FATHER'S DAY was a breakout indie hit of 2012 and finally put the Winnipeg filmmaking collective Astron-6 on the map after a long time in the trenches of YouTube shorts and experiments in self-released DVDs. A gruesome grindhouse chronicle of a maniac cannibal rapist who only targets fathers, and the ragtag bunch on a mission to end his grim legacy, the film manages to not just entertain but also drive a message about the politics of the rape-revenge genre.

Despite being an all-male collective (Adam Brooks, Matthew Kennedy, Jeremy Gillespie, Steven Kostanski and Conor Sweeney) women play an important role in their work. It can be argued that the women in their films and the roles they play help the collective effectively skewer popular notions of gender roles and expectations, something they manage to pull off in many of their outings. Whether this is an intentional political message or just a sign of the shift in perceptions in our culture is debatable and something we explore.

In recognition of Women in Horror Month, Fangoria has spent some time with two pivotal Women of Astron-6, Amy Groening and Meredith Sweeney, to get their perspective on the filmmakers and the films they bring to life.

FANGORIA: Tell us about your roles in FATHER'S DAY.

AMY GROENING: I was Chelsea and I played the role of the…I don't know if you'd call her the heroine. She's a tragic figure, as everyone is in that movie. We're all going through some rough

spots, and then we take on the Fuchman to avenge my father's death.

MEREDITH SWEENEY: I played the owner of a strip club who is the ex-love interest of Adam's (Brooks) character Ahab. My name is Sleazy Mary (pictured right).

GROENING: It was really cool to be one of the ladies of Astron-6. They wrote the part for me so I didn't have to audition or anything. It's funny reading scripts and knowing the lines are written for you to say because they are imagining me saying these things while they are writing it. It all takes on a kind of weird, new, funny meaning.

FANG: So how did this relationship with Astron-6 start? How did you get to the point where they wrote a part for you in one of their films?

GROENING: I was in first year theatre and Matt Kennedy was the TA (teacher's assistant) in this really kind of cheesy first year intro acting class. We played theatre games and…it was just so funny. Anyhow, he asked me if I wanted to be in a short film he was making on the weekend. I was so excited! I'd never done anything on film ever, I'd never really acted before—I'd done some high school stuff— but mostly I was a dancer so this was my first acting class.

That weekend I went and met all the guys. I think that was one of the first things they'd all done together. Adam Brooks didn't even really know them at that time; it was one of their first collaborations. So of course I had to make out with Matt and he had a girlfriend and she hates me. After that, all the other guys fought over my attention—not Adam, but everyone else. Ultimately Conor (Sweeney) and I got together and I ended up being his girlfriend for 2 years. And that's the story of that!

FANG: Meredith, how long have you been making movies with Conor?

SWEENEY: Matt (Kennedy) and Conor started making movies together under their own production company called Greypoint Films. That was when we were in high school. The rest is history. We kept on making shitty horror movies and then they met up with Adam and Steve and started doing stuff with them.

FANG: This is basically a rape-revenge picture but it turns the rape-revenge theme on its head. Had you seen any of the classic rape revenge films before? I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE and whatnot?

GROENING: The truth is I'm just not a huge horror fanatic. I really am afraid of scary movies. So no, I haven't really... I do know of the genre and I'm familiar with it but I'm not an expert like the Astron guys are. It's not really my passion. The whole thing is just really gruesome and upsetting to the system. I'm really proud of the movie but I can't show it to a lot of people I know or they'd be like "What the fuck are you doing?" It's not as mainstream as some of the other work I've done.

FANG: It's certainly become a very popular film in the indie horror scene though…

GROENING: It's got a heart, that's what I think sets it apart from others of its genre. Even though it's really disgusting and totally revolting in most ways, it has such a heart-warming story. And it's funny!

FANG: It's hilarious.

GROENING: Those guys know how to do comedy.

FANG: They remind me of KIDS IN THE HALL, actually.

GROENING: Totally. KIDS IN THE HALL gone bad. Very very bad.

