



HORROR HOSTS IN THE NEWS

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UP WITH GHOUL POWER: MONSTER NEWS TALKS WITH THE GHOUL, RON SWEED!

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Between 1963 and 1966, all the hip kids in Cleveland, OH were watching and digging one of the true legends of the Horror Hosting game, Ghoulardi. It's easy to see why Ghoulardi, aka Ernie Anderson, would appeal to his young fans. First of all, Anderson had an appreciation for modern rock music and he loved to use it generously during his show. Then there were his catch phrases like "Turn blue!" and "Stay sick!". And of course there is the fact that Anderson was a heck of a funny man who used humor and sketches on his show to great effect. As I said, there was a lot to like about Ghoulardi and it is little wonder that so many people watched him and made him one of the great television icons in Cleveland.

One youngster was lucky enough to do more than just watch Ghoulardi, he got the chance to learn from this icon first hand. That fellow was Ron Sweed, and when Ernie Anderson left for the West Coast to further his career (taking Ghoulardi with him), Ron stepped up to the plate to keep the Ghoulardi legend alive as the one and the only Ghoul.

Since becoming the Ghoul in 1971, Ron Sweed has broken out of the shadow of his mentor and the Ghoul has made quite a name for himself in Cleveland, as well as Detroit, MI. When we sat down to interview the Ghoul for this edition of Monster News, we found out how his adventures with Ghoulardi began. "At first, I was just a pest," Ron told

us as he recalled his first meeting with Anderson. "I showed up at [a Ghoulardi] appearance in my gorilla suit and then I showed up at the studio the next day and [Ernie] was gracious enough to give me [an] autograph and put me on t.v. Then I asked him, 'Could I come back next week?' [And Ernie said] 'I don't care, go ahead'."

After seeing some of the very rare Ghoulardi material that exists today, it'd be hard to imagine Ron not having a good time as he worked with his hero. But the good times ended for Ron when Ernie got ready to make his move to California. But just because Ernie Anderson left Cleveland, that didn't mean Ghoulardi had to leave with him. At least that was Ron's way of thinking.

At first Ron Sweed tried to talk Ernie into coming back from the West Coast once a month to shoot four Ghoulardi shows at a time. That way Cleveland would keep getting new Ghoulardi episodes and Anderson could still concentrate on his career in California. When Ernie came back to Cleveland with comedian Chuck McCann to do a special appearance, Ron hit him with the idea. Much to Sweed's disappointment, Anderson was determined to let his Horror Hosting gig be a part of his past. What he didn't realize at the time was that his decision opened the door for Horror Hosting to become a big part of Sweed's future. "He had no intention of ever doing Ghoulardi after that special," Ron remembers. "I was really bummed because I thought he'd go for it. That's when I approached him, that same day, [and asked him] 'Would you let me try it then? I think I could pull it off and recreate [Ghoulardi] for you.' He said, 'Yeah, go ahead. It's not going to work, but give it a try if you're intent on doing it.'"

From there, Ron Sweed set out to bring Ghoulardi back to Cleveland. "I knew right away I could never be Ernie Anderson," Ron told Monster News. "So I would just have to imitate Ernie Anderson. The first four weeks I just totally imitated Ghoulardi. I had convinced the Kaiser station, channel 61 in Cleveland, to let me recreate [Ghoulardi]. They felt that they might have a money maker here." Although Ron could recreate much of Ernie Anderson's style of humor, he couldn't use the name Ghoulardi (which was owned by Storer Broadcasting in Cleveland), thus, at Ernie's suggestion, the 'ardi' was dropped and The Ghoul was born. Eventually, as Ron got his own Horror Hosting legs firmly under him, more and more of his own personality came through and The Ghoul started to find his own groove. By week five of his first show, Sweed began to add more of himself into his creation. "On week five, I felt I had to expand what Ernie Anderson did. He was very laid back and low key and humor had changed. What was happening in 1971 is that [music] was changing too. The Beatles now had broken up and you had Alice Cooper coming on stage. I could see that I had to get more manic with the character to evolve it. I would keep the essence of Ernie Anderson's Ghoulardi, but I would have to contemporize it."

So how do you improve on Ghoulardi? First, Ron made the Ghoul more animated and he also began to update the Ghoul's style of music. Then he started adding more telling touches, such as his own brand of sketches like Chef Curdle, Ghoulumbo and the Little Rasghouls. Also, Ron began to find on-air sidekicks for the Ghoul to 'play' with.

One playmate of the Ghoul is Camera Four, the cameraman who is often pulled on air to interact with the Ghoul. This particular on screen character was a gift from the master. "Camera Four was Ernie Anderson's. It's because [the Ghoulardi show was filmed] with one camera, sometimes with two camera, but that's all. [Ernie] just thought it was hilarious that viewers would think we had three, four cameras. So I just inherited that also from Ghoulardi."

