

THE **TORONTO** **DAILY** *Hollywood* **No. 4** **REPORTER**


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Imogene stars Kristen Wiig and Christopher Fitzgerald, photographed on Sept. 8 by Fabrizio Maltese at Brassaii in downtown Toronto.

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Dealmaking has been sluggish at TIFF as U.S. distributors mull whether to gamble on films amid the postsummer box-office slump



Rob Zombie

The Lords of Salem helmer on his 'hippie' witches and directing disinterested CSI actors *By Nisha Gopalan*

MANY SUCCESSFUL filmmakers got their starts directing music videos — David Fincher, Michael Bay, Spike Jonze. But few, if any, have taken home a prize for helming his own band's video. That's what former White Zombie frontman Rob Zombie (born Robert Cummings) did in 1995, winning a VMA that presaged his movie career as a horror director. Twelve years later, a remake of *Halloween*, the third full-length film from the Splat Packer, debuted at No. 1. (The low-budget film grossed more than \$80 million globally.) Zombie, now a veteran on the festival circuit, talks with *THR* about how traveling to Toronto this year to debut *The Lords of Salem* marks a rebirth of sorts for him as a director.

When you first started making features, was it hard to get producers to take you seriously?

It was. A lot of people think that having success in music made it easier to get into the movie business, but I think it actually

made it harder. Nobody expects that you can have success in two fields. And in music, you create a persona — whereas if you're just a guy, there's no preconceived idea of who you are.

How does *The Lords of Salem's* depiction of the witch trials compare to other cinematic takes on it?

Well, I created my own mythology: We know about those 20 innocent people who were executed, but here there are another 20 people executed who were witches. I grew up in Massachusetts, so I'd always been very familiar with the story. I did the research anyway; I wanted to make sure that the movie felt like Salem. But let's just say I sort of ran off on a wild tangent.

Why did you decide to make your witches look tribal?

The actual look of the Salem witches — *The Crucible's* pilgrim clothing — looked boring. [In my film] they look a little bit like the witches in *Macbeth* more than anything, the equivalent of

weird hippie women who lived in the woods. So they have a very tribal look about them.

You're earning a reputation for making good use of character actors. What inspires you to work with guys like Clint Howard, Sig Haig and Udo Kier?

I like character actors. When you go back to movies from the '70s, there's always a wide range of really strong character actors. Someone like Udo Kier is larger than life. Whatever character you have him play is more boring than he is as an actual person. I remember the first time I worked with him, he was like, [in thick German accent] "Rob, nobody ever understands me. You get me. *You get me!*"

Your movies essentially deal in mortality. Are you spiritual or religious?

I'm not spiritual at all or religious at all. I mean, nobody wants to die, but I'm not frightened of it. You live and die and turn to fertilizer and a tree grows — that seems like the natural order of things. But people can't get their heads around those things, so they concoct these wonderful fantasies. Live in the now, people!

How do you feel about your hardcore following at Comic-Con, where you're now a regular, who've helped advance your film career?

A lot of actors going to Comic-Con are blown away just seeing all the people. They're not usually surrounded by thousands and thousands of their fans. But for me it's just like another day on tour, where you're surrounded by fans every night.

Vital Stats

Nationality America
Born Jan. 12, 1965

Film in Toronto

The Lords of Salem

Selected filmography

House of 1000 Corpses, 2003;
The Devil's Rejects, 2005; *Grindhouse (trailer)*, 2007; *Halloween*, 2007; *Halloween II*, 2009

Notable awards

Best screenplay and Killer Movie (*The Devil's Rejects*),
Fangoria Chainsaw Awards, 2006

Will Toronto be more intense for you since it's more industry-driven?
Yeah, I don't know. Those festivals are always weird. [Laughs]

It will be interesting to see how you are received now that you're dipping your toes into comedy.

I just like entertainment. The movies I've done have been horror movies, but that's not all I want to do by any means. The Tom Papa [special for Comedy Central] was the first that came up. We'd been friends for a while. I also like having different experiences. It's all directing: You will find something in what you've just done that you will apply to something else. And that's the reason I like doing TV commercials and other things.

What was it like working on an episode of *CSI*, with all of the boundaries that come with directing TV?

Actually, I didn't enjoy it at all. That world is not for me. It felt like such a factory system. I'm not going to say who said this, but one of the actors on the show literally said to me, not joking, "Wow, [imagine this] with actors who still give a shit." I cared more about how good the episode was going to be than they did. It was like, "Say the lines, and go home."

Is the hockey biopic *Broad Street Bullies*, about the Philadelphia Flyers of the 1970s, your next big project?

That's what I'm working on right now. I love hockey. And I especially love hockey in that time period, back when all those players looked like porn stars with long hair and big moustaches — and nobody wore helmets. I keep telling people it's like *Boogie Nights* meets *Rocky*.

And you can adapt your horror background into on-ice violence.

These guys basically brutalized their way to the championship twice. You're just watching guys on ice with blood gushing down their faces while they're playing and police coming onto the ice to break up fights. Insane stuff. **THR**