Film Close-Up: Quentin Tarantino

by Joey_Berlin

Cinematic trendsetter Quentin Tarantino tag-teams with his buddy Robert Rodriguez for a two-fisted punch to the gut called "Grindhouse." Each filmmaker wrote and directed one of the two retro thrillers that make up the double feature.

QUENTIN TARANTINO - Quentin Tarantino, along with Robert Rodriguez, wrote 'Grindhouse,' a homage to exploitation B-movie thrillers that combines two feature-length segments into one double-bill. CNS Photo courtesy of Branimir Kvartuc. Tarantino's half of "Grindhouse" is a slasher flick called "Death Proof," with three foxy females fighting off unwanted attention from Kurt Russell in a menacing muscle car. And when it comes to on-screen horror, Tarantino doesn't believe in going halfway. For his part, Rodriguez delivers "Planet Terror," a sci-fi zombie fest starring Rose McGowan as a go-go dancer with a high-caliber prosthetic leg.

Like Tarantino's previous pictures, "Death Proof" is jam-packed with quote-worthy dialogue and wild style. Tarantino's concept for "Grindhouse" is authentic down to the fake trailers for non-existent films, and the scratched and dirty look of the film stock. Given that the 44-year-old Tarantino has been an influential Hollywood filmmaker since 1992's "Reservoir Dogs," it may come as a surprise that "Grindhouse" is only his fifth major release as a director (counting both parts of "Kill Bill" together).

His sixth film will be a remake of the World War II movie "Inglorious Bastards," which he plans to write soon.

Q: Many of the "Grindhouse" actors have said that when you screened some authentic grindhouse movies for them, their first thought was, "Well these aren't very good movies. Why is there so much interest?"

A: Marley (Shelton) didn't say that. Marley is a big convert to grindhouse cinema. She's trying to actually match me movie for movie now. Even at the script reading she said, "So Quentin, I just watched the DVD of Umberto Lenzi's 'Nightmare City!' Wasn't that GOOD?"

Q: "Grindhouse" is contemporary, with characters using cell phones and such. So why did you decide to make the film stock look damaged, like it would have in the '70s?

A: It was like, we never really wanted it to just be this '70s artifact. Again - and this is all part of the fun of this - we're really doing a throwback to a Hollywood that doesn't exist anymore. We're in a different world now. Now, you open a movie up in 1,500 theaters, 2,000 theaters, and you have 2,000 prints floating around out there.

Q: And back in the '70s?

A: Back then, an exploitation company might make five prints and they'd open it in Chattanooga. And it'd play there, and then they'd move it to Memphis. And for the entire year they would just schlep these same five prints all around the country. They're actually playing in the worst theaters in the worst projectors available in America, and once a print goes through the El Paso drive-in theater meat grinder, you know, it will never be the same. And so depending on when you saw it in the run, they could very well look like this. So we actually wanted to pretend as if this type of film making had never stopped, this type of exhibition had never stopped.

Q: There are reels of film which are supposedly missing from "Grindhouse." Will we ever see those missing reels?

A: Well, hopes are high that we find them, alright? I have a detective working on mine. He said that there's a possibility that maybe my missing reel might be in a basement in Holland. So when I get through with all these interviews, I intend to go down there and see if I can find my missing reel.

Q: Is "Grindhouse" something that ordinary moviegoers can get into, even if they are not familiar with

grindhouse cinema?

A: Yeah! If you need to know the whole history of grindhouse, then we didn't really do our jobs. Part of our thing is, you know, Robert's movie has to work as a movie and my movie has to work as a movie. But when you put them together, it's got to work as a whole experience. And that was what we were really going after. So to us, you know, the trailers and just this whole experience we're trying to capture, hopefully, if it works correctly, it's almost closer to a ride than it is just going to see a movie kind of play out.

Q: "Grindhouse" practically begs to become a franchise. Have you started thinking about a sequel yet?

A: Oh, yeah! You better believe it. One of the things that is actually really funny is, when we came up with it, it was like there's many, many different sub-genres that would play at the grindhouses. That's what makes them grindhouses. So there were all these possibilities. What would we do? Would we do a Blaxploitation movie? A spaghetti Western? I've always wanted to do one of those. Or a moonshining movie, or women in prison.

Q: So if you continue making "Grindhouse" movies on the side, you might try one of those genres next?

A: Who knows? All kinds of stuff like that. And this gives us a wonderful umbrella to do it under. Not that it would ever be a left-hander project, because life's too short to do left-hander projects. I'd still give my heart and soul to everything that I do. But in a weird way, the weight of the world wouldn't be riding on it, if it fell into "Grindhouse." It could just be what it is. I don't have to reinvent cinema in order to do it.

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