

SXSW Programmer Jarod Neece talks the Midnighters

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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As today's [Midnighters announcement](#) gets us SXSW attendees very jazzed, Fango had the chance to chat with the man responsible for the incredible slate, SXSW programmer Jarod Neece, about putting together the program and his own excitement and expectations for 2012's iteration.

FANGORIA: The midnight lineup is really incredible this year. What do you find yourself looking for in filling the slots each fest?

JAROD NEECE: For us, we have genre films throughout the program, being the opening night CABIN IN THE WOODS, a lot of the international stuff we play, a lot of indie sci-fi. We have things like BEAST and HARD LABOR and CASA DE MI PADRE may fall into midnight programs at other festivals where here, we have genre throughout. So, the midnighters are things that are a little edgier, a little crazier, just go that extra step. We also want to make sure it's a diverse program. This year, we have films from almost six or seven countries, we have a combination of first-time filmmakers, returning vets, a combination of films with distribution and films looking for. We try to get a little bit in there for everybody. You have people like Austin Chick, who did the indie drama XX/XY and he has his first step into genre filmmaking. And then things we've been waiting for like [REC] 3 and IRON SKY, INTRUDERS. Some things we saw at Sundance, some we saw at Toronto, a lot were obviously submitted to us. It's just trying to find a balance between all those audiences we need to program for, be it the general audience, or distributors or press.

FANG: The Festival Favorites is a section for films that really made a mark at places like Sundance and Toronto. How do you differentiate between those that end up there or, titles like V/H/S and JOHN DIES AT THE END hitting the Midnighters.

NEECE: We do kind of cheat and put more genre stuff in other programs [laughs]. I don't want to just play eleven genre films, so something like LOVELY MOLLY could've totally been Midnight, but it ended up in Festival Favorites. There are films that would totally work in either category. GIRLS AGAINST BOYS could have been in Emerging Visions. So it's super subjective on where we put things. In our mind, it makes sense, so hopefully it makes sense to other people [laughs].

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FANG: So when do you start the process?

NEECE: We open submissions in August. We got over 5200, and from that, a few hundred genre films that could've worked for Midnighters. We go to Toronto for Midnight Madness, Fantastic Fest, Sitges, AFM; so we're going to all those fests. We're looking at Alumni filmmakers, people are pitching us things that aren't submitted. It's coming at us from all sides. We're just the curators, figuring out what those eleven films will be.

FANG: When you have something hugely anticipated like [REC] 3, do you chase that down?

NEECE: Oh, I've been chasing that film. I literally confirmed two days ago and I've been chasing that film since August. It was the same thing last year with ATTACK THE BLOCK. I had to convince Studio Canal why this festival made sense for that film. They heard of us, and a lot of people maybe hear about the music festival. We have a pretty good reputation in the UK, but Studio Canal were still kind of skeptical. We worked with them on FOUR LIONS a couple of years ago. For [REC] 3, I met with the filmmakers and producers at Sitges and then it was just working with Screen Gems and then Magnolia came on, and that's how it all came together. It took months of calls and meetings. It feels good, you want to work hard for it, especially when it pays off.



FANG: You also have THE TALL MAN.

NEECE: Yea, a lot of people are looking forward to that, and Travis Stevens produced THE AGGRESSION SCALE, he produced some of Adam Wingard's early films, and this is him going out with Steven C. Miller, who did AUTOMATON TRANSFUSION. I really like his filmmaking and it definitely has Travis' feel to it. It's raw, edgy.

FANG: Do you think that might be the one to look out for?

NEECE: There's that, there's MODUS ANOMALI, which will definitely get people talking. It's an Indonesian film from Joko Anwar. There are a lot of good discoveries. CITADEL is really good, it's a shorts filmmaker from Ireland. It's his first feature and it's super solid. Literally, every film in the program I stand behind, be it [REC] 3 or IRON SKY or CITADEL or INTRUDERS. We all love them in different ways. Every year, we think we know what's going to be the big film everyone talks about, and then it's "oh, really? That's the one?" So, I don't prognosticate. ATTACK THE BLOCK, it was obvious everyone would love it, but last year films like UNDEFEATED, or WEEKEND, some of the smaller films, you never know what people are going to react to.

FANG: When you have something like INTRUDERS, which is getting a wide release fairly soon after, do you have any trepidation?

NEECE: We want a mix. Like, the secret screening is amazing, and I wish I could announce it, but they're coming out a little later in the year, so they wanted to start under the radar. You want a mix of things that people are really anticipated about, kind of like your flagpole, and then you throw the discoveries in there so people take chances.

FANG: The Film Festival has really built up, what do you expect this year in terms of growth?

NEECE: It's big. We're just trying to find places to put everyone. The hotel situation in Austin is pretty bad. It doesn't have the number of rooms that a town its size should have. We don't have a professional sports team, and I don't know if that is one of the factors, we don't have that built-in—like, when Sundance got the Olympics, it increased the number of people that could actually go to Sundance, because they had to build all that housing. There are more hotels being built and so it's just trying to find where to put people. The festival has definitely grown, I've been here for ten years now, and it's a totally different festival from ten years ago.

Don Coscarelli's film, BUBBA HO-TEP was the first screening I ever worked at SXSW. It was his one and only print. It was his first night and one in the morning, and we had set up the

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projector wrong, and it melted on screen. I got called out of my hotel room and it was Don Coscarelli, BEASTMASTER and all the films of my young adulthood, and now I had to go apologize profusely. So, when I tried to get JOHN DIES AT THE END, I didn't know if he wouldn't call me back, or still had this horrible memory of SXSW. But, he was like, "Oh, no, it was a bad night for everyone." So that's cool, bringing it back ten years later.

For more, you can head to the official [SXSW site](#), and follow Jarod on Twitter [here](#). □