

# USC alumni produce thriller "Hellblock 13"

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In a haunted women's prison, a psychotic serial killer is scheduled to be executed tonight.

While on death row, she's spent her time composing three gruesome stories that she'll reveal to the executioner (and the audience) in "Hellblock 13," the latest horror movie by Columbia's foremost independent filmmakers, Paul Talbot and Jeff Miller.

"The movie dissolves into the three stories written during her stay on death row," co-producer Miller said. "The format is similar to 'Tales on the Dark Side.' And there's a surprise ending before her execution."

If you want to find out how the movie ends, the Nickelodeon theater on Main Street is featuring an encore presentation of "Hellblock 13" this Friday and Saturday at 7 p.m., 9 p.m. and 11 p.m. The movie plays at 3 p.m., 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. Sunday. "Hellblock 13" made its world premiere June 12 at Nickelodeon.

But, introducing a new film to Columbia is becoming familiar to Talbot and Miller.

"Hellblock 13" is my third horror movie," director and co-producer Talbot said. "Horror has always been my genre ever since I've been a little kid. I used to make (horror movies) after school with the kids from my elementary school."

Talbot, Miller and Michael R. Smith started writing "Hellblock 13" in the summer of 1995, finishing in fall of the same year. They filmed the movie in three segments between April 1996 and January 1997 for a total of 14 shooting days.

"The actual shoot itself is a hectic time," Miller said. "There were a lot of 15 and 16-hour days. Those were long days."

Talbot agreed. "Production and shooting the movie is the most stressful because the most amount of stuff can potentially go wrong," Talbot said.

"Hellblock 13" was filmed entirely in South Carolina. The haunted prison may look a lot like the old Columbia City Jail at the corner of Hampton and Lincoln streets.

A few shots were also taken at the Central Correctional Institute before it was torn down. Other filming locations included Blythewood, Lake Murray, a trailer park in West Columbia, Talbot's basement and a cave in Santee State Park.

"We had to have special permission to film in the park," Miller said. "It's a natural preserve and we had to promise to be extra careful of the limestone cave."

Even the small town of Lonestar, S.C., captured some time in the spotlight.

"Lonestar has a great small town feel to it," Miller said. "The main street looks like it's from a mid-west town."

The sets from each location were brought to life

by Gunnar Hansen, from "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre," and cult actresses Debbie Rochon and J.J. North.

All the other actors and actresses are native to South Carolina. You may recognize actor Bill Roberson as the stout man sitting on the bench who listens to Forrest's stories in "Forrest Gump."

The movie's music is local, too.

The soundtrack is composed of songs by popular club bands like Isabelle's Gift, Jebel and Hick'ry Hawkins.

Both Talbot and Miller are graduates of USC's media arts program. They agree the worst part of making a movie is finding enough money to finance it.

"Making a movie is a massive undertaking," Miller said. "Coming up with money is hard. They're not cheap to do."

After finishing its run at Nickelodeon, "Hellblock 13" might be shown in alternative movie theaters in Charleston or Charlotte, according to Miller.

Talbot and Miller will then sell "Hellblock 13" to a home video distributor who will

advertise it and turn it over to international markets.

"Hopefully it will be on international home video in the fall in time for Halloween," Miller said. Or it might be among "the stuff on Cinemax at 2 a.m., cheesy sci-fi or bikini flicks," he said.

Talbot and Miller are not newcomers to filmmaking. Together they produced "Freakshow" (1995), which won an international award. Talbot also produced "Campfire Tales" (1991). Both films can be rented from local video stores.

Compared to their past movies, "Hellblock 13" promises to be the best one yet, according to Talbot.

"Everyone who's seen it says it looks a lot more expensive than what it actually cost," Talbot said. "It seems to work in front of an audience."



Amy R. Swain, Roxanne, Debbie Rochon and Jennifer Peluso star in "Hellblock 13," the latest horror film produced by USC alumni Paul Talbot and Jeff Miller.

SPECIAL TO THE GAMECOCK

"I'm real critical of my stuff. I always want to spend more time or more money, but I'm definitely pleased with 'Hellblock 13.'"

Future projects for Talbot and Miller depend on the success of "Hellblock 13."

"There are some other ideas in the works," Miller said. "It depends on how well this one does. I hope to stick around here and keep doing movies if they're successful."

Talbot wants to work on a "Frankenstein" script next.

"A lot of people don't think you can make a horror movie in Columbia, but there are a lot of talented actors and technicians here," Talbot said. "I'm glad to be making movies in Columbia."

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Robins Cradle song.

Then there's two older songs, "Thankx For Pissing Me Off" and "Tired of Trying," which were originally on the 1995 tape *Lately*. The *No Apostrophe* versions of these songs may indicate where Robins Cradle are heading musically — less acoustic, more electric and two notches louder than anything on *Stone Flutedge*.

Surprisingly, Brooks plays her trademark flute on only two of the six songs.

Nothing is lost musically, however,

because her intensity behind the microphone has never sounded so good.

With a voice that could have rocked the Lilith Fair, she sings lyrics like, "I'm still enduring what's left of the fallout before I called you out" ("Battle Path") and "your lack of attention is a thorn in my side" ("Thankx For Pissing Me Off").

With more original songs already completed and an MCA representative interested in "Clinging Vine," Robins Cradle has a successful road ahead of them.

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