

Getting “INSIDIOUS” with Leigh Whannell, Part One

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
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In the weeks and months leading up to *INSIDIOUS*' theatrical release, Fango spoke to director James Wan and writer Leigh Whannell *a ton*. So, at this past spring's SXSW in Austin, TX, when yet another opportunity arose, we took the chance to have a much more leisurely conversation with Whannell about the film, its themes and anything that arose. Now, in anticipation of the film's bowing on DVD/Blu next Tuesday, July 12 and FANGORIA's free, special screening on July 11 (with the filmmakers in attendance; see details at the bottom), you can check out part one of the talk below...

FANGORIA: Since we've spoken to you and James a number of times in recent months about *INSIDIOUS*, I'm curious to know if you think there's anything that's been overlooked about the film?

LEIGH WHANNELL: One of the themes of the film that I haven't talked about much, or people haven't picked up on that much, is a march of time—aging, the eye cream, little things like the gray hair. There's a general feeling I wanted with the parents, a sense they're getting older. She's trying to do music and living in LA, I'm surrounded by artists. You're also surrounded by business people, but you're surrounded by artists, actors musicians and these people who've come to LA with a dream. It's a very functional city. It's not a place that huge amounts of people grow up in and grow roots in. It's a place that becomes a company town, at times. Everybody's striving for this dream, and so as you get older and you start to get to a certain age and see people getting married and have children, I started to observe this thing happening amongst my circle of friends in Los Angeles where people would slowly give up on the initial reason they came to LA. Like they'd given it some time, it hasn't worked out the way they wanted it to and so maybe they're starting to shift their life in a new direction, like start to focus on kids. I mean, it's brutal for women. Once a woman gets to 30, it's considered ancient by Hollywood, it's terrible. It's just this weird, brutal system. And so, seeing a lot of my female friends in Los Angeles start to focus on children and move away from this dream that maybe they came to Los Angeles with when they were 21, full of zest and zip and slowly, the brutality and the reality of the industry in LA can wear you down and make you change your goals. So I was really curious about that and really based the couple of Renais [Rose Byrne] and Josh [Patrick Wilson] around that. Renais has this dream of wanting to be a musician and the sense is there that she's getting older, that it's getting too late. The backstory is there that she had this dream and then had children and then had to put her dream aside to look after the kids. I'm sure you've seen that happen with people you know.

FANG: Definitely, I'm from New York, and it's funny how I think that age where people start to

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give up a little is getting even lower. I’m 23, and I have friends starting to marry and it’s still a little shocking.

WHANNELL: Yeah, and you’re at the age, you’re at the start of the journey where people have the zest. You’re in New York and it’s such an exciting place to be, everyone’s on the move, everyone’s on the go. I’m 34, so I’m starting to see people really settle down. I don’t want to use the words “give up,” but people take out mortgages, they have children.

FANG: Their priorities shift.

WHANNELL: Exactly and it’s really interesting to watch, especially if you have an artistic dream like music or writing or directing or something. It’s really hard to just detach from it. It’s a passion in a way that maybe someone who’s selling insurance for a living isn’t passionate about what they do. They might like it and stuff, but I’m sure you have friends who want to be on stage, and it consumes them, that goal. Or friends that want to direct films and that passion is all consuming. So anyway, that was kind of long winded. The way that plays into the larger theme of INSIDIOUS is that—to bring it back around to something that might be interesting for FANGORIA—the reality is we’re all going to die one day. It’s the great democratic, final punctuation mark. No one escapes it, no matter what your station in life. But I actually don’t think talking about death is a morbid thing, necessarily. If you approach it like the Sisters of Mercy, all dressed in black and talking about doom and gloom, then yeah, it can be a morbid topic. But death can also be something that’s pretty funny and it can be something that you can approach matter of factly, like, “Oh, this is going to happen.” Also, it depends on what you believe I guess. Some people don’t believe that death is it. Many, many people around the world believe that after they die, they’re going to some other world; they’re going to go to heaven or somewhere. I would be more agnostic. I don’t know what’s out there.



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FANG: I’m the same way and that’s why pictures like INSIDIOUS and films that deal with the paranormal are scary to me. I come from two separate religions on both sides of my family and then my mom is Wiccan and it just boils down to not knowing what’s out there and approaching that unknown is horrifying.

WHANNELL: Absolutely, and the thing is with supernatural stuff is you can’t really be wrong. It’s kind of like sci-fi. Because no one knows what’s out there, you can’t be wrong. Nobody can say, “I mean, that Tatooine planet was just so unrealistic.” It’s interesting when some critics have called INSIDIOUS a bit outlandish. It’s like, “But we’re dealing with concepts of the unknown here.” Nobody knows for certain, whether they claim to or not, what happens after we die. Nobody knows. Does everything just go black, or do we move on? It’s kind of a question that obsesses me and it seems to be a recurring theme in stuff I do. In INSIDIOUS, it manifests itself in this way that is supposed to be terrifying. We’re using these elements of the unknown to scare the audience, but at its heart, it’s really about this march of time toward death and how you’ve got this short amount of time to do what you want. Then you’ve got responsibilities, kids and the second you have kids, they start their march. It’s such an interesting cycle, the life cycle. From the second you’re born, you start this crawl and you’ve got to use this time you have as best you can, which was the theme of SAW, appreciating your life while you’re alive and living it properly.

FANG: When it comes to that unknown, I really enjoyed the journey into “The Further,” and the kind of bits and pieces you get from the specters haunting them, like the twins. Was more shot of their little stories?

WHANNELL: It’s interesting you say that. Now looking back at it, maybe I should’ve written those little backstories for them, but we didn’t actually. We didn’t shoot anything else that you didn’t see. We only had the family and then, we kind of felt like we had some different entities that were sort of crowding around this house and this family and we didn’t necessarily want to give them too much backstory, but I liked that we did something with the sisters because you sort of got to see how someone in this world ends up in this loop. I talked to a medium when I was researching the script, and he was saying that a lot of the time, ghosts are energy released from a body that is caught in a loop, particularly people who’ve had a violent death and they keep experiencing. He walks into houses and senses energy of somebody who died in the house violently experiencing their death again and again and again. And that’s kind of what I saw the sisters as, almost like that vignette was just played out on a loop and then they kind of crossed through and it was just kind of creepy and weird.

TO BE CONTINUED

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FANGORIA's free screening of *INSIDIOUS* takes place Monday, July 11 at Los Angeles' [Silent Movie Theater](#)

, hosted by director James Wan and screenwriter Leigh Whannell. The event's Q&A portion will be streamed live over the web on Facebook and Fangoria.com, and fans can send in their questions in advance via Facebook and Twitter using #INSIDIOUSLIVE. Go

[here](#)

for full details and to obtain tickets. Check out more of our interview with Wilson and Byrne on *INSIDIOUS*

[here](#)

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