



## HORROR HOSTS IN THE NEWS

The following article about "Doktor Goulfinger" appeared in the October 2001 edition of "Monster News."



### **DOKTOR GOULFINGER IS IN!**

Interview by Dan Johnson  
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*Just a decade ago, many people thought the profession of Horror Hosting was a dying occupation. While there were a few hosts still active around the country (most noticeably Big Chuck and Little John in Ohio and Dr. Paul Bearer in Florida) changing attitudes at local UHF stations, once the safe haven for many of the denizens of late-night, made it harder for new hosts to get started in the business. UHF stations started figuring that it was costing too much money to hire someone to host movies. In some extreme cases, even the rental of movies themselves was seen as too expensive. More and more stations began turning to paid infomercials and syndicated shows with prepaid commercials time to fill their time slots.*

*One would almost think that there was no place left for an up and coming Horror Host to go on television. Yet despite the changing face of local television, there has actually been a boom in Horror Hosts in the last few years. The new generation of mad scientists, zombies and vampires aren't on your local UHF station though. Now they are haunting the airwaves of your local cable access station. Many of this new breed of hosts are running Horror and Science Fiction films because they grew up watching horror hosts as kids. Now they want to re-create the same magic that they saw as children for today's kids. The great thing is that these new hosts have a certain freedom that their predecessors didn't. They never have to worry about being cancelled due to low ratings and cable access allows for a lot more leeway to get wild and crazy. Indeed, this next generation of Horror Hosts are limited only by their supply of public domain movies and*

*their enthusiasm as they carry on in a profession that is as old as the medium of television itself.*

*When we set out to do this edition of Monster News, our intent was to spotlight some of the legends of Horror Hosting. We also wanted to check out one of the up and coming cable access Horror Hosts who we feel has great promise. That's why we are proud to present Michael Monahan. Michael is from Berkeley, CA and he is a major Horror Host fan. No longer content to sit on the sidelines and watch others hosting the movies that he loves, Michael is currently preparing to launch his own show as Doktor Göulfinger. We're proud to present the first interview with Michael at this time and we're delighted to get the chance to introduce you all to his alter ego. Ladies and gentlemen, the doktor is in!*

**MN: Tell us how this all started. What sparked your interest in Horror Hosts?**

MM: As a kid growing up in the 60s, I was front and center for the whole monster boom: "Frankenstein Jr", Famous Monsters, big bug movies in the afternoon, "Munsters" at night. Sometime around '69, the San Francisco Bay Area suddenly became this strange nexus for hosted horror films. As far as I can recall, KEMO Channel 20 really kicked it off with "Shock It To Me Theatre", hosted by a guy called Asmodious. He had all the trappings of what I would later discover was the classic Horror Host: a dark castle, spooky music and a ghostly, but dignified, appearance. This is where I first saw a number of classic and obscure films for the first time - everything from "Bride of Frankenstein" to "Zombies of Mara Tau". It was also where I saw "Carnival of Souls", which really put the zap on my pre-teen noggin. The following year, KTVU Channel 2 launched "Creature Features", with Bob Wilkins. In sharp contrast to Asmodious, Wilkins was extremely dry and low-key, and looked like nothing more ghastly than an insurance salesman. I still vividly recall sitting down to the first show, "Horror of Party Beach". This was followed in quick succession by films like "Curse of the Living Corpse", "The Vulture" and "Agent For H.A.R.M.". The films were much more cheeseball than the "Shock It To Me" package, and Wilkins mocked them with a deadpan, though affectionate, sarcasm. Due to the popularity of "Creature Features", "Shock It To Me" eventually got pushed off the air. But other stations later brought in syndicated hosts, like The Ghoul and Son of Svengoolie. They also tried other home-grown models, like The Glob, which was just a rubber mask on a plate, manipulated by some nameless stage hand.

**MN: Who are some of your favorite hosts? Which ones do you think really stand out in the field?**

MM: Bob Wilkins is clearly my nostalgic fave. He was on the air for 8 very formative years in the Bay Area, and really meant a lot to people growing up here at the time. Back in the 70's I got to help out on a show Bob was hosting at a local theater, which is one of those classic thrill moments in a fan's life. He's recently done a few appearances for a magazine called Planet X in Sacramento (his original stomping grounds), and they've been packed. Wonderful shows.

