



HORROR HOSTS IN THE NEWS

The following article about "Ghoul A Go Go" appeared in "The Long Island Press" in New York in the summer of 2002.



MONSTER MASH:

Behind the scenes of TV's weirdest half hour, Ghoul A Go Go

Article by Kenny Herzog, Staff Writer
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Public-access cable is one of the last bastions for truly creative expression, aside from maybe college radio stations and anyone related to Francis Ford Coppola. Similar to the worlds of independent music and film of late, public-access cable has been getting bullied around by the corporate squeeze of companies like Time Warner and Cablevision, each of whom see opening of airtime as a window of financial opportunity. The last thing those conglomerates want are some young upstarts taking up valuable advertising revenue with their commercial-free, low-budget wackiness.

This is all the more reason why shows like *Ghoul A Go-Go*, on eastern Long Island's LTV, Channel 71, and WVVH, Channel 81, are a necessary cog in the fight for fun, original entertainment amidst syndication re-runs, sub-par Schwarzenegger movies and other byproducts of the political power struggle that is ruining television.

Ghoul A Go-Go is truly one of the most bizarre and hypnotizing half-hours to surface in quite some time. If The Misfits took eight sheets of acid, watched a marathon of *American Bandstand* and hijacked a super-eight camera and a chorus of grade schoolers, they still wouldn't possess the impressive production values and attention to detail that make *Ghoul A Go-Go* more than some cheaply thrown-together novelty show.

Shot in black and white, set in the 1960s and accompanied almost entirely by a

soundtrack of underground garage rock, the show begins with a group of ghostly children proclaiming, "It's time to put a head on a stick and have a party!" From there, Vlad and Creighton (a vampire and hunchback), and their pal The Invisible Man (an "invisible" man), awake to join the creepy kids in a jovial dance around a cluster of graves. Vlad, adorned in a dark suit, sporting fangs and wielding a cane, then emerges from behind a curtain, speaking through a thick accent derived from a homeland he will refer to only as "The Old Country." Like the demon-spawn of Ed Sullivan, Vlad somewhat malevolently informs his audience of the evening's lineup, which will generally kick off with lots of small children in poodle skirts, slacks and suspenders dancing like club-goers in *Austin Powers* to music made well before they were born. The program also includes short films selected by Creighton, such as *Dick Wakes Up*, a cautionary tale of a boy who lands in the hospital after jaywalking right into a car, and performances by hot garage acts like Johnny Chan and the New Dynasty 6.

Loosely based on an obscure children's dance program from the '60s called *Kiddie-A-Go-Go*, *Ghoul A Go-Go* is a hodgepodge homage to the sensibilities and passions of Vlad, Creighton and the rest of the men behind the show, who mostly remain ambiguous about their backgrounds, though many of them are rumored to originate from Long Island towns, including Medford and Hauppauge.

According to writer and producer Spiney, the group came together as part of the local punk scene in the early 1980s, an environment that fittingly embodied the do-it-yourself aesthetic that is imperative in keeping good programming on the airwaves. Sharing a mutual love for various forms of fringe culture and a desire to create something that would be an accurate reflection of their unique tastes, *Ghoul A Go-Go* was conceptualized two years ago. Since then, the show has become enormously popular amongst a surprisingly diverse array of admirers. "Different people like different things on the show, because it's segmented," says Spiney. Segmented indeed: The show's mix of '60s cultural references and long-forgotten short films, modern-day music and humor, and its surreal, faux children's show pretense is entertaining kids, provides their parents with a unique nostalgia trip and gives night crawlers something to gawk at after last call.

This also might have something to do with the fact that LTV has now scheduled the show to air six days a week, both at the wee hours, such as Wednesdays at 4:00 a.m., and during the coveted kids' slot, Saturdays at 11:00 a.m.

All of this is fairly amusing to Spiney, who says that both he and the cast love the widespread devotion, but they're really just a bunch of guys with similar interests, sitting around with some beers and kicking around ideas that seem entertaining to them. Ultimately, says Spiney, "We just sit there and say, 'Would I sit through this?'" In other words, just because a 7-year-old boy is watching and giggling as Creighton dances like a hunchback in heat, it doesn't mean they will hesitate to follow up with an abstract film featuring barely-clothed belly dancers.

However, this is not to imply that they effortlessly turn ideas into realized segments as quickly as they brainstorm them over a drink. Cleanly edited, wisely structured and done

with a professionalism missing from anything David Hasselhoff has had a hand in, anyone who regularly tunes into *Ghoul A Go-Go* has to wonder how the people behind it still hold down their day jobs.

In fact, Spiney insists that it takes “a hell of a lot of work.” With a current production schedule of four shoots each year ultimately resulting in up to five shows, there is just as much time spent bickering over what gets cut as there is filming those infamous children’s dance segments.

And what about the children involved in the show? How do they stay both well behaved and unafraid of their somewhat strange surroundings? “For the most part, they just want to be on TV,” laughs Spiney, who says that the kids are culled largely from ads in area magazines. The show also enlists the help of “kid wranglers,” who show all the participants a video of ‘60s go-go dancers as preparation and, in one instance, even calmed a hysterical child with a Power Ranger toy. “After a while, it’s a big party,” Spiney says assuredly.

“[But] it’s a nightmare of logistics,” admits Spiney when speaking about the show as a whole. He gives much of the credit to everyone on the cast, crew and those at LTV, all of whom pitch in because they like what they are a part of, which is a perfect reflection of the independent, passionate spirit of public access.

They even have time for a social life. Vlad, breaking his ambiguity only momentarily, points out that he has plenty of time for “Victorian humorous taxidermy and conducting studies in animal magnetism.”

As for the big cable companies breathing down their necks, Spiney doesn’t seem too worried about the future of *Ghoul A Go-Go*, but breathes a frustrated sigh as he states quite succinctly that, as a result of programs like theirs, these companies “are losing money, and they don’t care about TV for the people.”