SWEENEY: The first movie that I watched with Matt actually was I SPIT ON YOUR GRAVE.

FANG: So how awkward was that?

SWEENEY: It was really, really awkward. I like campy movies but that particular strain of movie I was not used to and I didn't like it. It was a really awkward first date.

FANG: So Amy, even though you haven't seen a lot of the rape-revenge movies that influenced this film, as a woman how do you feel about the fact that there is a genre of "rape revenge films"?

GROENING (pictured left): Well…this is a big reason this stuff is not my cup of tea. This is a genre that isn't really geared to women. I'm sure that there are women who enjoy those movies.

There is something very satisfying about kicking someone in the balls after they fuck you over. I, myself have gone after an ex-boyfriend who cheated on me—we were at a music festival—and I found him wandering around with my friends and when he least expected it just fucking cranked him in the nuts. So sometimes you do just need to take revenge. It's empowering in its own way, I guess.

That's probably why I'm grossed out by it sometimes though. Not the "go lady, get your revenge!" part, but the fact that someone out there is watching and enjoying this woman being defiled.

SWEENEY: I think it's gross and weird. I think the way the movie industry in general is towards women is already negative enough. I'm not sure how troubling it is, it's not as if rape-revenge movies are a popular thing. Movies like SAW and THE HUMAN CENTIPEDE, those really awful exploitive gore movies, are kind of more troubling to me I think. The way the guys (Astron-6) do extreme gore is in a campy, fun way which is what all those old movies did. Movies these days do it so realistically that it's kind of normalizing horrible torture against all human beings.

Back on the subject of rape revenge movies. As awful as it is to watch—it's atrocious to watch a woman basically being raped by a group of people for what seems like an eternity—but at least she gets hers in the end. At least she turns it around on them.

GROENING: FATHER'S DAY on the whole kicked that whole thing in the face. I'm probably stretching here, but it was probably feminist in its way.

FANG: I've argued FATHER'S DAY is a feminist film. If you look at how it's put together, it's men being sexually abused, which is not the norm, and it's women who save the day. Literally the women are the only competent people in the film.

GROENING: That's totally true! Okay, so I wouldn't say it's a feminist film but I guess I kind of did.

SWEENEY: Absolutely it is. The women are the only ones with their shit figured out. Everybody else is just fumbling their way through life.

FANG: Some of the reactions to the film, because of its reversal of gender stereotypes, are really weird.

SWEENEY: You really have to wonder where many of the people who watch campy horror movies minds' are at when it's such an issue to see naked men in the movie. You see breasts as well, but the fact you see naked men as well is such an issue for some people. Seeing a woman raped on film doesn't raise eyebrows. Seeing men raped on film? People were up in arms about it.

FANG: So you've got a $10,000 budget to make this movie. As a performer, dealing with a budget this small and ideas as big as the Astron-6 guys had, how challenging is that?

GROENING: Oh you have no idea. Maybe you do, but take that idea and triple it. These guys are dreamers and that's what makes their movies so fantastic and creative and hilarious. They definitely bite off a lot and when you don't have money it's really hard to accomplish those things. The car chase is a great example because there were so many things that should have gone wrong and did go wrong and were so illegal. Overall I'd say that they are lucky they had such a small budget because if they had any more money they'd have to start paying people and doing things legally, and that would fuck them over. I hope they get as much funding as humanly possible. I want that for them of course.

It's very challenging. It's a high stress environment. There are a lot of laughs and good times but when nobody is getting paid and nobody is getting fed and there is corn syrup blood all over you and it dries and gets sticky and rips the hair off your arms, there are definitely some meltdowns that happen.

SWEENEY: Well for me, because I don't have to figure out where the money is going and because we never had money to make our movies it didn't feel different than making any of our other movies. I know for them it was a huge challenge when they were expected to include certain things in the movie that they just didn't have the budget for. Like car chase scenes and explosions. That took some skills. For me? It was no different than any other set I've been on. I still didn't get paid.

