

INDIE FILMS AND FX MAKEUP AS A PASSION

WITH ROBERT FITZ

Owen Shapiro 00:04

Welcome to Kino society with Owen Shapiro. Welcome to the first episode of Kino society. Today we have Robert Fitz, an award winning director who started his journey of 25 years in the film industry as a makeup and effects artist. Rob has participated as a makeup artist in various well known movies such as Jumanji, Manchester by the Sea surrogates and many more. Also, after 10 years of hard work Robert Leeson action horror film titled God vampires, which he directed himself, let's get to know the world of makeup and movie directing, with Rob, welcome to the show. So Rob, I'm just curious as a kid, did you ever imagine that you would become an award winning director one day, as it's always been a dream of yours? Or is a passion that developed over the years unexpectedly?

Robert Fitz 00:56

Well, no, actually, you know, I never thought I would do that. I, I always love movies. And I really, what I've always wanted to do is special effects, makeup and makeup. It wasn't until I got to film school because I thought film school would be the most direct route to doing makeup on people's films, where I made a low budget, you know, little student film, and I did a special effects in it. Right? With it, freaked people out. So basically what I was doing, I showed this movie and, and I cut someone's face off. And I peeled it away. And when a host and then I started licking the eye socket. And it everyone went crazy, like freaked out and I said, Oh my god, like I should. I need to make movies. You know, like, I think the power of it and the, you know, amazing like you making people react was wonderful, you know, was like a great feeling. So I also in addition to doing makeup, I also kind of garnered a passion to make films as well.

Owen Shapiro 02:13

So that makes sense where to go for education.

Robert Fitz 02:18

I went to the School of Visual Arts in New York City, and from the years from 1989 to like, maybe two. And then I ran out of money. And I couldn't continue school, so I had to go home and get a job. But that's where I started. And you know, after leaving film school, I ended up getting a job landscaping and doing different things and met some people in the film business and started being a PA a production assistant.

Owen Shapiro 02:55

Alright, you started out in the film industry as a makeup an effects artist though. So how did you come across the path? Well,

Robert Fitz 03:03

interestingly enough, I was working on a few movies as a PA. And this one movie I was working on. I was on Nantucket this film was being shot on the island of Nantucket, which is right outside Massachusetts, or it's part of mass, but it's off the coast of Massachusetts. And what happened was the makeup artist, this was doing it. She had a drug addiction. And she freaked out and they had to get rid of her. And the the it was a low budget movie. So they were like panic. They're like, we need a makeup artist. Does anyone know how to do makeup? And I've been studying makeup since I was a kid I just didn't officially have that position. I was just a PA. And I said why not do some makeup and the they said aren't making the sky look dead. Right? And they put me in the trailer and they gave me all the makeup. The particular makeup artists left in the trailer. And I did my thing he came walking out You look like a corpse and they loved it. So I became the makeup artist on this movie and and then everyone on the crew and you know the people that I knew all said, Hey, Rob Fitz, as a makeup artist, you know, you should hire him and then that's how I got started like after that I just didn't make up on movies.

Owen Shapiro 04:36

So you think word of mouth is a very important place to start with for me.

Robert Fitz 04:41

Absolutely. It's the most. It's word of mouth is the most important way to start any career. Really, you know, reputation, you know, when people hear people talk, and that's gold, you know?

Owen Shapiro 04:54

Yeah. But how do you manage to make us as a larger production firms

Robert Fitz 04:58

interest trustingly enough. What happened was I started working on movies right away, I did a, I got lucky. And I got hired to do makeup on. It was a low budget movie in Boston called squeeze. And this is like early 90s. And the movie, I was the head makeup artists for that. And we did the film, and then it got picked up. It got actually got distributed in theaters. By I think it was Miramax. And that, you know, having a movie that got distribution, and then your name was on like in the theater. It was pretty good. And so people started throwing my name out there. And later on that summer, I got my first people called me to do makeup on a bigger budget movie, a big budget movie just to do extras. And that movie was the original Jumanji. That was shot in Keene New Hampshire, or at least in part, and Keene New Hampshire. So I, I worked on the original Jumanji, that was my first big movie.

Owen Shapiro 06:15

So but where did your career go from there? How do you think that makeup that your makeup has evolved over the years?

