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THE SOFTER SIDE



SID HAIG



As a special for Halloween, Moving Pictures brings you one of the icons of horror, Sid Haig. Better known for his face-painted role in Rob Zombie's *The Devil's Rejects*, Sid has created a kinder clown for this Halloween's release, festival favorite *Little Big Top*. Can looks be deceiving? We asked Sid's co-star, rising character actor Mel England, to chat with Sid on our behalf.

England: Sid, how are ya?

Haig: I'm good. How about you?

England: Good. Oh, hey, by the way, did you and Susie get married?

Haig: Yes!!

England: Congratulations! So, we get to this little town in Indiana to shoot *Little Big Top* and everyone, except for the three or four of us actors that were brought in, was a local. What was it like for you, to be surrounded by this town of circus performers?

Haig: Well, you know, you have to understand where people are coming from and help them as much as you can. I know that some of them were really uncomfortable... you kinda have to help them through that process.

England: Yeah. That scene that you did with the big circus performer was so authentic and so real and...He was nervous and it worked out beautifully, you know. It was perfect.

Haig: That was Pat Kelly. He had been a clown all his life, with his father, Emmett Kelly. He'd never spoken a line - he just never had to say anything. It was totally foreign to him and he was able to pull it off.

England: It's one of my favorite scenes. So what attracted you to the role? To a lot of people, it would seem so radically different from roles you've played in the past.

Haig: That's exactly why I wanted to do it. I have been looking for something like this for years to kind of break the stigma of, "Oh, my God. He looks like a duck and then walks like a duck and sounds like a duck. He must be a duck." On the whole, I am, hopefully, soaring like an eagle through this production.

We had a screening of *Little Big Top* at a horror film convention in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and these are hardcore horror fans and they loved it. There were tears in their eyes at the end of the thing.

England: Is it easier to play a dark, twisted psychopath than a more dramatic role like Seymour?

Haig: Well, the Seymour role certainly had many more levels than most of the horror characters that are written today. Even at their best, the horror characters are not playing on as many levels as just real guys with problems they've got to face, you know.

England: Right. You got a chance to show more of your range. So when you get a script like this and you decide to do it, then what?

Haig: Well, for the way I work, no matter what the project is, everything comes from me, okay? There are pieces of every character that I've ever played that reside inside me.

What make us who we are are the choices that we make. Just because I choose not to show the dark side of who I am doesn't mean that it isn't there; it exists and I have to dig down and find it in order to play it and to make it real.

England: If we get into that "old school" Strasberg-versus-Stella Adler debate, it sounds like you're more on the Strasbergian side of things. [Laughs]

Haig: You could say that. My formal training came from Pasadena Playhouse, which, unfortunately, is not in existence anymore due to budgetary stuff and all that craziness. But the guy who taught me more than anything in terms of being able to hook up with who I am, actually started with Lee Strasberg in the Group Theatre all those years ago: Ernie Brown.



Photo: Lionel Deluy

Charles McGaw wrote a book on acting. Probably the best book ever written on acting because you never have to open it, all you have to do is read the title – *Acting is Believing*. That just proves to be so true. If I believe it, the audience is gonna believe it. They can't help but believe it. Real for me is real for them.

I'm very serious about what I do. As a matter of fact, there was a point in time when I got out of the business 'cause I was so horribly typecast. Fortunately for me, Quentin Tarantino called one day, and I still don't know how the hell he got my phone number and said, "I know you don't want to do stupid heavies anymore, blah, blah, blah, so I've written this part for you, the part of a judge, and you will do it. That's it. Just show up and you'll do it."

And, you know, it was the start of people starting to respect the fact that an actor doesn't like to get trapped. I've great respect for him for realizing that and just kind of giving it up, you know.

England: And you've gotten to work with the likes of Tarantino and George Lucas... Pam Grier... Is there a stone left unturned?

Haig: Certainly. First of all, I just want to do good work in good films. That's where it all begins and ends for me, but yeah, I probably still would want to put the bad guy image to bed by doing somebody who's totally despicable, like Rasputin, okay? But, you know, I just want to do good stuff.

England: What's the point to being an actor when there are people out there solving the energy crisis or saving polar bears or whatever?

Haig: Well, I don't want to get too philosophical on you, but it's almost like a religious experience for me. It's so rewarding on a lot of different levels, one level being completely and totally selfish: It just makes me feel good.

England: On set, you told me this wild story about a fellow actor, who just happened to be Lucille Ball – one of your first gigs in Hollywood, working on "The Lucy Show" – and how she ripped into Desi Jr. 'cause even after the director yelled, "Cut!" he threw a pie in your face. Did you find yourself mentored by many people?

Haig: Yeah. When you've got somebody

whom you look up to... When I did *Spider Baby* [1968] with Lon Chaney Jr., I didn't know if I was coming or going, 'cause I grew up watching all the werewolf movies, you know, and there I was on the set working with him.

I probably bugged the hell out of him, getting his experiences and the way he



"Haig '08" poster designed by Lance Thingmaker at Creepy Cult

had started in the business and some of the traps that he fell into. He was a mentor to me.

England: *Little Big Top* is opening on Halloween. What else is coming up?

Haig: I really do feel fortunate, because I went through so many time periods of no work, raising a family and trying to get all of that stuff sorted out. I've got *Brotherhood of Blood*, a vampire slayer film where I play a thousand-year-old vampire. I'm just a little bit younger than that. [Laughs]

And I did a film that I was really pleased with in terms of the whole film itself, just like *Little Big Top* because everybody's performances in *Little Big Top* were just so right on the money. But I did a film in Pahrump, Nevada [Laughs] – don't ask – with a great cast – Maria Conchita Alonso, Chris Mulkey, Billy Drago, Max Ryan, and just a whole group of really good people;

and I got to do something in this film that no one had ever done before, and I can't tell you what it is because people would kill me if I did.

England: Sid, your performance in *Little Big Top* is incredible, and I just hope everybody gets a chance to see it. It was an honor to be able to work with you and I just wish you all the best.

Haig: Thank you, Mel. That means a lot because we're talking fellow actors here; it's always good to hear something like that from somebody that's doing the same job you are. You're really easy to work with and I appreciated, you know, everything that you did. It was really just totally magical.

And I have to take my hat off to Ward [Roberts, director] because he facilitated a lot of that, making it easier for people to work and to feel comfortable in what it was that they were doing. So, you know, it's just a very cool situation and I really enjoyed myself. And, I had pneumonia through the whole shoot!

England: But it didn't affect your work. As soon as they said, "Action," you were at 100%. I felt like I was watching the Olympics.

Haig: [Laughs] Well, one thing I try to work on is, if you have a problem, I'm sorry, but don't make your problem my problem. Pneumonia was my problem and I wasn't gonna make it anybody else's.

England: Sid, we've got to get you to write a little book – Sid's thought for the day, "Don't make your problem my problem." There's just one other thing I forgot to ask. Are you running for president again this year? [Laughs]

Haig: Running for president of the United States. I am this country's last hope.

England: So what's the deal? I have to write you in?

Haig: Yes, you have to write me in, but that's okay. You can do that. [Laughs] -MPM

Little Big Top opens at Laemmle's Sunset 5 in L.A. this Halloween. Check times at www.littlebigtopmovie.com. The film is represented at the American Film Market by Moving Pictures Film & Television.