Count was born to introduce a variety of goofy genre movies each week. It was here that kids, such as *Every Other Day is Halloween* director C.W. Prather, discovered him.

"I watched Bozo in the morning, Captain 20 in the afternoon, and when I was about nine or ten I began staying up late to watch Count Gore De Vol," reminisces Prather. "Even though he is kind of the iconic 'vampire' character, the fun he was having resonated and was contagious. He allows himself to be the butt of a joke and underneath it all, you can tell he gets it and keeps moving forward. If there's a mistake during the show, he's likely to stop and point it out."

Footage of these early shenanigans is quite rare because a station with a limited budget would reuse the tapes, worth \$300 at the time, until they eventually fell apart. ("The fact that anything survived is amazing," Dyszel says. "It's like *The Tonight Show* – they don't have anything from the first episodes.") Luckily, he possessed the foresight to preserve some of the tapes. A portion of that salvaged footage – which Dyszel has donated to the US National Archives – appears in *Every Other Day is Halloween*.

Dyszel says he loved the looseness and freedom that the show offered but had no direct input into the selection of the films themselves (until the 1980s). Yet it's fitting that some of the first ones broadcast were science-fiction flicks from the 1950s, such as *Them!* and *Tarantula* – the very films he adored as a kid growing up in Chicago.

Although *Creature Feature* was the first horror host program to air *Night of the Living Dead* uncut, often the movies were of the more typical schlocky variety, including *Attack of the Giant Leeches* and *Wrestling Women vs. The Aztec Mummy*. No matter how bad some of the films were, though, the show was respectful and rarely stepped into the frame while the film was broadcast to interact with them, a horror host staple that went as far back as Zacherley in the 1950s.

"I did not want to interrupt the movies," says Dyszel. "The few times we did it was like in *Phantasm*, when Gore would walk down the hall of the mausoleum [in the movie]; he was never actually interplaying with the film."

Setting *Creature Feature* above other horror shows of the mid-1970s – many of which were disappearing due to *Saturday Night Live*'s takeover of the late-night market – was its old-time burlesque feel, meshed with sexual innuendo and the politics of the era. Kids could talk about it in the schoolyard on Monday morning, while adults guffawed over Gore's annual failed attempts to score with the *Penthouse* Pet of the Year.

"Sometimes I'd ignore the concept of the film and just do something else entirely," recalls Dyszel. "Burt Reynolds does a fold-out for *Playgirl* and I could not let him get away with that. I could not let him be America's sex symbol. So we parodied it by having Gore pose for a centrefold, and when it came time to reveal the outer fold, the rest of me was skeleton!"

Despite the wide appeal of the humour (apparently the Count's political-themed material made him a favourite of the area's politicians, who would watch him on Saturday nights at the local pub), *Creature Feature* also eventually fell to the success of late-night comedy and was cancelled in 1979. Dyszel fought to revive it and, after a five-year hiatus, it returned to the airwaves, featuring a guest appearance from Forrest J Ackerman.

But by 1987 Dyszel saw the writing on the wall; the station's new owners no longer saw any viability with in-house production and the show was cancelled again. "They fired the production staff, but kept me around, hoping I'd quit so that they wouldn't have to pay my pension," he claims.

At first, Dyszel became a DJ in the DC area, but the possibilities of the internet in the '90s soon exhumed the Count once more. Although the technology was still very limited in 1998, *Creature Feature* re-launched as the world's first online horror host show at countgore.com and has continued ever since, offering new weekly episodes. The rebuilt set even looks identical to what he used at WDCA, right down to the Vampirella poster inside the lid of the Count's coffin.

Upon *Creature Feature*'s digital revival, Dyszel discovered a network of other horror hosts, sharing tricks of the trade via mailing lists and message boards.



**Creature Teacher:** (clockwise from top) The Count glours you, examining Bela Lugosi's ring with Forrest J Ackerman, Karlos Borloff and the Monsterminators as musical guests, and (inset) The Count with actress/model Glori Anne Gilbert.

"We should have been supporting each other like this all along, but we never spoke to each other back in the day," he says. "We were very protective of our markets. Now we make guest appearances on each others' shows!"

Prather says that Dyszel's ability to adapt and evolve is key. "The fact that he's still doing it and is so encouraging of others who are also doing it, sets him apart."

While many of those interviewed in *Every Other Day is Halloween* – including a younger generation of horror hosts inspired by Gore, such as Dr. Sarcophagy (*The Spooky Movie*), Karlos Borloff (*Monster Madhouse Live*) and Penny Dreadfu (*Shilling Shockers*) – remark that while the internet is great, its push-button, instantaneously accessible nature can't replace the anticipation of waiting for your local TV broadcast.

Dyszel disagrees. Often asked when he'll return to the airwaves, he says "Why should I? I'm as free as I've ever been. I keep telling my producer I'll retire in 2013, then I'll have been on the internet longer than I was on television!" 🦇

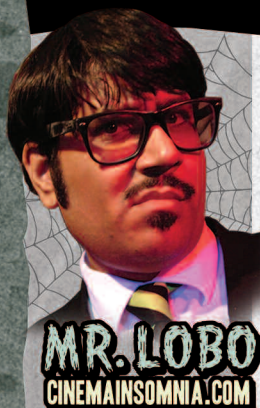




**RUE MORGUE ROUNDS UP SIX  
HORROR HOSTS**  
TO ASK THEM WHY THEY KEEP TV'S  
MOST SCARE-IFYING TRADITION ALIVE.

# The LATE SHIFT

by Trevor Tuminski and Eric Veillette



**MR. LOBO**  
CINEMAINSOMNIA.COM

**1** **"THEY'RE NOT BAD MOVIES – JUST MISUNDERSTOOD,"** says the bespectacled suit-and-tie guy behind nationally syndicated *Cinema Insomnia*. Featured on many stations across the US, Erik Lobo regularly trumpets the praises of fine celluloid specimens such as *The Brain That Wouldn't Die* while conversing with his houseplant co-host, Miss Mittens. **TT**

"Unhealthy obsessions with creature features, drive-in movies, robots, monsters and all things spooky ruined my brain for honest work. I was lucky that I got to meet my hosting hero Bob Wilkins. He gave me the courage to pitch my material to pad out the 3 a.m. movie. ... I was hooked! It's a great way to meet chicks and the money is amazing! My only goal is to one day be written up in *Rue Morgue*!"



