Written by Michael Gingold
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When we last left Skye Rotter, played by Lauren McKnight (pictured left), at the end of last year’s MTV movie MY SUPER PSYCHO SWEET 16, she was departing the Roller Dome where a number of her high-school classmates had been slain by her deranged dad Charlie—leaving her nemesis, Madison Penrose, to die at his hands. In MY SUPER PSYCHO SWEET 16 2, debuting tonight on the cable channel (see review here), we find Skye in search of inner peace and the mother who abandoned her when she was a baby—somewhat heavier dramatic territory than usual for slasher sequels.

“She’s been tormented her entire life,” McKnight observes, speaking to Fango with her SUPER PSYCHO cohorts at the recent New York Comic-Con. “She’s had this psycho-killer dad, Madison destroyed her life as a teenager, so that’s where the sympathy for my character comes from. She goes to find her mom, whom she barely even remembers and has a new life, a new family, a new husband, and Skye discovers she has a half-sister she has never met before, Alex. There are still some tender moments in this movie; I mean, Skye’s not a hardened murderer now.”

“She’s basically conflicted about the dark side of her genealogy,” says SUPER PSYCHO 2 director Jacob Gentry (pictured with actresses McKnight, right, and Kirsten Prout), also back from the previous movie. “That’s a big conflict for her—is she going to turn out like her dad, or she going to be a new person and find her own identity? No matter how much you can say morally about the fact that she let another girl die, you can see that she’s conflicted about it. You’re so much inside her story and her inner goings-on that even if she makes a bad choice, you’re still along for the ride.”

That ride isn’t all heavy interior drama, of course; there’s another major party to be staged and another round of slashings to stain it with blood, courtesy of Charlie (Alex Van), who tracks Skye down before too long. Writer/producers Jed Elinoff and Scott Thomas, while bringing Madison (Julianna Guill) back briefly in ghost/nightmare form, also introduce a new queen-bee

teen, Zoe (Stella Maeve), to make trouble for Skye and Alex (Prout). All this added up to an opportunity for Gentry to build a better stalker sequel, one that he was excited to tackle.

“A lot of horror follow-ups introduce a whole new scenario and set of characters and just carry over one element,” he notes, “or, in the case of HALLOWEEN or something like that, they reverse-engineer a relationship that wasn’t present in the first one. We had all these unanswered questions from the original that we were able to play and go further with, and really continue the arc of the story. We had this family saga, and we introduce a whole new element with Alex and her mom and this whole new townful of people. The idea is that if you start at the beginning of the first movie and end with the second one, it’s a nice journey. Over the two of them, we have a really good story arc.

“Plus, we raised the ante on everything: the drama, the comedy, the suspense—and the gore,” he continues. “We definitely tried to raise the bar in terms of the thrills and the suspense leading up to the violence, which we wanted to make creative and fun; it’s almost like pop violence. There are some brutal moments, but it’s all within the context of the story.” Apparently Standards and Practices agreed, as MY SUPER PSYCHO SWEET 16 2 contains some pretty splatterific moments for a basic cable program. “It’s been pretty great” dealing with S&P, Gentry says. “We thought they were going to be very conservative in terms of that stuff, and we were able to push it all the way and were surprised at how much we could do. I think we got away with a lot more because, again, it works within the story. You’re connected with the characters and what they’re going through, so it’s more effective. It’s not just about coming up with some quirky way of killing somebody and then shoehorning it into the movie.”

Prout, the most significant newcomer to the SUPER PSYCHO world, appreciated the extra care its creators put into the first installment. “Initially, when you hear a title like MY SUPER PSYCHO SWEET 16… I had no idea what to expect,” she recalls. “I thought it was just gonna be a bunch of girls killed off at a party. But then I watched the first one and saw that it had a lot of heart; I saw how talented Lauren was, how talented Jacob was, and Jed and Scott are

amazing writers. I became really excited to come on board with all the cast, who are terrific, and get involved with this film. Also being given such a great character, because Alex has so many elements to her. She’s got that darkness, very similar to Skye, but Skye’s a lot stronger in the way she handles it. Alex toys with it a bit more; she’s a little more fragile.”

