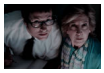


As noted yesterday, our talk with INSIDIOUS writer Leigh Whannell (begun here) turned into quite a laid-back discussion of all sorts of topics floating around the paranormal. We continue as I’ve just related my own experience with a ghost… (See below for details of FANGORIA’s free 35mm LA INSIDIOUS screening this Monday, with Whannell and director James Wan attending.)

LEIGH WHANNELL: So when you watch something like INSIDIOUS, you sort of look at it through the prism of, “No, that can happen.”

FANGORIA: Absolutely, but I don’t really know for sure. I want to believe that people can communicate with the dead. I don’t necessarily believe in TV mediums, but I believe there could be a connection and sometimes I believe that when I had that experience, I could’ve been a person who had that connection but I shut myself off to it because I was so scared. As I got older, whatever possibility I had, I lost. So I get scared when I see things like INSIDIOUS because it just reminds me. That’s why I love haunted house films and paranormal movies. That’s what affects me in horror.

WHANNELL: Can you still see that ghost really clearly in your mind?

FANG: Oh, absolutely. It was literally glowing, like gold. So it might’ve even been like a warm or a positive presence.

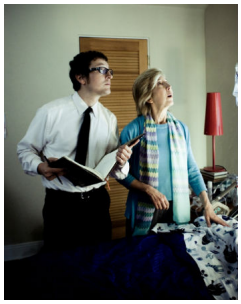
WHANNELL: I’m kind of envious because I haven’t experienced anything like that for myself. Here I am, fascinated by the topic and I’m like somebody who’s fascinated with the ocean, but

has never been there; just looking at it in photographs or hearing second-hand stories about the ocean and what it’s like. It’s like the biggest tease in the world. It sounds crazy, but I kind of want to have something like that.

FANG: So do I. Now that I’m older, I almost wish I never shut myself off to that.

WHANNELL: I went out with these hobbyists, these guys in LA. These really friendly, super nice guys took me out when I was researching the script and just sort of meeting with people. I went out with these ghost hunters and they took me to an abandoned hospital in east LA and it was left exactly as it was the day it shut down in the late ’70s. So there were medical records everywhere, hospital equipment. It was like everyone in this hospital dropped what they were holding and walked out. So we’re in this hospital, lights are out, exposed wiring dangling. It’s pitch black, it’s 1 a.m. and we’re there with flashlights with red lenses on them so it’s a different kind of light—it doesn’t blind you when you shine it—and night vision cameras and everything. These guys were wanting desperately for a ghost to give them some sign.

I wish I could go out with them one night and have an experience where something was seen or heard. I guess what happened to you was more unequivocal. Usually, what they talk about is a lot of disembodied voices where I would start to question if it was the wind, I would start to second-guess what that was, but there’s no mistaking a body.



FANG: Yeah, although I don’t know. I just know that that’s what affects me as far as horror now.

WHANNELL: Yeah, same here. Of all the horror genres, zombie films, slasher films.

FANG: I enjoy watching those very much, but this is what I get scared of. THE ORPHANAGE, for instance.

WHANNELL: THE ORPHANAGE got me.

FANG: THE OTHERS was something contemporary. And that's the other thing, people seem to be shitting themselves that INSIDIOUS is PG-13, but there's no rating for atmosphere.

WHANNELL: I agree, I thought THE ORPHANAGE was really a creepy film. I feel like people who say, "PG-13 horror, that sucks!" They're not getting it. I can see that reaction if somebody made a PG-13 zombie film. Then you get online and you go, "Well, what are you possibly showing me." But when it comes to our favorite genre, the haunted house and ghost film, you don't even care about the rating, all you want to know is, "How scary is it?" I was so excited about THE ORPHANAGE and the scene where she plays "Knock, knock, knock" and they start appearing quietly, I thought was beautifully directed, very tense. There's a made-for-TV movie called THE HAUNTED and it's based on a true story. It's a little rough around the edges because it's made for TV [from 1991], the acting's not great but, man, do they nail some atmosphere. Go out and find it. There's one scene where the mother is down in the basement—the mother's played by Sally Kirkland—it's one of those basement laundries and she's putting the washing in, and she starts to walk up the stairs and she hears her mother down in the basement behind her. Her mother lives with her; it's one of those houses where the grandparents, the parents, the kids are all together. Her mother goes, "Janet!" from the basement and she's looking and it's dark. She goes back down and then she hears it from upstairs. She walks up and looks outside and sees her mother nowhere near the house, and it's just so creepy the way they do it that the ghost is literally calling out to her in the voice of the mother. There are a couple of moments like that.

FANG: Basements are just horrifying. The house I grew up in suburban north Bronx was below street level. Whoever lived there before us, the government gave that family money to raise it and they just spent it on other shit. So the main level is where the basement should've been and the basement was like a sub-basement, and there was an old darkroom and doors that were boarded up.

WHANNELL: Like someone before had used it for photography?

FANG: Yeah, it was a legit darkroom, but completely abandoned at this point.

WHANNELL: That’s serial killer territory. Who uses a darkroom besides photographers? Serial killers. [Laughs]

FANG: The steps were wooden with gaps between each step and there was a weird, pitch-black space behind them.

WHANNELL: Oh, shit, dude. It’s one of those where going up you start to hear another set of steps behind.

FANG: Every time!

WHANNELL: It’s amazing what that stuff can do to you. I think finding these films, it’s a very specific area because if you’re into those sort of films, you’re starved for quality. You’re always looking for THE OTHERS and THE ORPHANAGEs amongst THE HAUNTING IN CONNECTICUTs and stuff that aren’t quite there. And not to take anything away from those, but it’s not quite up to that level.

I’m too close INSIDIOUS now. I can’t tell if this is good anymore, but as someone who I know has that same taste in those sort of films, is this a film that gives you that same feeling?

FANG: Absolutely. The fact that there’s a lack of false scares gives it a bit of a relentless feel, like the threat is real. Also, I was onboard from the opening, and you’re just going through the house. Nothing is popping out, you just get face to face with the old lady. There are shadows here and shadows there and it wasn’t something grandiose and silly, just the feeling that this is a real place with negative energy and that’s scary enough, nothing needs to get thrown at you. Plus, the cut to the title card is great. I think the best scene in the film is with the child ghost in the middle of the day.

WHANNELL: As close to as it as I am, my favorite bit is when Rose Byrne comes out and the guy’s standing there behind the baby, just looking. I felt like if I had never seen this movie and just walked into a theater and watched that scene, I’d go, “Whoah!”

FANG: Well, like the opening, it’s more the energy. In the scene with the ghost on the porch, it’s not someone coming out and pointing and popping out. It goes back to the endless loop, it’s the ghost doing what it does and that’s what’s scary.

WHANNELL: Exactly, like if you’re looking down a corridor and the ghost isn’t here, the ghost is way down at the end of the corridor, not looking at you.

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.