When a water-borne, pollution-spawned plague of illness and worse strikes the Chesapeake Bay town of Claridge, Maryland in Barry Levinson’s THE BAY (out this week on DVD from Lionsgate), no man, woman or child is safe. One of the few survivors is journalism student Donna Thompson, who has put together the horrific footage we see and is played by Kether Donohue, who discusses the experience of making the movie in this exclusive interview.

Throughout THE BAY (reviewed here ), we see Donna both in video snippets from the fateful Fourth of July and as an onscreen narrator providing context for the multiple-sourced images. As everything bloodily falls apart, her character holds the story together, making her the de facto heroine of this documentary-style nightmare.

**FANGORIA:** How did you get involved with THE BAY?

**KETHER DONOHUE:** I live in California and was born and raised in New York, so I was there during the summer, just going on auditions like any other day. My manager called me and said, “Hey, we have an audition for you tomorrow for this film”—at the time, it was called ISOPOD—“being directed by Barry Levinson. The only thing the casting office is asking is, ‘Be as real as possible’; they really don’t want you to look like you’re acting. Just be natural, be

real, don't try to do anything that makes you look like an actor." So I was like, "OK, I can do that." I went to the audition and the casting directors put me on tape, and the very next day I got a call saying, "Barry watched all the tapes yesterday, and he loved your audition and you got the role." My jaw just dropped; I was like, "What? No callback?!" I didn't even have to meet Barry. I must have been a really good person in my past life!

The funny thing was, I was originally supposed to audition for Kristen Connolly's character. But the night before, I had a dream I was a news reporter in animation—that was the weird, funky dream part—and the next day, my manager called and was like, "They want to audition you for the role of the reporter as well." I was like, "I had a dream last night that I was a reporter," and he said, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. I gotta go, I have work to do." And then when I got the role, he was like, "Wait, didn't you have a dream that you were a reporter?" I said, "Yes—you should listen to me more often about these dreams I'm having."

**FANG:** How much did you know about THE BAY when you auditioned?

**DONOHUE:** That's actually a great question, because at the audition, I was just given the one scene I was reading, no script. And when I got the part, it was like a week before the start of shooting, and I was getting a little panicky, like, "Wait, I don't have a script yet!" I thought maybe my agents or manager had forgotten to e-mail it to me. So I called my manager and said, "Hey, can you send me the script? We're gonna be filming in a week, and I kind of need to know what's going on here." Then we found out that Barry didn't want any of the actors to read the script! That was actually very smart, and when I heard that was his decision, I was like, "Well, I just trust Barry; he obviously knows what he's doing."

Once I got to the set, I realized it was such a blessing to not know what was happening in the other storylines, because it's an ensemble piece; there are five main characters, and none of us know each other and we're not interacting with each other. So it was very natural—for example, in my scene with the mayor, I liked not knowing what was going on with him, because as the journalist, my character wouldn't really know what he was up to. So that really set an environment to have very realistic interactions with the other actors.

**FANG:** Donna is kind of central to the film, in terms of being the one who both experienced the horrors and has put the footage together after the fact. Did you get to witness any of the other shooting in the course of making the film?

**DONOHUE:** The only scenes I witnessed were really the ones I was in. And that made sense for when I'm narrating the story in 2012; you can tell Donna only saw the other footage after everything happened. It was something she learned about after that experience, and that's what motivates her to want to tell the story.

**FANG:** Did you get to see all the footage before you shot the 2012 scenes?

**DONOHUE:** No, and it did not negatively affect me in any way, because as an actor, I work with my imagination. When I read the narration script, I was aware of what I was reporting, so I didn't believe it was necessary to physically view any footage to be able to talk about it.

**FANG:** How was Levinson as a director? Was there a lot of improv, or did he want you to keep to a script or outline?

**DONOHUE:** Oh my God, that's what I love about him—he absolutely loves improv! Actually, it was funny—the first day I was on set, I was originally just supposed to have a wardrobe fitting, and after that I met Barry for the first time. The whole cast and crew were eating lunch together, and Barry sat at the table with me, which I thought was nice, because he just wanted to get to know me. And I told him this story about how I got my first speeding ticket when I moved to LA, since I literally had to learn how to drive in one week in New York City, because I was moving to LA very quickly. He was rolling on the floor laughing, and said, "You know what? We're gonna put that in the movie. After lunch, we're gonna shoot you telling that story to your cameraman." I was like, "Wait, I don't even have hair and makeup!" And he said, "Don't worry, we'll get you covered. But think of more funny stories you can tell from your real life; I feel like your character would do that."