A few years ago, Bob sent me tapes of some of his "Creature Features" material, which fired up my interest Horror Hosts all over again. Happily, there are host fans all over the country, and I was able to collect a lot of classic material. Zacherley wows me, of course. Morgus, Count Gore DeVol, Crematia Mortem, Dr Creep, Sammy Terry, Dr Paul Bearer, Svengoolie...they all come to mind immediately.

But the biggest influence on me as a fan (outside of Wilkins) has got to be the whole Cleveland scene. As I said, The Ghoul was syndicated on the local Kaiser station, Channel 44, back in the 70s. In trading with fans, I discovered he was back on the air in Cleveland, which was pretty exciting at the time. But more importantly, it opened the door into the richest vein of Horror Host history I'd ever discovered.

Up to that point, I'd been completely unaware of the greatest host of all time, Ernie Anderson, better known as Ghoulardi. Ghoulardi hosted films in Cleveland from late '62 through '66, and influenced a whole generation of viewers like nothing else I've ever seen. Calling Ghoulardi a "Horror Host" is like calling The Beatles "musicians". He was a nothing less than a cultural phenomenon.

I got a tape of a some Ghoulardi material one day, and was just about to pop it into the VCR, when the missus, Dee, came home. With nothing better to do, she sat down to watch it with me, and we both became hooked at the same time. This is not an area that she's particularly interested in, but Ghoulardi grabbed her immediately. So much so that when I started buying Ghoulardi tee shirts and such, I'd have to get two.

Through Ghoulardi, I've made a number of friends in the Cleveland/ Akron, OH area, and have developed an interest in the whole Cleveland television scene. I had two separate people recommend Son of Ghoul as a Ghoulardi-styled keeper of the flame. After checking out a few of his shows, I got hooked in a big way. Son of Ghoul definitely tops my list of current hosts. He's been on the air for over 15 years now, and has actually expanded to two different shows - his weekly movie, and a live 2 hour call-in game show!

A few months after we started watching Son of Ghoul (via tape delay), he announced a drawing to win a life-sized skeleton. When he added that the winner could come down and claim the prize on the show, I said, "That's it. I'm going to win that skeleton." I sent in a little over 200 postcards, won the drawing (imagine that), and flew out to Cleveland for the show.

My buddy, Bob Ferguson, got us into a taping of the Big Chuck and Lil' John Show, which was a great thrill, as Big Chuck Schodowski was a close friend of Ernie Anderson's and a creative collaborator on the Ghoulardi show. He's been on the air since 1966. After Ernie left for California that year, Chuck began co-hosting movies in Ghoulardi's old time slot, first with Bob "Hoolihan" Welles, and later with Lil' John Rinaldi. After the taping, we got to hang out with Chuck, and he told us some wild stories about the Ghoulardi and Hoolihan days. This guy is a genuine piece of TV history, and one of the finest folks you'd want to meet.

The Son of Ghoul and his crew were likewise tops. We laughed ourselves sick that night (a tip: never unleash a blast of Festival Fart Spray in an enclosed space), and the crew treated us like visiting royalty. I understand they even straightened the place up before we arrived. A really wonderful bunch of guys.

**MN: What made you decide to take the plunge and create your own Horror Host at this time?**

MM: I think all of this host activity had me pretty well primed. Then I stumbled across a Horror Host newsgroup moderated by Count Gore DeVol. A number of the members are hosting cable access shows all across the U.S., and this finally inspired me to step up to the plate. Some of these folks have had shows on for 8 and 12 years. This is much longer than a lot of regular shows. Cable access suddenly started to sound like a viable option, much like UHF was back in the 70s & 80s.

**MN: Now, tell us about Doktor Göulfinger. Who is he? How did he come to be? What is his secret origin? What rocks his world? What gets him through the night?**

MM: Göulfinger popped into my head as a reflection of my twin childhood obsessions with monsters and spies. Remember that "Man From U.N.C.L.E." episode, "The Batcave Affair", where Martin Landau played, Count Zark, a Bela Lugosi-style villain? That's the perfect representation of my youth.

Funny thing about the character development...One Thursday afternoon, I was thinking about how I'd like to get one of them Zacherley black frock coats. That Saturday, I walked by a second hand store and felt a sudden compulsion to go in. Although they never had anything in the way of interesting clothes, I walked right over to the coats, pulled one aside, and...bingo!...the very next one hanging there was a black Zacherley frock coat! It was a bit tight, but I figured the Fates had decreed I was indeed to be a Horror Host...but had to lose a few pounds first!

