

Miguel Reyna shares his love of horror with production of ‘Misery’ at Santa Cruz Actors’ Theatre

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Director Miguel Reyna talks about his fascination with the horror genre and the journey to production of “Misery,” based on the Stephen King novel, which opens Friday at the Santa Cruz Actors’ Theatre at 1001 Center St. (Courtesy Jake Thomas)

This weekend, The Santa Cruz Actors’ Theatre will open its latest production, “Misery,” a stage adaptation written by William Goldman based on Stephen King’s psychological horror. During the past few years, the Actors’ Theatre has decided to put on plays in October with scary storylines, and this macabre tale of madness perfectly fits the bill. To learn more about the people behind the horror, the Sentinel sat down with director Miguel Reyna to discuss his background with this frightening genre.

Q: Is there a connection between Latino, Chicano culture and the horror genre?

A: I’m going to say yes. La Llorona and chupacabra — they have a rich history of horror. We all take death seriously, but for Mexican culture, there’s just this other level of grief that we go through. It’s a catharsis. It’s a release — a celebration.

I think the last time we talked, my mom had just passed away. I told you that “The Thin Place” really distracted me from my mom dying. The grief was real, especially through the month of October. But, when Día de los Muertos came around, we celebrated my mom’s life. We got all the things that my mom loved, and we put it up as an altar. And it was really

cathartic to do something like that. Death is — I'll tell you what I'm hoping for: I just want space travel. That's it. I just want to travel. Just let me travel through the universe. Look at all the beautiful nebulas. Look at the planets. I don't need a deity or anything. Just let me fly. Just let me fly through space.

Jacob Elordi on long preparation for 'Frankenstein' at London premiere

Q: I know how significant your mom is to you, especially in relation to the horror genre.

A: That's why I still do this. My entry point into horror was (the) "Twilight Zone." But Stephen King movies, the books that she read — I always saw them on their nightstand table — she was a fan. When the movies came out, my mom would let me watch them with her. I saw "Cujo" when I was 9, which is freaking great. I couldn't get my eyes off of it. We saw "Pet Sematary" when I was a kid. We saw "The Shining" when I was 8, which was awesome. I was scared to death, but I could not keep my eyes away from the story, especially Stephen King's story, because it's so twisted. I loved it. It was great.

Q: Do you remember the first time you saw "Misery"?

A: I saw it when it came out with my mom. It was wonderful. It was so demented and masochistic. Especially because it was (directed by) Rob Reiner, who comes from humor. He comes from comics. And he had this flair to make it not so serious. When I got the green light to do this, I got the book and started reading it. And the book is just so much darker. (The protagonist) Paul goes through so much more in the book than you see in the movie. And you can feel everything — his consciousness is everywhere, and you can hear what he's thinking in his head. It's bleak. It's really bleak. I tried to capture the spirit of the book into the play and completely forget about the movie. I told my cast whatever you do, do not go see the movie. I don't want it to plant anything in your head.

I love my cast. They all decided to read the book themselves. So we all came in on the same page of what our vision was and what we wanted and how we wanted to present it, especially the spirit of the book and what Paul Sheldon had to go through. I think we've accomplished it, especially Ian (Dyer), who plays Paul. He took the book to heart. He's conveying that through his work in the rehearsals that we've been doing. He's been doing a really good job.

Manirose (Bobisuthi) is just a freaking force of nature as Annie. They're so committed. It's fun as a director when you see two actors who want something so bad.

Q: What can people expect as far as the viewing experience goes?

A: It's a quick 115-minute piece. No intermission. We want to make people forget, not only about the time, (but) about the world that's outside of the theater. Horror is a risk. It really is, because not everyone likes it. Not everyone can really get into the darkness and the bleakness of certain storylines.

I like the punk rock of it all, dude. I love punk rock. And that's something I decided a long time ago, back in 2007. There's not enough stage horror, and this is what I want to do. This is what I'm going to do, because it's exciting and it's fun. We're having such a great time. It's a dark piece, it's a scary piece and it's a heavy piece, but we're having so much fun, and we're laughing, and we're having a great time putting this on. We know what's at stake. We know how fun it is to do stuff like this play. And that's something that we have not lost.

Goldman's "Misery," directed by Reyna, opens on Friday at the Santa Cruz Actors' Theatre at 1001 Center St., with performances Thursdays to Sundays through Nov. 1. Shows are for ages 16 and older due to graphic depictions of violence. Tickets are \$35 for general admission, \$32 for seniors and students, and Thursday shows are two-for-one with promo code "2for1" (no spaces). Get tickets at ci.ovationtix.com/35410/production/1248399.