Robert Fitz 06:22

Well, I you know, and, you know, I first started I kind of had my notions of what makeup was, and I you know, it wasn't like, I wasn't great, but I did what I could. And then I learned as I went, I was a, you know, one of these guys who taught himself. And from there, I started doing a lot a little low budget movies. And working. I also worked regular jobs because, you know, Boston wasn't like a big place for filming. And I continue to work, work on movies, work regular jobs I did, they did things like I was a janitor, delivered autoparts landscaper, all these things, but I I looked and pursued makeup jobs, because they were the highest pain, you know, I could work when I made that day doing makeup was when I made the week, you know, landscaping, so it was a real tough, you know, wasn't you know, it was like, it was easy to to decide, like I'm gonna go for doing makeup obviously, because, you know, it's a much higher paying thing. And as I was going along, as the years went on, I you know, still had that itch to make a film. And when I got to, was around 1999 I decided to go for it, because I had been waiting long enough. And I started writing a script called God vampires. And I raised \$26,000. And I started shooting it on the weekends. And, and I'd work on films when I could, it was kind of cool to work on different movies, as you know, a makeup artist and then you know, a lot of these films that were low budget, or they had, like, you know, they didn't want to pay to have like sets all the way or materials, you know, trashed. So what I would do is I would rent a truck at the end of the film. And I'd say Alright, guys, you want to I'll take all this stuff away for you. And I fill the truck up with all the materials like sets and, and whenever I could find that they were getting rid of hauled away for God vampires. So basically, my movie was the scavenger of bigger films, you know, and, and that's how we were able to make a 16 millimeter feature on like with a \$26,000 budget.

Owen Shapiro 09:21

That's impressive. Very, very impressive. It took 10 years though you said it started in 1999? Or was that just what he wrote?

Robert Fitz 09:30

Well, I started writing in 99. We started shooting it in 2000. So about a year to write it properly. And I read the book Rebel Without a crew, the Robert Rodriguez book, and it inspired me and I said, You know what, I'm doing this, I got to do this. I mean, this guy did it for less than that. And you know, if he can do it, I can do it. So I, you know, started shooting in 2000. And what I did was do some casting and I wrote the script in a manner where, like, we could shoot parts of it, and they wouldn't be affected by continuity, if it took me 10 years to make, you know, so we'd shoot, like all the pieces that didn't require, you know, attention like that. And then we shot a big chunk of it. That required, like, you know, the actors to remain the same pretty much at one point, but, you know, it was it was hard, man, it was, you know, it's one of those things that, you know, you have to be very passionate, crazy. And, and, you know, very clever to get through, and we did it, but it was, it wasn't easy, I can tell you that it was hardest thing I've ever done.

Owen Shapiro 10:58

You know, making a movie speaker set with that little money is almost unheard of, pretty much.

Robert Fitz 11:06

Yeah. Well, you know, the other thing is that, you know, when I saw the movies that I aspired to, they were all those super low budget, you know, cult classics, you know? Yeah. And like, I mean, you know,

the movies, they're legend, or Evil Dead, and the Texas Chainsaw Massacre, and, you know, night of living dead. I mean, those are the movies that are legends. And, you know, some guy like, you know, who, you know, makes a movie that like that, like, they become, you know, the icons, you know, and, and not that I really cared about myself doing that, but I wanted the best for the movie problem, put all this effort into something. I want to at least have some, like least have some semblance of that respect, you know. So,

Owen Shapiro 11:58

yeah, it's weird. And nowadays, people are gushing over how cheap films like paranormal activity are. And then just like Blair Witch Project, your newfound Ford found footage movie that just came out. And those are just completely unimpressive in comparison to a lot of the older stuff. They may be cheap, but they also look really, really cheap. If they do. Yeah, paranormal activity. It looks like it was shot with only \$15,000. Yeah. Yeah.

Robert Fitz 12:32

Yeah. You ever hear with that? Chris Rock said about The Blair Witch Project?

Owen Shapiro 12:35

What do you say?

Robert Fitz 12:37

He said? He said, The Blair Witch Project was made for \$60,000. Like somebody out there walking around with \$59,000 in their pocket.

Owen Shapiro 12:51

That movie is not each bottle. Now. It just seems like a poorly done intimate mystery.

Robert Fitz 12:56

Yeah, yeah,

Owen Shapiro 12:58

it was at the time, you know, at the time was very gimmicky. But now it's

Robert Fitz 13:02

just Timing is everything as we know.

Owen Shapiro 13:05

That's why none of the sequels ever took off at all. No. So are there any more challenges that you've encountered as a film director, maybe from other projects? Well,