**PENNY DREADFUL**  
SHILLINGSHOCKERS.COM

**2** **WINNER OF THE 2007 RONDO AWARD** for Favourite Active Horror Host, Danielle Gelehrter plays Penny Dreadful XIII, the 700-year-old bewitching host of *Shilling Shockers*. Broadcast on cable access stations across New England, California, Pennsylvania and West Virginia, Penny regularly serves up flicks "from the fetid swamp known as 'the public domain'" while giving Elvira a run for her money in the, um, "haunted hills" department. **EV**

"I was first introduced to horror when I was very young by my uncle Valdemar. He is a big fan of classic horror and initially tried to scare me with his *Famous Monsters* mags and Pickwick horror records. I think he saw that I was actually fascinated and eventually asked me if I wanted to watch these fifth-generation video tapes of *Dark Shadows* or Universal, Hammer and Roger Corman's Poe films. Thanks for the nightmares, Uncle Val!"



**SVENGOOLIE**  
WCIU.COM

**3** **SINCE THE EARLY '70s, SVENGOOLIE HAS** spooked the Chicago area in his trademark face paint, wig and top hat, and he still hosts a weekly program on indie TV station WCIU. Originally portrayed by Jerry G. Bishop, Rich Koz took up the mantle a few years after the character's inception and has been called "the most decorated horror host," having won eight regional Emmy awards. **TT**

"I started horror hosting after working with the original Sven, not only because I was a fan of the genre, but as a way to be the 'front man' on my own program. I am motivated by the constant encouragement of the many fans who appreciate my work, my love for the genre, and to keep the tradition of quality locally produced entertainment television – beyond just news – alive at a time when most broadcast stations have phased it out."

**4** **THE FIRST AND ONLY AFRICAN-AMERICAN HORROR HOST,** John Dimes has embodied Dr. Sarcofigu since 1995 in the Washington, DC area. He's appeared on Count Gore de Vol's *Creature Feature* and also has a recurring role on *Monster Madhouse Live* as the president of Monster Land. Alongside an upcoming CD, new episodes of *Spooky Movie Television* are set to roll, co-hosted by the lovely Boo DaPest. **TT**

"It was because of Count Gore de Vol, and other hosts like Vampira, Elvira, Zacherley and The Bowman Body that I wanted to pay homage to a time where we were scared in a grandly silly way! ... I enjoy 'eating the scenery!' If it wasn't for Sarcofigu, I would never have found my performance voice, which belongs solely to Foghorn Leghorn by way of Colonel Sanders!"



**Dr. SARCOFIGUY**  
SPOOKYMOVIE TELEVISION.COM

**5** **JERRY MOORE HAS PLAYED THE SPACE-TRAVELLING,** monster-huntin' host of *Monster Madhouse Live* since 2006. *MML* airs daily on various channels in Washington, DC and regularly in Dallas, Texas. Borloff also leads rock band The Monsterminators, which writes original themes for many of the movies he screens. **TT**

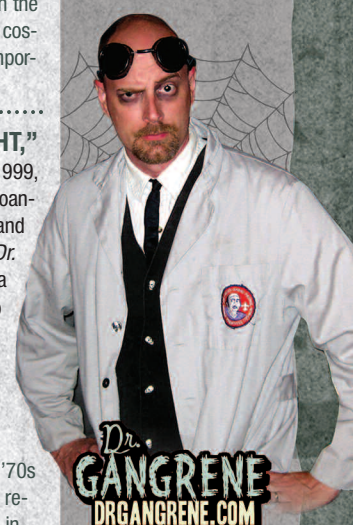
"I originally started horror hosting in my room and parents' garage when I was about nine years old. I'd show four-minute reels of *Destroy All Monsters*, *Godzilla vs. the Thing*, *Varan*, *Frankenstein Conquers the World* ... taking my cue from Count Gore de Vol. He was the talk of the hallways for all the school kids. The motivation to keep doing it is to keep that element of excitement alive for the kids that missed the monster/sci-fi culture in the '60s and '70s. Live action hosts and characters, costumes, contests, local appearances and, most importantly, monsters!!!"



**KARLOS BORLOFF**  
MONSTERMADHOUSE.COM

**6** **THE "PHYSICIAN OF FRIGHT," HAS HAUNTED** airwaves since 1999, and along with his assistant Nurse Moan-ek, he provides chills throughout Tennessee and southern Kentucky with his weekly program *Dr. Gangrene's Creature Feature*. Having produced a Rondo Award-winning series of PSAs called "Go Green with Dr. Gangrene," the good doc also fronts horror punk band Spookhand and has lent his voice to albums by The Creeping Cruds and Psycho Charger. **TT**

"In Tennessee there was a horror host in the '70s called Sir Cecil Creape. His show is still fondly remembered to this day, and that was my original inspiration. My motivation to continue hosting lies in a deep-seated love of Halloween and horror movies. This is a chance to celebrate horror movies and creators and really make it Halloween all year long."



**Dr. GANGRENE**  
DRGANGRENE.COM