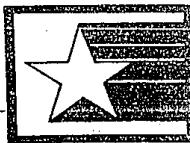


Entertainment

Ethel Simmons, editor/644-1100



101C

Thursday, May 4, 1989 O&E



Patricia Ward (left), Mark Watzi and Michael Gravame appear in the Birmingham Village Players production of the comedy "The Foreigner," opening Friday, May 12.

upcoming things to do

Deadline for the Upcoming calendar is one week ahead of publication. Items must be received by Thursday to be considered for publication the following Thursday. Send to: Ethel Simmons, Entertainment Editor, the Observer & Eccentric, 36251 Schoolcraft Road, Livonia 48150.

information about the season's subscription call 644-9225.

• ALBEE PLAY

"Seascape," a humorous look at change and the inevitability of change written by Edward Albee, is scheduled for 8 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays, May 5-6 and 12-13, at Smith Theatre on the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills. A matinee is scheduled for 2 p.m. Sunday, May 13. Director Sandra Sutherland, English and philosophy faculty member at the college, will lead a symposium immediately following the performance. OCC faculty and cast members will assist her. Reservations and details may be obtained by calling 471-7700.

• COFFEEHOUSE CONCERT

Paint Creek Center for the Arts in Rochester features folk singer/

Please turn to Page 8

Back to being a bad guy

By Kevin Teevens
special writer

THE MOVIE THEATER audience was settling down, Max — the maniacal, meat-cleaver-toting, joke-cracking mass murderer — finally was dead.

Or was he? From the back of the theater came the blood-curdling promise of a repeated in "The Horror Show" — "This isn't finished!"

Actor Brion James, who plays the evil Max Jenko, was out in the lobby stalking moviegoers at the film's Detroit-area premiere at the American Theatre in Southfield. Instead of a meat cleaver, he was armed with a pen for autographs.

"With a lot of actors, when they're done filming, they say, 'Goodbye' to the project," said James, after an interview the next morning at the Radisson Plaza Hotel in Southfield. "I'm more than happy to visit Detroit." This stop was one on a five-city tour to promote the opening of "The Horror Show."

THE LAST TIME the actor was in the Detroit area, he was causing mayhem and driving around town on a van with a giantified rat on the roof, playing a man/mouse/terminator who was really grotesquely horrific in "Crimewave."

"I was here filming for three months in the dead of winter. You can keep your Michigan winters," the actor, who resides in California, said with a laugh.

The "Horror Show" is a cut above your run-of-the-mill slasher flick. In the film, Max is a twisted mass murderer bent on the destruction of the detective who's been sent behind bars, no matter what it takes. "Horror Show's" difference became the terror is psychological," said James, breaking into the voice of Max.

"In a lot of horror movies there isn't much emotion or tension because you can't identify with any of the good guys. They're buried up before you can get to know them. In this film, you care for the detective and his family. And Max isn't a faceless monster. That's one of the reasons why this movie is different.

Freddie ("Nightmare on Elm Street") is a dream and Jason ("Friday the 13th") is a moron. Max is a real guy, just gone very, very bad."

Bad in more ways than one. Max wears Armani clothing.

Max is truly one man dude in "Horror Show's" horror-fest story — a combination of horror and science fiction. He has murdered 118 people before being caught and stopped by a police detective played by Lance Henriksen. We join the story with

Max awaiting his fate on death row.

PRIOR TO his arrest and conviction, Max, who is no dummy, evidently studied electricity, psychology and the great beyond. He had been exercising, working out with a home version of the electric chair with some strange results.

From his cell, he manipulates the reality of the detective and his family. Max causes the detective to hallucinate. Detective McCarthy doesn't understand this at first. And his family begins to think he's not firing on all cylinders. This doesn't stop when Max is executed because the essence of Max is catapulted from the electric chair into another dimension, where he can continue to wreak havoc on McCarthy and then the general population.

JAMES, 44, brings almost 20 years acting experience to the role of Max. His film credits include "Southern Comfort" with Keith Carradine and Powers Booth, "48 Hours" with Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy, and the now-classic science fiction film "The Thing." He also directed "Fried" and "Hunger." He also has appeared in numerous television shows from "Gunsmoke" to "Dynasty" and "Miami Vice."

James grew up in Beaumont, a city in Southern California. It was there he developed a fascination with movies that led into acting.

"My father built a movie theater in 1939. From the time I was very young, I saw a lot of movies. I lived

in movies. And as I got older, I became a big reader. I found this fantasy world in books and movies and I liked it there. That fantasy world, probably more than anything else, sparked my interest in acting."

He studied acting at San Diego State and with Stella Adler in New York. Along the way he performed as a stand-up comic and served a stint in the National Guard as a cook.

WHEN JAMES arrived in Hollywood, his dream to act in westerns wasn't realized. Westerns were out and cops and robbers were in. So he started out as a bad guy biker.

"When I started in film, there was a pool of bad guys. The pool got smaller over the years as people branched out into different areas. I moved from a biker bad guy to a good ol' bad guy to white-collar biker. Before 'Horror Show,' I was crossing over into good guy cops and more sympathetic roles."

He considers himself a character actor and greatly admires Lee Chamberlain, Wallace Beery, Lee Marvin and Charles Laughton.

"I've always wanted to play the Hunchback of Notre Dame," he said.

The big break came for James in 1981, in "Southern Comfort." He played the role of the one-armed Cajun Trapper so convincingly, it was noticed a local Louisiana was used for the part. Roles started coming in after that.

Interestingly, James prefers to work with younger directors.

"They're much more flexible than the guys who have been in the business a long time. More willing to experiment with a scene."

He recalled the time he met director and filmmaker Sam Raimi, who is from Birmingham and is a member of the Fright Pack — a group of Detroit-area writers, actors, directors and producers working in each other's horror movies in Hollywood.

"I WAS WAITING in an office to meet with a director. In walks this young guy. I figure he's 20-21, and just an office worker for something. I almost fell off my chair when he introduced himself. But, hey, if you've got the vision, it doesn't matter how old you are. Sam is great!"

Current projects for James include "Camp Horror," in which he plays a flesh eater "who bites a little old lady from Pasadena — and she turns into one, too." The story of the flesh-eating old lady with Max is a transformation. He also works on a sci-fi titled "Street Asylum," where I play a street preacher. And in another project, I'm the hero. In "Time of the Beast," I play a scientist who saves the girl and then saves the day."

One more time James turned into Max. Laughing menacingly, he signed another autograph: "Any way you slice it, the cutting edge is where to be."

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