Though I've never given birth to an actual child, I feel like when you are doing it [making movies] it's long days, it causes a lot of pain physically and emotionally but the finished product you can look back on and go "That was amazing, let's do that again!" You create beautiful little babies and you want to make more of them.

FANG: All the effects in the film are practical too, so you are using pig guts and all this awful stuff. There were things that were done that just would not have happened on a “regular” film set. Somebody would have come in and stopped it. Yet the way it plays on the screen is so effective…

GROENING: Because it’s real! That day with the pig guts was the day I did in fact have my meltdown, my most severe meltdown. There just comes a time and a place where you’re in this cold concrete basement, it smells like pig guts and you’re freezing and covered in corn syrup and it’s drying on you and your hair and everything is ripping off of you. I just lost it. I really did. It’s not a pretty picture.

I did wish at that time that we had more money so we could have space heaters and someone to…I don’t know, dry my tears?

FANG: The Tear Grip.

GROENING: Yes, exactly! That’s probably a thing on some sets. Depending who you’re working with. Looking back on it I found it hilarious. It’s so absurd it’s hard not to laugh a bit but mostly I just cried.

FANG: Well what you did was extremely difficult. To anyone doubting, what you guys did was very extreme.

GROENING: Right. Adam (Brooks) said the other day that anyone who is so critical of movies

and thinks it's so easy should try and make one. Just try. Even a short one. See how you feel about it then. It's true, it's far more difficult than you think.

SWEENEY: My first day shooting as Sleazy Mary I'd had some kind of allergic reaction and my eyes were swollen shut. So I tried to get them to reschedule the shoot, but obviously they couldn't. They were filming at the University and had the set all made up. They needed me to come in. I was not pleasant to work with that day, but I did it.

I've never really had any meltdowns on set but I've also never had to be laying in pigs guts. I've never had to be naked on set. Amy has had to those things so I think she probably has more of a right to melt down than I ever have had to.

FANG: So when you have five guys co-directing a movie, how does everyone get along?

GROENING: You know, at first when I started working with them, they were very intimidating and I was dating Conor so I really wanted to please them because they were his friends. I didn't know them that well and they've got all their weird references all the time. I didn't know what they were talking about. Eventually though, they became like my brothers. Yes I get mad at them and they get mad at me but it's just not that hard anymore. It's not such a stressful environment just because we're all so comfortable with each other. It's not without drama. It's like siblings and that's the best way to describe it because we all know each other in such weird ways. It's like intimacy brought on by trauma. People who go through bad experiences together, they know things about each other that they might not otherwise know.

No matter how many mean things I say to them—which have no fear, is many—I love them and I know that hopefully they feel the same way about me.

SWEENEY: The way your relationships form with people when you're working with them like that, you can't describe it. It's not like any work relationship that I've had in any other capacity. You have to do these horribly uncomfortable things with each other. You cry. You scream at each other. You kind of hate each other sometimes but you all have this shared experience that really draws people together in a way that can't be described unless you've done it.

FANG: Were there points in the movie where Mackenzie Murdock really freaked you out in his portrayal of the Fuchman?

GROENING: There was never a moment that Mackenzie freaked me out. He is the most ridiculously goofy guy alive. He is so far from the Fuchman. It was really funny watching the movie and thinking he looks kind of scary, but then I go back to the scene in my memory and remember he tripped over that cord and said some really awkward reference about a movie. He's just not scary. He's other things, but he's not scary.

SWEENEY: I am constantly freaked out by Mackenzie. He's a character. Anybody who will do the things he has done for no money kind of speaks volumes I think.

FANG: Did you see his **VW commercial** ?

GROENING: It was hysterical. I watched it like 3 times to get the full effect.

FANG: So what's next?

GROENING: I guess I will just say that things are coming together. All those guys are back in Winnipeg so they are collaborating and you can expect some big things in the future.

SWEENEY: Adam has written a film called THE EDITOR. It's a 70s Italian-style horror movie about a movie editor. They were going to make a trailer for it and then decided to make it feature length.

GROENING: They are up to their usual antics, so have no fear.

For more, see Fango's review of FATHER'S DAY here .