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THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT 2: GHOSTS OF GEORGIA may have no connection to the original other than the basic subject matter, but there was continuity behind the scenes. Tom Elkins, who edited the first film, made his directorial debut on the sequel, which he discusses with Fango in this exclusive interview.

Like its predecessor, THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT 2: GHOSTS OF GEORGIA (in limited theatrical release and available on VOD starting tomorrow, February 1 from Lionsgate) is based on an actual case. It begins with the Wyrick family—mother Lisa (Abigail Spencer), father Andy (Chad Michael Murray) and young daughter Heidi (Emily Alyn Lind)—moving into an inherited rural home. Lisa has long been plagued by ghostly visions, and once they settle into their new home, Heidi starts seeing them too. Joined by Lisa’s sister Joyce (Katee Sackhoff), the Wyricks gradually discover that the property is haunted by the ghosts of the area’s tragic past. It’s familiar territory for Elkins, who began as an assistant editor on the likes of Wes Craven’s RED EYE and CURSED before moving up to head cutter on other supernatural fare like WHITE NOISE 2: THE LIGHT, THE NEW DAUGHTER and last year’s THE APPARITION.

FANGORIA: Since the HAUNTING films aren’t directly related storywise, were you given any sort of marching orders to keep in line with the first one, or were you able to go off in your own direction?

TOM ELKINS: I'd say a little of both. Both films, very deliberately, have a similar spirit in that they're companion pieces, though they're not really sequels. [The documentaries] A HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUT and A HAUNTING IN GEORGIA appeared together on the Discovery Channel, and the stories have a very similar spirit and vibe: They're family-oriented, they're very story-oriented, they have an unapologetic amount of heart to them, which I think is atypical of scary movies, especially these days. That's one of the things I'm most proud of about the movie, that it's different in that regard; it's a paranormal thriller that's unashamed of its heart.

FANG: How much research did you do into the actual haunting?

ELKINS: The writer, David Coggeshall, did a ton of research when he was developing the script, so a lot of that homework was done for me, but I did do some research and spoke to the Wyrick family; I talked to Lisa and Joyce and to Heidi, who's an adult now, and delved a little bit further into their frame of mind and where they were coming from.

The film also has a backstory about the Underground Railroad, which is a cool and, again, pretty unique plot point, and I did quite a bit of research into that as well. I think anytime you make a film that has its roots in a true story and real events, you have to do your best to do your homework. You're probably not going to get everything right, and the nature of making a movie, in and of itself, means you're going to have to take some liberties, but you always try to get it close.

FANG: Was the Wyrick family involved with the production, and have they seen the movie yet?

ELKINS: They weren't involved with the production, but they were friends of the production, for sure. Brad Kessell and David Coggeshall met with them initially when they were developing the script. I don't believe they've seen the movie yet; I think they wanted to wait until this weekend. The last I heard, that was what they hoped to do.

FANG: The movie deals with some fairly touchy subject matter, including slavery. How did you deal with those elements?

ELKINS: Well, at the end of the day, the way we dealt with that was, they're characters in the movie and they're individuals and they're the ghosts of people, and it just so happens that slavery is part of the story. We tried to honor the story and the characters, regardless of their backgrounds. When you see the film, you'll know what I mean. It's done in a way that's very benevolent. It's not about slavery *per se*, it's about individuals who were involved in this fascinating and terrifying part of history.

FANG: It's quite impressive that you got Cicely Tyson in the movie in a small part.

ELKINS: Oh, I know! She was wonderful. Honestly, I was blessed with such a great cast. The acting in the movie is just so good—Chad Michael Murray, Abigail Spencer, Katee Sackhoff, Emily Alyn Lind [pictured below with Elkins]. And to be able to get Cicely Tyson, and for her to think so positively about the script that she felt she wanted to be in the film, was truly an honor. She was somebody we thought about early to play that role, because she's just such a legend, and we thought, "Well, we might as well try. If we could get her to play Mama Kay, wouldn't that be the most incredible thing in the world?" So we sent her the script, and she said yes!

FANG: Was GHOSTS OF GEORGIA shot on locations near where the events actually happened?

ELKINS: It was shot in Louisiana, and that location where you see the house and the tree, which is a central element of the movie, and the creepy mobile home—they were all on the same property, just outside of Baton Rouge. We were literally deep in the woods when we were filming; it wasn't like there was a trailer and craft services and grip trucks 20 feet away. We

were literally deep in the woods of Louisiana making this movie, and the property was very creepy. In fact, the owners told us they were always chasing teenagers off the property because there are rumors in Baton Rouge that the place is haunted, and devil worshipping used to happen there and all that stuff. The area has its own kind of lore to it.

There were only a few sets built; there's a big underground chamber that obviously was constructed, but most of the stuff you see in the house, except for a couple of rooms, was actually filmed inside that house. It was pretty much a practical set.

FANG: How did you approach the movie's special FX, and how much or how little to use them?

ELKINS: The effects in the film evolved, as often happens. We had special sequences where very advanced visual effects were necessary, and then there were other sections where we actually did our visual effects as part as our color-timing process. It's a new technology that we're pretty excited about, and this was one of the first films it's been used on, where you color-time the movie and do the effects at the same time, sitting there in front of the screen, and it was very exciting. We didn't have a ton of money, so we couldn't spend a lot on the effects, and we had to be very careful where we used them. We ended up going with a lot of looks. Each character has their own sort of hallucinations and/or experiences, and a big part of our process was determining what those would look like.

FANG: As an editor, it seems you've kind of specialized in films about the supernatural. Is that a subject that particularly fascinates you, or is that just how the jobs came along?

ELKINS: It's a little bit of both. You tend to dance with who brung ya, you know what I mean? And I was so blessed to come up through the Wes Craven and Patrick Lussier camp. When I was a kid, most of the 8mm films I made were scary movies, so I love the genre. I hope to one day be able to do things other than just scary films, but I do love them, particularly these paranormal films.

FANG: What's your particular attraction to that material?

ELKINS: Because it's something that terrifies everybody. Ghosts are something that I think we all sort of feel and sense could be around us at any moment, at any given time and place during the day, but specifically at night, in our sleep and in our dreams. I love the idea of this potential paranormal world that exists right under our noses, and the great thing about it, again, is it can be as terrifying as it can be emotional—equal parts nightmare and dream.

FANG: You first worked with Craven on CURSED, which was kind of a cursed production, with a lot of reshoots and re-editing. What was that situation like, trying to put together this crazy production?

ELKINS: It was fascinating, because what I realized was that even if you're a legend like Wes Craven, we're all just trying to make the best movie we can, and the movie sometimes tells us what it's going to be in post, even though we swear we know what it's supposed to be when we start filming it. It was a great thing for me to see, because it made me realize that making movies that land with an audience is difficult, and sometimes it's *really* difficult. Good people do their best to make a good film, and sometimes it just takes a while to get it right, or to where it needs to be to serve the audience. It was a true learning experience, and Wes Craven and Patrick Lussier were extremely cool about it, and very much interested in making the best film they could.

FANG: More recently, you were the editor on THE APPARITION, which wound up having a very brief running time. Was there a lot cut out of that one before it hit theaters?

ELKINS: I was the editor on THE APPARITION through the first cut, so I was on that movie for about four months, and then they were kind enough to allow me to leave early to go direct GHOSTS OF GEORGIA. So I didn't finish that film. The material that was coming in was cool, and I had a great time cutting it, but the way that movie ended up is different from when I was on it.