

Young filmmaker succeeds with low-budget horror movie

By Tom Panzenhagen
staff writer

SAM RAIMI HAS ONE film playing at a theater near you and another scripted and awaiting a buyer. This week he's at the Cannes Film Festival, showing the first film, "The Evil Dead," selling the second, titled for now "The XYZ Murders," and, more than likely, hobnobbing with friend Stephen King, "Carrie" author and "Creepshow" creator, who praises Raimi in a recent issue of Twilight Zone Magazine.

Sam Raimi, a Franklin resident out of Groves High School class of '77, is 23 years old.

He was 20 when he completed "The Evil Dead" with the help of Groves classmates Bruce Campbell and Ellen Sandweiss, who costar in the film that opened in New York last month, in Detroit May 6 and in Atlanta this week.

while a student at Michigan State University.

RAIMI BEGAN making home movies at 13. He's had little classroom instruction in film technique but has been involved, with Campbell and Sandweiss, in school productions at Groves and a film society at MSU.

He credits youthful excursions to the movies with his interest in films, citing such horror classics as "The Haunting" and "Night of the Living Dead" as inspirations.

He pleaded guilty when asked if "The Evil Dead" was intended partially to resemble George Romero's "Night of the Living Dead," and added: "That was really a powerful film that scared the heck out of me."

Raimi also compared the form of his first film with the campy, Andy Warhol versions of "Dracula" and "Frankenstein." "I'm not comparing the films," Raimi said, "but that is the closest genre to 'Evil Dead.'"

Raimi expressed some concern over the impact that ultraviolent horror films may have on viewers. "So long as kids are old enough to know the difference between films and real life," Raimi said, "I don't think what they see in a movie affects them outside the movie."

"The same holds true for adults," he added. "Anything can set someone off. Superman could make them want to jump off a building. But 'Evil Dead' is a monster picture — it's not behavior that someone could emulate."

IT'S APPARENT from talking to Raimi that he's proud of his first effort, but he also maintains a sense of humor about its limitations. About three-quarters of the picture was filmed in Tennessee and the remaining portion at a cabin near Marshall, Mich., and in the backyard and basement of Raimi's parents' home in Birmingham.

Asked how many people are in the cast, he said, "There are five actors in the film . . . then four . . . then three . . . then two."

He also is quick to share credit for the film's success, and he credits Bart Pierce with creating the special effects, which define the film.



Sam Raimi looks positively playful, on location for "The Evil Dead," the backyard film that he has taken to the Cannes Film Festival and to commercial movie theaters throughout the world.

"Bart built replicas that were anatomically correct, working inside out from the bone outward, and finally painting on the makeup for what I call the 'meltdown sequence' at the end of the movie," Raimi said.

The replicas were filmed one frame at a time, as Pierce brought about their decomposition, the end result being the ultimate destruction of the demons that haunt the film's hero.

Reviews of "The Evil Dead" have been mixed. The film has drawn raves from such quarters as Twilight Zone Magazine and Fangoria, another sci-fi publication, while more ecumenical reviewers have been less kind.

Raimi's reaction to criticism typifies his feelings about himself and his work. "I read every single thing that's printed about the film, and naturally I hope it's positive, but it just kills me that it's in the paper in the first place," he said.



Bruce Campbell struggles to destroy the Book of the Dead in this gory scene from "The Evil Dead."

'The Evil Dead' deserves to rest

By Tom Panzenhagen
staff writer

"The Evil Dead" represents a first effort. It's the premiere film of screenwriter-director Sam Raimi.

It was made on a budget. The most expensive item on the list of production costs must have been the Karo corn syrup used to simulate blood.

It was shot, in part, in the backyard and basement of the filmmaker's parents' home in Birmingham. In one scene the walls are, in fact, paper thin, because they are made of paper.

The acting is amateurish, the characters hackneyed, the dialogue trite and the camera work clumsy. But it's the first effort of a 20-year-old filmmaker.

Does that fact excuse the film's many shortcomings? Not when tickets are \$4 a pop.

As a student effort, "The Evil Dead" would be commendable. It might take home first prize in a campus film festival. But "The Evil Dead" is not a student film, although it was conceived by Raimi while he was a Michigan State University student.

It's a professional effort that commands top dollar at the box office. It's a film that's being shopped around the

review

Cannes Film Festival this week. But, foremost, it's a film to be avoided.

"THE EVIL DEAD" is about five college students who vacation at a dilapidated cabin in the Tennessee hills. There they encounter "The Book of the Dead," an ancient tome that serves as catalyst in the resurrection of evil demons.

They also encounter creaking floors, creaking doors, creaking trap doors, creaking stairs, creaking windows, creaking bridges, creaking trees and creaking shower curtains. The only thing that doesn't creak is the chain saw, which roars like a dependable chain saw in a creaky horror film should.

At the direct moments of dread and distress, with characters decapitated or transformed into hellish fiends, lines like "Everything will be OK" or "You'll be OK" spew out with the detested re-

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