Robert Fitz 13:14

let's see. The biggest challenge was finding distribution. And, you know, like, once you're done, and you've gone through all this stuff, and you're exhausted, right, you'd have to find a way to get it out there. And I did find distribution and but I wasn't entirely satisfied with it. So unfortunately, I think my

movie didn't like the distribution didn't really do any favors. When they put it out there they I think the quality was degraded somehow. So it didn't look as very good. It did get on Netflix for a few years. Before Netflix was as big as it is now. Which was cool, but like i think i got a lot of criticism for Oh, this movie looks like crap. You know, and you know, it kind of like suffered from a low budget look where the movie actually doesn't like when it's when you see a proper quality, you know, video of it or a DVD, it doesn't look that it doesn't look like that. It's actually much better. Which wants what I want to do is I want to take the film and do a laceration or restoration 4k or something like that of it. So I can actually because it is shot on film, and I have the negative. Yeah. So I want to I want to do that kind of maybe meet remaster the audio, you know, get the whole thing together like that and, and do something really good and that way people can really see. I don't feel as though I got the best bang for my buck on That film because I think it's, I'm very proud of it. And that Believe me, I know horror films, I love horror films, I grew up with all all that stuff, and I worship that stuff. But, you know, like, it's it's one of those things where you you feel in the end you kind of you're proud of it and everything, but then you feel as though like, Man, I wish things went better.

Owen Shapiro 15:27

Yeah, there's more potential to be

Robert Fitz 15:30

there is and then the, I think that I didn't achieve what I really wanted to achieve. So I think, you know, at this point, I think I want to go and do some more with it. You know, I mean,

Owen Shapiro 15:45

absolutely understand that. It's just the fact that it was a movie worked on for 10 years, as well.

Robert Fitz 15:54

Yeah, people died in the process. Not because of us, but, you know, during the making it just such a long time. You know, and, and we had some really cool things happen during it too. Like, one of the guys do, you know, the movie bad taste?

Owen Shapiro 16:11

not familiar with it.

Robert Fitz 16:13

Okay, so bad taste is Peter Jackson's first movie. And I was putting God of vampires out on the internet, we had like a little website and stuff. And the guy, one of his one of Peter Jackson's friends that was in bad taste. messaged me, sent me an email, and was like, Oh, my God, Rob, like, this is the coolest thing. That's all your stories you're writing about your film. That reminds me of us when we were making bad taste. And that was like an amazing compliment. I'm like, wow, like, you know, he were reminding him of, you know, Peter Jackson and his beginning. So that was a big boost. So I asked the guy to do a voiceover. And this is back in like, 2002 a voiceover and email it to me, and I'll use it in the movie. So we actually have this guy, Pete O'Hearn, who sits passed away in the film, and so po hears in the, in the movie as a voice, you know, so that was kind of cool, little obscure thing any, like horror

fans would might know it, you know, that kind of thing. So, yeah, like, we would do little things like that. Alright,

Owen Shapiro 17:34

so I'm back to make up for little bits, do you have any specific procedure that you follow when doing characters makeup?

Robert Fitz 17:42

Well, when you're depends on what you're doing, when you're sitting in the chair you get when you have a an actor sitting in the chair, and you have to do something specific, you go by various steps, you a lot of times, like cleaning the skin, maybe moisturize, it makes sure you know, they don't have any allergies. And then you get to work. So like, if you're just doing a regular, you know, cosmetic makeup, a lot of times, you know, it could be something so as simple as a little Foundation, a little powder, you know, maybe some mascara, you know, little lip color, or whatever, depending on the person. And that's it. But if you're like doing a whole prosthetic that's all planned out in advance. So, you know, you clean them up. You put on your, you know, prosthetics you glue them on, and you start painting and airbrushing and stuff like that, you know, it's um, makeup is such a big, like our, in our art form that encompasses so many things, that there's a lot, you know, going on with it, it's not really easy to sum up. You have to, you know, there's so many aspects of art that are in it, meaning like, you know, like sculpting, painting, fine art, photography, you know, movies, so many different things like that. So it's a very, it's an art form that kind of encompasses every other art form, you know, and then, you know, at the end, you put in, like their teeth, or, or maybe they're wearing contact lenses,

Owen Shapiro 19:30

you know, and that kind of thing. Yeah, that definitely makes sense. And what about in terms of inspiration? Are you allowed to do your own thing? Or is there a specific set of guidelines that say back to?

Robert Fitz 19:42

Well, that all depends on the director. You know, if you're doing it for a movie, I've run into directors who have a very specific vision, and they'll they'll, you'll talk about it way ahead of time, and you'll figure it out. You know what they want, exactly. But then there's other ones that are, you know, hands off, you know, or you're just getting communication from, like the department head. So like the makeup department head will tell you, okay, you're gonna make these people look, you know, stressed and tired, you know, or sweaty and dirty, or you'll get those kinds of instructions and you'll do your thing. There was a movie that's actually coming up on Netflix called Houdini's Halloween, Adam Sandler film. And I worked on that amongst with, like, you know, 20 other makeup artists. And we're giving people like that we're going out for Halloween. It was all every hope thing takes place on Halloween, you know, and they had to make them up. Or, you know, we had to grab someone and they said, Oh, well, we're, you know, a witch or where blah, blah, blah. So then you'd have to make them up as, you know, one of those things. And then you the next person is a skeleton, or the next one is like, a, you know, could be as simple as like, they were just a surf bum or something. And they had paint, like white makeup on their nose. Like they were like that was suntan lotion, or something. So it was it was fun. You know, but that's, you know, I know you. I was told that you had seen my credit in Manchester by the seat.