I thought that was great. What Barry likes to do is highlight whatever essence an actor naturally has, and enhance that and bring it out in your performance. Throughout the course of shooting, I really felt we were creating my role together as we went along. We had a joke, because at the time I had a short pixie haircut, that maybe Donna wanted to be Katie Couric and that's why she got the haircut. Every day, any time something would make someone laugh, or we had an idea, we'd just try it out and go with it. He's so open, and it's nice to work with someone who's so passionate about what they do, and still finds the playfulness and the fun and the creativity, almost like a child playing with toys. He's not so serious, like, "We have to get this right on the

first take!"

**FANG:** Since you hadn't seen too much of the footage beyond your own, were you scared as a viewer when you saw the final film?

**DONOHUE:** I was scared shitless! I was literally gripping my fiancé's hand the whole time. Yeah, I was definitely scared.

**FANG:** Is this the first horror film you've done?

**DONOHUE:** Let me think back…I want to say yes. My fiancé Nick Gaglia and I did co-produce and co-write a film together that I'm in, ALTERED STATES OF PLAINE [also directed by Gaglia], which is more of a sci-fi thriller. I've actually done a lot of thrillers [also including BOY WONDER]; not necessarily horror, but psychological thriller/drama types of things. But THE BAY was my first experience with blood and screaming and the typical things you would associate with a horror movie.

**FANG:** So how was it dealing with all the blood and screaming for the first time?

**DONOHUE:** I actually do a lot of cartoon and *anime* voiceovers, and I scream a lot when I perform those characters. So I'm a really good screamer, and I actually love screaming. I mean, not in real life, I don't just sit around screaming [
*laughs*
]; that would be strange. But whenever I had a scene where I had to scream, I got really excited!

**FANG:** How did you make the transition from voiceover acting to being in front of the camera as well?

**DONOHUE:** Well, when I initially set out to be an actor, I always thought in the back of my

head that voiceovers would be nice, but I never full-on pursued it. I was going on TV/film/theater auditions and I was in an acting class, and one day my scene partner was like, "You know, you have a really cute voice. I'm going on an audition tomorrow for an animated show, you should come with me." I was like, "Are you *serious*? That's really nice of you!" So I went; it was for a Fox Saturday-morning cartoon, and I got the role! And after that, I guess because the voiceover scene in New York is a very small world, I would get referrals for other jobs, and really, that's how I put myself through college. But I was doing that simultaneously with television, film and theater work; I was kind of doing everything all at once.

**FANG:** Has the BAY experience made you interested in doing more horror or found-footage films?

**DONOHUE:** Yeah, absolutely. To be honest, I just get excited by characters and storylines, and if they just so happen to be in the genre of horror or found footage, then I'm on board. I'm not so much into saying, "Oh, I want to stick with this genre" or "I don't want to do that genre"; I prefer to be open and not go into a project judging it that way. What I do love about horror, though, is that its audience is *so* passionate about it. Like when we went to the Toronto Film Festival and screened THE BAY at Midnight Madness, the crowd obviously really enjoyed horror movies, and I loved being around them because their energy was so positive and they were so into the movie. The fans are very dedicated to the genre, and I think that's exciting.

**FANG:** In closing, I have to ask: Has anyone pointed out to you the coincidence of your name, considering that Heather Donahue was the star of THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, the first major found-footage horror hit?

**DONOHUE:** Oh my gosh, you know what? I didn't even think about it! That's so funny. I have to meet her. I should Facebook her and be like, "Hey!" It was funny; I went on an audition the other day, and I wrote "Kether Donohue" on the sign-in sheet, and the casting director was like, "OK, Heather Donahue…" I didn't correct her, I was just like, "Yeah, that's me, Kether Donohue," in case maybe there was a Heather Donahue in the room and I didn't know. So she said, "Um, honey, you have a typo here—you spelled your name wrong," and I was thinking, "No, I know what my name is!"