

How the Horror of It All Began.

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Richard O'Brien was an unemployed actor in England, going through a slump in a not-too-exciting career when he whipped up a brainstorm of an idea while watching late-night TV. What, Richard mused, scratching his pale, monkish head, would bring him out of his London apartment and into the movies? Horror films, science fiction extravaganzas, kissy-poo boy-meets-girl films, and perhaps some good, old fashioned rock and roll music. All the big elements of pop culture in the 1950's. But what about a production with something of all these brands of entertainment?

As Richard says with a typically daverous smile—his facial features are refreshingly just one tinge livelier than wasn't so much the glittery rocky horror creature concocted out of the wildest erotic dreams of mad transvestite scientist Frank N. Furter. No, the monster was the Rocky Horror Show itself, which has swelled from a dingy theatre in London's off-Broadway equivalent, and has since spawned a movie plus a brief Broadway outing in New York City. The play is still playing to packed houses at the Kings Road Theatre in London and is the second longest running musical in town.

But now there's a cult swelling to millions all over the world, of people who dress in Rocky Horror-like costumes and chant all the words in the Rocky Horror Show. The Rocky Horror Show has

about everyone—much to their delight. It is witty and erotic and wonderful and outrageous.

What O'Brien has done is take two innocent babe-in-the-woods types, Brad and fiancée, the virginal Janet, and place them in a lunatic setting of a mad castle presided over by a doctor whose fellow inmates include tuxedoed aliens and muscle-bound monsters as well as some garden-variety mutants. In the center of all this maniacal fray is a ghoulis servant, with just a touch of hunchback, Riff Raff, played by the author-songwriter-demon creator himself, Richard O'Brien.

Who is this Richard O'Brien and what did he do before creating one of the most fanatical cult films in the history of movies? Well, he has worked as a surfer, a stuntman, a dustman and an actor. He is married and 35 years old and began his acting career as a stunt rider on Carry on Cowboy. His successes were usually warped ones; for example he only lasted one night as Herod in the London production of Jesus Christ Superstar. After his late-night inspiration of a curious melange of rock, horror, and science fiction, he took just six months to compose the music and lyrics and write the script for the show.

In person, O'Brien is not markedly different from the twisted servant he portrays in The Rocky Horror Show. He's just a touch macabre and spooky, with his thin, pale, spindly body. But he's really more shy than threatening. His success with The Rocky Horror Show is huge, making his name familiar and adulated to theatre-goers as well as movie fans, yet Richard is, in a typically perverse way, unassuming about the phenomenon of his creation. "I'm an actor first and foremost," he still insists. "I can't write... I write a few words—

then a dash—then a few more words." Richard is equally modest about the clever 50's rock song parodies he composed for the show, which are Elvis-like if a little zany renditions of "I'm not a bump and grind musician... I was only interested in rock 'n' roll and that's a feeling."

After Richard, previously an unsuccessful songwriter, had finished The Rocky Horror Show, he showed his creation to Jim Sharman, who was then directing Jesus Christ Superstar in London. Sharman used his theatrical influence to persuade the miniscule Royal Court Upstairs Theatre—it only holds 60 seats—to put on the show for just a five-week run. But the popularity of the show was so overwhelming, its engagement kept being extended and it moved from the Royal Court to the larger Kings Road Theatre. A version was brought to the Roxy Theatre in Los Angeles in 1974 as well as a short-lived stint on Broadway a year later. The movie version with Tim Curry and Richard O'Brien re-creating their eccentric roles was completed for 20th Century Fox in 1975. The film was directed also by Jim Sharman, who had guided the previous stage productions to success, and also starred Susan Sarandon, Barry Bostwick, the now-popular, prematurely slovenly singer Meatloaf, Little Nell and Patricia Quinn. Although the show is inspired by the high camp of the 50's, it is very much 1970's in approach. There is the kind of sexual freedom that was repressed during the 50's—as encapsulated in the very proper and straight Janet and Brad—which is now brought open in the 70's.

As O'Brien explains, "When I was in my adolescence, life was very oppressive; this affected me a lot. If someone was

continually having themselves they sent to the doctor—that sort of thing, it came as a big shock to find there were queens and transvestites in the world. But all that side of life was hidden under the surface and nowadays, it's all out and I acknowledge it in Rocky."

The film was made in Britain and one time it was the only film being made there. Richard confesses that as much as he loved his project, he did not enjoy making the film. With his usual equal expression-peppered conversation he compares the film-making process to "Continual coitus interruptus. I do believe you have to enjoy acting. Too many people act for prestige or to advance their careers which is very silly. The only son to act is to enjoy the make-believe kids do."

Much of the overt forms of sexuality in O'Brien's movie is because of his once confused feelings. "I used to have fears of homosexuality to a degree, now one's learned to cover the way front."

O'Brien was born in Cheltenham, England and his family later moved to New Zealand. He was never particularly athletic at school and left at age 15½. But he was always turned on by entertainment so much so that the painfully skinny cried the first time he heard Ricky Nelson sing "Poor Little Fool." Back in England once more, he kept trying to break show business. His first big break came when Sean Kenny's production of Gulliver's Travels at the Mermaid after which joined Hair.

What does this strange creature father of one of the most popular movies in history want out of life? Not much but he longs for "a studio, a playground. What I need is a really big playground where I can listen to sounds, do a bit of painting, write songs."

followed by a film, The Rocky Horror Show is still being performed up and down the country and attracting gasps of amazement.

The same could be said of 44-year-old O'Brien, whose unnerving appearance makes it unlikely that we shall ever see him as a romantic lead or the boy-next-door. Yet he was born in graceful Cheltenham, brought up a pastoral New Zealand and is married with two sons, Limus and Joshua.

My favourite way of spending an evening is around a dinner table with friends, preferably in our kitchen,' O'Brien says. He insists he is an excellent cook but, in view of his present role as the wizard of Sherwood, it might be an idea, before you accept an invitation, to check that he is not bringing his wizard home with him.

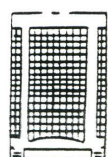
Real toad-in-the-hole?

Wizard of horror



Richard O'Brien plays the evil wizard Gulnar.

LAST WEEK AT CTC



ATTENDANCE



PRIZES

FRI	48	No Drawing*
SAT	99	Patty Grady

*ran out of crayons

QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS? WRITE :
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RICHARD O'BRIEN has leapt menacingly out of the forest quite a few times in ITV's present series of Robin of Sherwood. Bald head glistening, fingernails flailing, he appears as the evil wizard, Gulnar, determined to rid the world of Robin Hood.

O'Brien's own creative output has been rather more attractive, but sometimes just as shocking. As a television, film and stage scriptwriter, he wrote the outrageous Rocky Horror Show in 1973, playing the part of the butler, Riff-Raff, himself. Apart from a sell-out run in the West End,