Owen Shapiro 21:30

Yes, I think I have. Okay, so.

Robert Fitz 21:33

Yeah, so it was funny about that. One is the director of that. He's the only director I've ever seen. And not one I've never seen one of my whole career and worked on a lot of movies. Come to the background holding and talk to me about what he wanted the the background to look like, like the director comes in. And I'm like, Hey, how you doing? Who are you? And he goes on to the director. You know, he's like, you know, I'm like, really? Like, okay, and he's like, yeah, I want these extras to be this, this, this and this. And I'm like, Okay, I will do it. Thank you. And usually, it's like, it's either it's usually a PA or a second second ad someone like far down the chain. or, or, or it'll just be, you know, the makeup department head or the key makeup artist or something. Someone not as official as that, you know. So, that was very interesting. To have a director come up to you and give you instructions as a background makeup artist on bigger on other movies. When you're like the department head then you have a lot more interaction. You know, with the main guys.

Owen Shapiro 22:52

Yeah, I think a lot of the directories some of the best directors are hands on. Like really hands on with their staff. Yeah, I think so. Yeah. Manchester by the Sea was a fantastic movie.

Robert Fitz 23:02

Yeah, that's, that's actually shot in Gloucester. Mass are a lot of it. And my shop is right down the road from Gloucester.

Owen Shapiro 23:14

My store. So speaking of directors, can you tell us how a director's typical day looks like when he's in the middle of film production?

Robert Fitz 23:24

Well, for me, you take out your shot list, and you talk to the ad and the DP. You know what those terms are? Yeah. And they're getting everything ready. You talk to the production designer, you know, you look at the set. You talked to your actors, and maybe you block the scene out physically before makeup. And then they go off to have their makeup and hair done. Well this the DP and is the gaffers and grips and stuff like the set. But then you you know, when you're, when I like, as far as low budget movie, you know, we don't have like a big crew, like we're blessed with having hardly anybody. So what I would do is I would write down a list of like, 30 shots that I needed to get, and our lighting, you know, was pretty simple. So we get everyone done. A lot of times I had to jump in and help doing makeup and stuff because we just have everyone and I'll get everyone to set now. Like Alright, first shot we're gonna do is now explain things to people and get everyone ready. And then we would go and we're really like when you're when you're shooting low budget like that. You're running gun, like you're going so fast. That you know, you can get you know 20 to 30 Probably 30 setups done in a day, and your day is not necessarily a 12 hour day either, you know, you can do things pretty quick. That's how I loved. You know, that's what I mean, I don't really know any different. Because as far as directing movies, because

I never worked beyond, like these low budget standards, you know, but that's the way I prefer to do it, you know, to just crank it out and not have all this, a lot of like, outside noise influencing. You know, it's funny, like when you, when you see a low budget movie, even though it doesn't have the money to make it polish. Keep in mind that what you see, for better for worse is usually the director's complete vision. Meaning like, there's very little, you know, communication breakdown between the director and the camera. And the actors, like, it's usually right there, you know, because there's no one else, you know, or hardly anyone else, you know, but at least that's my experience. And I think I was able to pull off some pretty cool stuff with with that, you know, I think we did pretty well, at least, people we showed the movies to thought that you know, they liked it.

Owen Shapiro 26:30

So finally, where can my listeners find you and connect with you?

Robert Fitz 26:34

All right. Well, now my one of my big focuses, my main focus is my shop in Salem mass, called the magic parlor. And I have a website, magic parlor calm. And we have a Facebook page. If you look up the magic parlor on Facebook, and you're welcome to, you know, you can message me there can mess it, you can go on to the magic parlor website and messages. And if you're in Salem mass, because Halloween is coming, you know, even though everything is COVID, and everyone's kind of staying at home. So there are a lot of people coming out to Salem for the Halloween season. It's like the whole month of October. You can come visit us at Salem maps and I most likely will be in the store. Even I'm a hands on director but I'm also a hands on shop owner. So a lot of times I'm behind the register. So it will be good to meet you, you know anyone coming by? And if you mentioned this podcast, if you're, you know if you listen to this and you heard about us there, let me know. I'd love to see that.

Owen Shapiro 27:49

You know, Alright, thank you very much. And that's all for today. Don't forget, you can subscribe to kynar society on iTunes and Spotify. Wonderful. Thank you. Thank you very, very much