



HORROR HOSTS IN THE NEWS

The following article about "Dr. Sarcofigy" and "The Spooky Movie" from the "Northern Virginia Journal" appeared before Halloween 2002.



DR. SARCOFIGUY PRESCRIBES HORROR MOVIES
Host of cable TV show to present 12-hour Halloween treat
By CHRIS SCHNEIDMILLER
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In the movie "White Zombie," evil sugar mill owner Murder Legendre uses his powers of zombification to enslave unlucky Haitians and terrorize island visitors and inhabitants alike with his undead minions.

It's sick. It's wrong. It's ...

"Chahhhming."

You can't hear it here, but that two-syllable word has been delivered in a Southern accent only slightly less thick than Foghorn Leghorn's. And the man with the drawl is Dr. Sarcofigy, Fairfax County's own Ph.D of terror.

Sarcofigy can be seen each week hosting "The Spooky Movie," a late-night cavalcade of horrifying--and sometimes horrible--movies in the public domain. He'll don his customary white lab coat and dark sunglasses again Thursday for a 12-hour Halloween movie marathon on Falls Church Community Television Channel 12.

"Viewers will see basically back-to-back ridiculousness through the whole thing " said Sarcofigy, sometimes known as 36-year-old writer, artist, stand-up comedian and singer John Dimes, of Washington DC.

The doctor is a spiritual descendent of decades-worth of hosts like Elvira and D.C.'s own Count Gore De Vol, but with his own twist. He's the first and possibly only black host of a TV horror-movie show. And he's more given to hearty laughter than evil cackling--think of a slightly macabre teddy bear--but still deranged enough to inflict "Santa Claus Conquerors The Martians" on viewers.

The show's 47th episode will be included twice in the Halloween marathon, along with four classic shows. If past episodes are an indicator, viewers can expect humor, rampant ad-libbing and occasional confusion.

"What're we doing? We're talking about? This is it. What is it? What it it? What're we doing?" asked the doctor, a bit flummoxed in the first minutes of a recent episode.

"Welcome to Spooky Movie," prodded C. W. Prather, the shows producer and co-creator, from behind the video camera.

"Oh, that's what we're doing."

The night's film was 1932's "White Zombie," in which Bela Lugosi and his eyebrows perpetrate great evil upon an unsuspecting populace. After zombifying nearly every person in sight, Lugosi is knocked on the head, his pasty followers all stumble off a cliff and the bad guy fatally follows suit.

Before, during and after the movie, viewers were treated to videotaped scenes of Sarcfiguy's appearance in the 2002 Falls Church Memorial Day parade.

The doctor rolled through town in the back of a convertible, calling out to the crowd and swinging a rubber third hand. The hand was the butt of several bad jokes shared by Sarcfiguy and parade-goers.

Citizen: "Give me a hand over here!"

Sarcfiguy: "Everybody things they're a comedian."

Along the way, Sarcfiguy even passed by some fans: "Doctor!" "Dr. Sarcfiguy! Hello!"

The doctor has been building his fan base since first appearing in 1995, but his inspiration goes back to Dimes' and Prather's childhoods as horror-loving youths and fans of Count Gore De Vo's "Creature Feature" on WDCA-TV Channel 20. Prather even dressed up in fourth grade as a vampire--his monster of choice--and sent a photograph to the Count.

"The Count on Sesame Street. Count Chocula. It was an obsession through my school years," said Prather, who grew up to be a Webmaster and film producer.

A good scare flick could be anything from the children's classic "Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory"--whose poorly behaved and subsequently punished youngsters have freaked out kids for years--to schlock like "The Screaming Skull," which offered viewers a free burial should they be frightened to death by the movie.

Dimes said his first fright film was "Friday the 13th, Part II," which left him "in a puddle on the floor." But his love for the movies stuck--he only half-jokingly estimates having seen all horror films and owns upward of 200 on videotape.

"[It's like a] roller coaster without actually being on the roller coaster," Dimes said. "Your heart is racing."

