

Hollywood Exclusive: Virginia Madsen finds the fun in playing terror; Andrew Lawrence brings real-life emotion

by Marilyn_Beck_ & Stacy_Jenel_Smi

Virginia Madsen will be seen as a mother battling supernatural forces in a "life and death struggle" to save her son in "The Haunting in Connecticut," opening today (3/27). But the actress doesn't mind admitting that things were anything but dark and intense on the set between scenes.

"Because it's horror, and you're playing terrified beyond belief, when they say 'Cut!' you have to crack up. It's so absurd," she says. She also says, "I think when you go to work, you go to play. I always say I play make-believe all day long, like a little kid."

Still, Madsen "is" a fright film figure since starring in the 1992 slasher movie "Candyman" "takes her horror seriously. The 2004 "Sideways" Oscar nominee says she was interested in doing another chiller, but "I didn't want to do something that ended like a bad 'Saturday Night Live' sketch where they all fall on the floor at the end. This has a good story and characters. When you're invested in the characters, everything is scarier," she says. "And I like that my character has a strong relationship with her son. I definitely identified with that because I have a teenage son myself. You don't often get to see teenagers and parents loving each other and having a good relationship on screen."

Madsen says she became the earth mother and "bad influence" on her young costars, Kyle Gallner, who plays her son, and Amanda Crew.

"It's so great to work with young actors who are still hungry and work with such energy every day. Kyle doesn't even know how good he is. This is his first big lead in a movie, and he didn't care what was demanded of him. We had one scene where he is being rescued from this big fire, and the paramedics lay him on the cold grass. Well, we were in Canada in late October. He would just lie there and let me cry and scream "but when they'd call 'Cut!' his body would start shaking. I said, 'OK, what are you " a Tibetan monk?' He said, 'I don't know how I did that either.'"

THE FEELINGS WERE REAL: Andrew Lawrence's emotions were close to the surface when he shot his April 25 "Chasing a Dream" Hallmark Channel film "in which he plays a high school athlete who feels responsible for causing the death of a friend, then takes on the friend's dream of breaking a four-minute mile. The 21-year-old tells us he really was shaken up when filming began.

"I lost my grandmother right before we started shooting. I was really close to her," he says. "And I lost my dog. You'd think you'd be able to cope with the death of a dog very easily, but ... it was crazy. That was my childhood dog. When I was a kid, I was attacked by a dog and required 98 stitches. My older brother Joe went out and bought me a Golden Retriever to help me get over it " and that dog, Dakota, became my best friend and was around all the time, giving me unconditional love."

Now Andrew is living with his other big brother, Matthew, who "has a German Shepherd â€” an awesome, fantastic creature, so intelligent. Eventually I'll get another dog of my own, but for now I'm just enjoying his companionship and focusing on my career," says Andrew, who also has a recurring role on Showtime's "United States of Tara" â€” and is busy singing, playing guitar and writing songs for his band. "I don't know if I'm responsible enough to raise a puppy at this time in my life."

Fans can hear Andrew's music in "Chasing a Dream," which also stars Treat Williams. "I did a little score for the movie, and they're using it. I'm impressed that they kind of let me palm some of my music off on them," he jokes.

INDUSTRY BITS: Edoardo Ponti, filmmaker son of Sophia Loren and the late Carlo Ponti, is getting ready to make a feature film called "Coming and Going," about a man who pretends to be wheelchair bound in order to get the attention and sympathy of a beautiful attorney.

A casting notice has been making the rounds for an untitled "fallen celebrity project," an hour-long docu-reality show, for which they're looking to cast a major celebrity who's suffered a career-damaging scandal or career drop-off and is willing to bare his or her heart and soul as to what happened. He or she, of course, will be looking to make a TV comeback. Wonder how long the lines have been at the casting sessions.

With reports by Emily Feimster.

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