

Interview: Marcus Dunstan, Patrick Melton on ‘The Collector,’ ‘Saw VI’

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CHICAGO – Screenwriters Marcus Dunstan and Patrick Melton (the upcoming ‘Saw VI’) met each other at the University of Iowa and both are originally from Illinois. Dustan makes his directorial debut with the release of ‘The Collector.’

In anticipation of The Collector, which Dunstan and Melton also wrote, HollywoodChicago.com interviewed the very successful duo about their Midwest roots, Italian horror films and their involvement in the Saw series of films.



Something Wicked This Way Comes: A Scene from ‘The Collector’
Photo credit: Liddell Entertainment

HollywoodChicago.com: The story of ‘The Collector’ was actually one of your earliest ideas as filmmaking partners. What made this film more satisfying to make because it came from such an early idea?

Marcus Dunstan: Patrick is a tremendous writer and I’ve been lucky to work with him. As writers, we’ve handed films over to production teams and watched those films come to life. But in this case, we got to wear two of three storytelling hats – writing and directing, the third is

editing – so it was nice as a director to look at Patrick's words and just flat out protect them. When someone said no to something in the script, we'd figure out how to do it.

Patrick Melton: It was helpful too, to think about this one for a long time and seeing what worked and didn't work in other films and trying to get it correct in this one. If we made this four or five years ago, it may have not come out as well because we weren't as experienced.

HC: You describe 'The Collector' as a stylistic twist on the heist caper genre. What elements of that heist genre did you want to express in The Collector and how does it make it ironic in the twist you inject upon it?

MD: That comes from a desire to mimic the early work of Michael Mann. Patrick and I said to ourselves, 'What if James Caan from "Thief" broke into the Tooth Fairy's house from "Manhunter"?' That sounds like a bad-ass movie. That is what we did.

HC: Why do you think audiences respond so well to the Saw Series, Feast and the style of horror that you have helped manufacture? What elements in the human psyche, in your opinions, are most turned on by the films?

MD: With the Saw series, I think there is a universal thread that just resonates and that is each of us, every human being, has a vice. But Saw says what if someone traps you in a room with the physical incarnation of that vice, put it on a timer, and asks you to deal with it, would you survive the worst in yourself?

PM: With Saw, remember the teaser for the first one that came out? It was the Billy puppet and he's talking, and then there is this person in the bizarre head trap and they start flopping around. And the tag line was 'How F**ked Up is That?' Yeah, that was pretty f**ked up (laughs). It's been a few years now but it felt new and different, kind of fun, as in 'what would I do in that situation?'



Creepy Crawling in 'The Collector'
Photo credit: Liddell Entertainment

HC: There were many unanswered questions from Saw V that will play into the elements of Saw VI. Will we see more flashbacks into the origins of Jigsaw that will perhaps reveal more answers into the mystery of his villainy?

MD: A blanket statement on 'Saw VI' is this is the most proud we've even been about a Saw movie. Kevin Greutert [the director] did a wonderful job. He's been associated with the series since the very beginning, and he concocted this great story right into shape.

It's timely, aggressive and there's a sense of resolution with the Jigsaw mythology. We were getting to the point where things needed to be more fresh. If you've felt slighted by the previous entries, then this one will be the answer.

HC: Marcus, you are on record as a life long admirer of the Italian Giallo horror film genre. Describe the characteristics of the that particular brand, and how you have incorporated it into films like 'The Collector.'

MD: Oh man, with joy. The director who inspires The Collector more than any other is Dario Argento. I try to pick and choose hallmark images from his films that have stayed with me the most. He has a clear delineation in his directorial tract, where he has thrillers and fantasy-based horror. So we take some of the lighting designs from his fantasy-based films and mix it with the character esthetics of his thrillers.

One of his characteristics is that the camera becomes a character. It's not whiz bang editing or loud crash sounds. It is very complacent, like a spider. Watch the victim enter a threatening territory, back away, figure out where the threat is, find the victim again and just wait, wait, wait for that moment of impact to come.