**MN: What can viewers expect to see on your show?**

MM: The first show basically just features me and the movie, which was mostly due to a lack of time and organization. I've got a number of characters I want to add, which would expand things into the area of sketches and such. The scripts are all ready to go, I just have to coordinate the talent. I've got some local artists and musicians lined up for interviews on upcoming shows, and I'm hoping to hit the convention circuit in order to score some celebrity chat time.

And as television strives to educate as well as entertain, I'm planning on produce segments on various classic Horror Hosts. My own researches have given me a whole library of material to bore the hell out of folks with. I defiantly want to do a Ghouardi night of some kind, but it would also be nice to get people on the show sharing their Bob Wilkins memories - a real Bob-A-Thon!

**MN: What has been the hardest thing about hosting your own show? What has been the most rewarding?**

MM: My own technical limitations. I have a very clear idea of how the show should look and sound, but these are early days yet. I want to craft something that pays tribute to all the old shows I grew up with, and uncovered along the way. I do see improvements as we go along, and that's heartening.

The most rewarding thing I've run into so far is the enthusiasm with which people greet the project. I've had a couple folks actually stop and shake my hand when I've told them what I'm up to. These are middle-aged geezers like me who share that fondness for Bob Wilkins' "Creature Features", and all those other shows we want to see come back. It's an idea that just seems to generate a lot of good will and happy memories.

**MN: What films will you have on your show? Are there any movies in particular that you are anxious to air on your show?**

MM: The program premieres with "The Brain That Wouldn't Die". If you can't get the classics, go right for the sleaze. Happily, the public domain offers a wealth of both. On the one hand, you have titles like "White Zombie", "Horror Hotel" and "Carnival of Souls" freely available. And then of course, you've got all those great old loony movies, like "Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla" and "The Devil Bat". You really can't go wrong with Bela, baby!

I'd like to get some of the wackier spy movies in there as well. "The Fat Spy", the Dr. Mabuse films, some of the cool Euro-spy titles from the 60s. These all have sci-fi and fantasy elements which fit right in to this kind of show. Heck, if Bob Wilkin can show "Agent for H.A.R.M." and "Shadow of Evil", I can certainly inflict "The Fat Spy" and "Dimension 5" on an unsuspecting public.

**MN: What would you say are the three best movie for a Horror Host to show? Which three movies do you think lend themselves the best for goofing on?**

MM: Everyone dreams of hosting the classics. Anything from Universal. I have a special fondness for "Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman". There's a movie that pretty much tells you all you need to know about post 1940 horror movies. Films like "Bride of Frankenstein" are clearly superior, but "Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman" is perfectly entertaining and hits all those nostalgic buttons for me.

So, on the dream list, you'd need at least one Universal title, a big bug movie, preferably "Tarantula", and a Godzilla movie. Those really cover the range.

But realistically, at the level on which most of us are working, you have to think in terms of public domain. I understand a few 60s Godzilla titles are available there, which is something I'd definitely want to present. An early Roger Corman should be in there: "Little Shop of Horrors" or "Attack of the Giant Leeches". And if you can get your mitts

on "The Brainiac", you're set. I'd actually avoid something like "Night of the Living Dead", which is so ubiquitous.

Godzilla films and "The Brainiac" also work as fun goof-on-it movies. One film I'd never thought would have worked in a goofing presentation is "Plan 9 From Outer Space", it is so perfectly out-of-it on it's own terms, there just seem anywhere to go with it. But Son of Ghoul added a bunch of music and sound effects to "Plan 9", and made it a whole new experience. Dee was actually laughing so hard we had to stop the tape a couple times to let catch her breath.

**MN: Finally, what is the name of the Dok's show and where and when can folks see him practice that voodoo that he do?**

MM: "The Hip Crypt of Doktor Göulfinger" will be broadcast on BTV25, Berkeley cable access. Additionally, some of the other hosts on the newsgroup have managed to score some extra time on their stations to highlight programs from other areas of the country. So you never know where or when I might pop up. A. Ghastlee Ghoul, out of Dayton, OH has got this set up going. And another group are launching a 6 hour block of programming called Horror Host Underground, starting in January 2002. This sort of self-syndication presents a wonderful opportunity for the new wave of Horror Hosts everywhere. At the same time, it recalls the low budget, handmade quality that defined these great local shows in the first place.

*We want to thank Michael for taking the time to talk to Monster News and we also want to wish him the best of luck as Doktor Göulfinger prepares to launch his Horror Hosting career. I'll be keeping you Monster News readers informed of when the Doktor will be making his first house call in the Berkeley area. Keep your schedule open, because you'll want to make an appointment with him!*