The most famous nemesis of the Ghoul is perhaps Froggy, based on the gremlin from "The Buster Brown Show". "The [Ghoul] show was in its first year and I was just going through Toys R Us one afternoon cause I was looking for some ideas, you know stupid stuff to work with," Ron told us as the subject of his little green buddy came up. "All of a sudden, there from my youth, is a rubber Froggy the gremlin, a whole rack of them. I bought just one at the time, but then I had to go back and get some more. I was just going to use him and a do a one time bit, I figured for the people my age, and I was only twenty-two at the time, who remembered Froggy. Now for the teenagers that I was appealing too and had modernized the Ghoulardi persona, [so they] would think it was funny too, I just obliterated [Froggy] with a big, plastic baseball bat. So that was the first Froggy, a one time, throw away bit. The mail was fantastic. That stupid rubber frog got more mail than I did for the next couple of weeks."

Camera Four and Froggy are solid bits for the Ghoul and they have become standards of the his show. But just because he sticks with material that works doesn't mean that the Ghoul is opposed to new ideas. "I move on to different bits and change with the times," Ron told us as we discussed the need to keep the Ghoul fresh and evolving. It's that willingness to change with the times that has allowed Ron and the Ghoul to find new fans. "Now we're in the 30th year of Ghoul Power and the kids are still coming up and going, 'Ghoul, man! You rock!' I just made an appearance this morning and the kids who are twelve and thirteen are [coming up saying] "Hey! Hey! Hey! Hey, Ghoul, we love ya!" The reason is they just like the craziness." (Just a quick note: The "Hey! Hey! Hey!" is usually heard at the beginning of the Ghoul's show when he welcomes his viewers).

Ron touches upon a good point and perhaps it is his alter ego's wild side that keeps the Ghoul popular. "Everybody wants to cut loose. Especially in this politically correct atmosphere we're in, you know you can't [always] let loose." Even if we ourselves aren't always allowed to get crazy, the Ghoul always can and will. Thankfully there are a lot of avenues for the Ghoul to spread his unique brand of humor to the masses.

First of all, the Ghoul can be heard every Saturday night from 9:00 pm until midnight on his own radio show on 98.5 WNCX FM, the number one classic rock station in Cleveland. "What we do is take requests from our listeners and put them on the air and play their songs." I could tell from the tone in Ron's voice that he really enjoys his duty as the Ghoul on the radio. "It's a lot of fun because most of our listeners, by the nine o'clock hour when they start calling in, have totally consumed the first beer ball and they're on the second one. They're lucky if they can string two or three sentences together in a coherent manner, so we have a lot of fun with that."

The Ghoul has also started a friendship with Ray Fery of Famous Monsters of Filmland that he is very excited about and this friendship has led to the Ghoul being the subject of a feature in that publication that will appear very soon. Also, Sweed has another cool Ghoul deal planned for this October. "I've been fortunate enough to align myself with Universal Studios in Florida and they have, through out the whole month of October, Halloween Horror Nights there and I will be there for one week in October. We'll be taping things for my t.v. show and also I'll be doing live remotes from their radio facilities back here to my Cleveland [radio] station. If you go to your AAA Ohio Motor Association there will be a special package available to be with the Ghoul at Universal Studios for Universal's Horror Weekend."

Then of course there is the medium that helped to launch the Ghoul, television. The Ghoul's current television show on WBNX 55 in Cleveland is doing quite well. "[It's a] weird time slot," Ron explains as Monster News got the low down about the Ghoul's current gig on television. "It was just supposed to be temporary, but then they tripled their ratings. Sunday nights at midnight, I tripled their ratings and now their reluctant to move me because now they're doing the money dance of joy at the WB station here in Cleveland."

Despite this odd time slot, the fans of the Ghoul (especially the younger ones) are still catching his antics thanks to video tape. "[The kids] are setting the VCR and they'll watch [the show] Monday after school is what our emails reflect." Despite his success, it is understandable that Ron would like for the Ghoul to get a better time slot. "Come on, its a Friday, Saturday night type of show. I never thought it was going to fly on Sunday nights, but the program director here said, 'You know Cleveland is a three shift town'." It makes sense also that the fans of the Ghoul will find him no matter where he goes. Ron has other thoughts concerning his success and why he is doing so well. "Nothing's on Sunday. So I tell you what, I'm the highest rated show on Sunday nights and we beat the hell out of Suzanne Sommers and her thigh buster infomercial and the guy selling Ginsu knives and that real estate baron who can make you a millionaire without any money." We here at Monster News think that the Ghoul doesn't give himself enough credit for being an act worth catching. We think his many fans would agree.

For additional information on future Ghoul appearances, check out the Ghoul's website at <http://www.theghoul.com>