The two girls have a pretty contentious relationship through a good portion of the movie, but that was no reflection of how they related to each other behind the scenes. “Lauren and I actually get along really well,” Prout says. “We really connected midway through shooting. It was interesting, because we shot a lot of scenes where we were at odds, or there was an awkwardness, at the beginning, and then by the end, when we had more history, Lauren and I had really connected. So it was a wonderful working relationship, and it was very true to the movie!”

While McKnight had a role in the on-line zombie series LIFELESS and Prout has appeared in a few sci-fi TV shows as well as playing Lucy in the TWILIGHT flick ECLIPSE (which she refers to as “pseudo-genre”), the SUPER PSYCHO saga marks the two actresses’ first experience in serious movie-length horror. McKnight, in particular, has been thrilled to take part in a genre she loves. “I’m really into the classics; A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET has to be one of my all-time favorites,” she raves. “As far as gore goes, SILENT HILL has great stuff in it; that one has always stood out for me. The effects in that movie are just intense.”

Prout professes an enthusiasm for everything from Stephen King to RE-ANIMATOR, and adds, “Some people love it and some people hate it, but THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, to me, was very smart because it was all about building suspense the entire time. When I saw PARANORMAL ACTIVITY, I thought, ‘This is not gonna be good, there’s all this hype surrounding it,’ but that was the same thing. It caught you off guard. I love the psychological suspense element of movies like that.” And as an actress, she adds, “My game is action. I started out doing ELEKTRA ages ago with Jennifer Garner. I’ve always enjoyed watching stunts and being involved in them.”

MY SUPER PSYCHO SWEET 16 2 put both actresses through some heavily physical scenes, though the most elaborate stunt involves (SPOILER ALERT) a character who pops out of a large “stripper cake” covered in flames. The gag is one of the movie’s highlights, though Gentry recalls that it didn’t come off without a hitch or two. “The first take wasn’t very successful,” he admits. “We had this stuntwoman in the cake, and we put the lid on it, it was ready on set, all the extras were there, we had done safety meetings and rehearsals and everything. So we lit her up, and she popped through the top of the cake…and there was one little flame on her shoulder. She had this bag on her head where they had drawn the face of the character she was supposed to be, but she basically looked like Raggedy Ann. All the extras were like, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah!…oooohhh…This is what we waited all day for?’ So that really nipped us in the bud, and it made us step up our game on that whole sequence.”

If the ratings indicate that Gentry, his fellow creators and cast have been successful in stepping up that game, the director says “it could be really fun” to take the SUPER PSYCHO series into trilogy territory. Prout agrees: “It’s hard to tell before it actually airs,” she says, “but everyone involved in the project believes in it so much, and I know that a lot of people would be open to discussing the possibility of other storylines.”

For Gentry, who first broke out as part of the triple directing team (with friends David Bruckner and Dan Bush) on the acclaimed independent chiller THE SIGNAL, the solo stints on the SUPER PSYCHO movies have been “a really cool experience. The first one was difficult, actually, because I hadn’t made anything of that size before, and I didn’t write the script, so that was a new thing for me. I felt like I was a little bit in over my head. But after having gone through the process and feeling like I did a good job, and having my confidence built up when people liked it, the sequel was the most fun I’ve had making a movie, especially working with these actresses.”

And he doesn’t rule out reteaming with Bruckner and Bush on another combo project. “They’re two of my dearest friends in the world, and I really enjoyed making THE SIGNAL with those guys,” Gentry says. “There are some things that we’ve been brewing. I know that all of us have our own films we want to make, but hopefully we’ll have some other SIGNAL-esque projects in the future that we can work on together. That’s really how it would work. It was a pretty unique approach on THE SIGNAL, and [a further film collaboration] would need that different perspective.”

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