Dimes and Prather met in 1989, introduced by a mutual friend who knew both were writing novels about vampires. They became friends and Dimes began to appear in works Prather produced for the Falls Church cable access station. In 1995, Dimes hosted Prather's "Tales To Make You Say, 'Goodness!,'" a 12-part variety series of home videos and taped segments. Looking to do something a bit different for the October episode, the duo unleashed the doctor and his "cornpone" accent on the world.

After briefly considering becoming Arab/Irish horror host, Kareem O'Torium, Dimes settled on the nom de plume Sarcofiguy, a simple play on sarcophagus, for the host.

"All I remember is I was sitting and talking about something," Dimes said.

"The second he did it, we both knew that was it," Prather said of the accent.

The first episode of "The Spooky Movie" appeared only a couple weeks afterward.

The doctor is a psychiatrist at a mental institution in "Hope Valley, U.S.A." He joins a proud medical legacy among horror hosts, he who include Drs. Creep, Destruction, Frank N. Albertstein, Fear, Freak, Gangrene, More B.S. and Zombie, to name a few.

Where most horror hosts might while the hours away with fellow ghouls, Sarcofiguy's fiends include fellow boarding house resident and renowned poet Maya Angelou and "fabulously successful vampire author" Anne Rice. Or at least reasonable facsimiles thereof.

Rice--actually stand-in Mark Blackmon--provided a highlight for the 2001 Christmas special, with her poem "Twas the Bite Before Christmas."

"When what to my wondering eyes should see but a miniature actor, only 5-foot-3," she said. "He smelled like blood and a bit of booze, and I knew in a moment it must be Tom Cruise."

The show other wise maintained Sarcofiguy's fly-by-the-seat-of-the-pants ethos. He opened the show with a discussion of how to open the show, then joined compadre Dr.

Bombay--also played by Blackmon--in a conversation that careened wildly from P. Diddy to Tweety Bird to Mickey Rooney.

"We're lucky if we remember the title of the featured movie," Prather said. "That has been sort of the running joke with Dr. Sarcofiguy, that he doesn't watch his own movies."

Shows are televised at 9 and 11 p.m. each Friday and last 75 minutes to two hours, depending on the length of the feature film. "There's a few short ones. A few giant bug movies from the '50s," Prather said.

Movies in the public domain, which are free from copyright and available for use by anyone, can be identified through the Internet or the Library of Congress, Prather said. Then it's just a matter of finding a copy of the film.

Some are actual classics--the first "Spooky Movie" episode offered George Romero's "Night of the Living Dead." Conversely, combining Old Saint Nick and extraterrestrials in any film should be a punishable offense.

In making "Spooky Movie," Dimes and Prather have become part of a nationwide collective known as the Horror Host Underground. Prather joined Count Gore's e-mail list at www.countgore.com in 1999. Hosts and would-be hosts made contact through the mailing list, and soon began trading tapes and filming greetings.

Prather developed and maintained a Web site for the group, www.tvhorrorhosts.com, which lists 35 hosts, from A. Ghastlee Ghoul to Zomboo.

Hosts "self-syndicate" by televising tapes of their colleague's shows along with their own on public access channels across the country. Channel 12 airs a six-hour block of horror hosts each Saturday, and Sarcofiguy is seen on cable channels in North Carolina, New Jersey, Ohio, Illinois and soon in California.

Horror hosting even has allowed Prather and Dimes to meet Count Gore and establish a friendship built on mutual respect. Prather has worked on the Count's Web site; Sarcofiguy taped a message for his millennium special and provides movie reviews for the site.

"I try to be calm about it, because he's just a guy, but he's my hero," Dimes said.

"The guy's nuts," said Count Gore, who now lives near Chicago under the name Dick Dyszel. "I can't emphasize enough what a wonderful job [Prather] has done and how creative Dr. Sarcofiguy is," he added.

The show's future remains open-ended. Prather said he wants to produce at least 50 episodes. Big changes could be on the way--new characters, a sitcom, and maybe even an

arch-foe for the doctor. Viewers might also look for another live episode and Christmas special, and even some non- "Spooky Movie"-related shows from the duo.

"We've got too many ideas right now," Prather said.