The music is also inspiring. Argento put together a wonderful team of musicians and goblins to score his stories. In the case of *The Collector*, we lucked out as well. We've got Nine Inch Nails drummer Jerome Dillon who contributed a beautiful score. We also have an extended suspense sequence all done to the 'Bauhaus' song 'Bela Lugosi's Dead.' We're harkening back to the era to when these films came out.

HC: In terms of psychological situations, how do you deal on set with the intensity of the horror genre both with the actors and crew? Are there problematic elements in keeping it together psychologically on a horror set?

MD: That's a bit of an urban legend. The fact is, if your job is to go to work and scream all day, you're absolutely relaxed (laughs). There is nothing left to get out.

Literally, if we wanted to ratchet up the intensity or wanted to shiver, we went outside because it was cold there (laughs).

PM: Horror movie sets are usually the most fun because it's so over the top. You're in this normal situation, just hanging out, and suddenly you tell the actor, 'okay, we're going to cover you with blood and you're going to scream for 5 minutes.' It's fun. It's more revved up and crazy. When you call 'cut', there is either applause or laughter.



Patrick Melton and Marcus Dunstan of 'The Collector'
Photo credit: Liddell Entertainment

HC: How do your roots in the Midwest inform you when navigating the jungle of Los Angeles and the film production game there?

MD: I think our Midwest backgrounds have helped shape the opportunities we've had now. In the sense that the horror stories, and what scared us as kids, is what we've held onto. It was staying up too late and watching scary movies through our parted fingers, which is a special memory.

Like anyone, moving to Los Angeles was a challenge. I came from a town of 8000 people. The first week I moved there I found a gun walking in the park. But I was very fortunate that Patrick Melton was already in L.A. He was reading scripts for an agency. I landed at a video store watching any movie I could. And one Halloween weekend in 1999, we elected to see if we could write our own horror movie and that became 'Feast', the first movie we were lucky enough to get produced.

It came full circle. Our Midwest youth and our appreciation for things that go 'bump in the night' was always there to protect us, and was a fertile ground to imagine.

PM: The Midwest work ethic has also been helpful in sustaining and getting jobs. We're humble people who grew up in normal Midwestern environments, we were taught to work hard and not have a lot of attitude and that helps tremendously when we're out here. There are a lot of big attitudes, but people generally like to work with those who are enjoyable to be around. And nine times out of ten, people will hire others who they like. And that comes from our roots.

HC: Are there any plans to move outside the horror genre for filmmaking or story telling. How about a nice romantic comedy?

PM: Yes, Katherine Heigl.

MD: We really want to play with the horror equation a bit more. *The Collector* has thirty minutes where it is a pure thriller, surrounded by the rest being horror. We're hoping as we go along to keep playing with that equation, by adding more thriller it just makes the horror character that much more vicious.

HC: Marcus, who is the most underrated American horror filmmaker that perhaps emerged during the schlock era of the 1960s and why do you admire them?

MD: Francis Ford Coppola. Have you ever seen 'Dementia 13'? This is the horror film he made for Roger Corman. This is a somewhat sarcastic answer but it's also sincere. That movie freaked me out. He made a bad-ass horror film.

HC: The type of films that you do are often called Torture Porn. Do you think that branding is unfair and what is your counterpoint to that

accusation?

MD: They are absolutely Torture Porn and we revel in it (laughs).

PM: Are we suppose to be offended by that?

I will tell you that in ‘The Collector,’ we’re not doing gore for the sake of gore. Some movies do that and they’re usually the straight-to-DVD B.S., often derivative of other movies. But with The Collector we’re not trying to be gratuitous, but yes, it has blood and violence, but the people scream not because they’re taking joy in it.

In the Saw series, someone is forced to do something to learn a lesson, Jigsaw isn’t taking joy in hurting people. Because in his back story he is dying, he is teaching the others to appreciate their life.

‘The Collector’ opens everywhere Friday, July 31. Check local listings for theaters and times. Featuring Madeline Zima, Andrea Roth, Josh Stewart and Daniella Alonso, directed by Marcus Dunstan, written by Marcus Dunstan and Patrick Melton.



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