

Having attended over three dozen film festivals as a filmmaker, volunteer, and judge, I've come to a conclusion: Independent films are too damn heavy.

Quick story: I was invited to screen a short documentary I co-produced called **Y'all Come! The Hell Hole Swamp Festival** at the Maryland Film Festival in May of 2003. Saturday afternoon, I caught the recently Oscar-nominated "Stevie," the feature documentary about a filmmaker reconnecting with his Big Brother Program little brother in southern Indiana. This is a touching and first-rate piece of filmmaking, but not an easy film to watch, as Stevie gets arrested for molesting his niece. That night, I attended a screening of "Capturing the Friedmans" another film with pedophilia as its central theme. Needless to say, that was a long day.

These films deserve all the accolades they've garnered and there is certainly a need and a market for serious films of this nature; however, I see an artistic, economic, and cultural need for an alternative to these serious, heavy films. I see a need for fun, creative films that don't pander to audiences (Hollywood Studio films) or weigh audiences down either (see above). Good storytelling, attention to craft and intelligent filmmaking are not solely the property of high-minded drama. Nor should genre filmmaking be left to amateurs. True escapism is rare in independent cinema, but it's something audiences really respond to when done well.

Now is a good time for smart, well-crafted, independent, genre filmmaking.

Set in 1966, **Stomp! Shout! Scream!** is the story of an all-girl garage rock band that gets stranded in a small southern town at the same time that the Skunk Ape (the Florida Everglades' version of Big Foot) is washed ashore by a hurricane. This film was written and produced as if it were made in 1966 – without parody, without condescension, without any retrospective irony. Science fiction and horror film of the 1950s and 1960s are renowned for their camp and low production values, but there were films that transcended the genre: "Creature from the Black Lagoon", "Invasion of the Body Snatchers", "Them!" These are the films that inspired me to create an interesting story with compelling characters, but to do it within the framework of science fiction and horror genre filmmaking.

Everything in this film – from the production design, to the style of acting, to the original songs and score – has been created just as it would have been in 1966. The film was shot on 35mm with the look of the 1960s beach party films – unnaturally bright primary colors for the

characters and locations that contrast with the dark, grungy look of the Skunk Ape. Costumes were vintage, not retro-styled. Locations were practical, not sets. The all-girl band in the film performed original songs recorded by Atlanta all-girl band Catfight!

Good storytelling and escapism entertainment need not be mutually exclusive. Hopefully, **Stomp! Shout! Scream!** succeeds at both.