

Halloween Comes Early to Long Beach With Midsummer Scream

BY SCOTT FEINBLATT

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The Decayed Brigade prepares for a slider show.

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Halloween comes but once a year, yet its fans love every timeless scare. The first **Midsummer Scream** Halloween Festival kicked off the Halloween season by giving the holiday's lovers their first taste of its sweet delights. Whether their preference was for the horror, the decor, the candy or the pageantry, attendees of Midsummer Scream got their fix.

The Long Beach Convention Center allowed the Midsummer Scream team all the space they needed to provide the entertainment, the education, the market, and the fascination for the scores of hungry fans who heeded the call. The spectrums of each of those categories ran the

gamut from elementary and family friendly to advanced and very mature. Some children enjoyed creating Halloween-themed arts and crafts projects, watching the ghoulish Mudd The Magnificent's magic show, and attending panels featuring theatrical performances of horror comic books (by **Captured Aural Phantasy Theatre**). Intermediate level Halloween fans perhaps attended a BJ Winslow (of Dapper Cadaver) demo on how to create gory, mummified skull props, braved the mini-haunts in the Hall of Shadows, or attended one of the major theme park panels to discover what new characters or maze designs will premiere this year.

Hardcore fans, likewise, had much to satiate them. They could have learned from haunt industry pros how to create and manage their own haunts, shopped for professional make-up and prosthetic supplies, or attended a special presentation of "**Urban Death**" (presented by Zombie Joe's Underground Theatre) and learned that even seasoned horror fans can be taken to school.



A mutant bangs on the glass in Toxicity.

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Additionally, several large studios created unique displays exclusively for Midsummer Scream. Among those was **Boneyard Effects**. Under the art direction of Larry Bones (head make-up artist and creature creator at Universal's Halloween Horror Nights), a sizeable team of make-up artists created the inhabitants of Toxicity, a hallway of toxic waste-mutated scientists and experiments gone astray. Toxicity led guests to a darkened arena of a half dozen or so mini-haunts, which were designed by the creators of various home and pro haunts. Another impressive display

featured at the convention was that of **Jim Henson's Creature Shop**. Animatronic supervisor John Criswell whipped up a few mechanical zombie heads (with flesh and without to reveal the mechanics) especially for the occasion. The Henson panel, entitled Henson: Creatures with Heart, which took place on Sunday afternoon, was a great centerpiece for the festival.



Moderator Clarke Wolfe discusses Jim Henson's influence.

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After the panel was introduced by the core Midsummer Scream team (David Markland, Rick West, Johanna Atilano, Claire Dunlap, and Gary Baker), David Bowie's "Magic Dance," from *Labyrinth*, played as Moderator Clarke Wolfe took to the stage and revealed that *Labyrinth* was the film which got her to fall in love with monsters. Other members of Henson's Creature Shop, Jeremy Nocon (VP of Business Development) and Robert Bennett (designer/fabricator) joined Wolfe and Criswell onstage to talk about the magic and the mechanics of some of the dark creatures that were born of their company. Foremost in the discussion was the guiding spirit of puppeteering pioneer Jim Henson and the influence he has had on the public's perception of scary monsters. Nocon quoted puppeteer/actor/filmmaker Frank Oz as having said, "Jim Henson provided the opportunity to be scared in a safe environment." Given the predominance of a range of scary material, all within the context of a safe environment, it should be safe to say that Henson's work has had a significant influence in the popularity of Halloween culture.

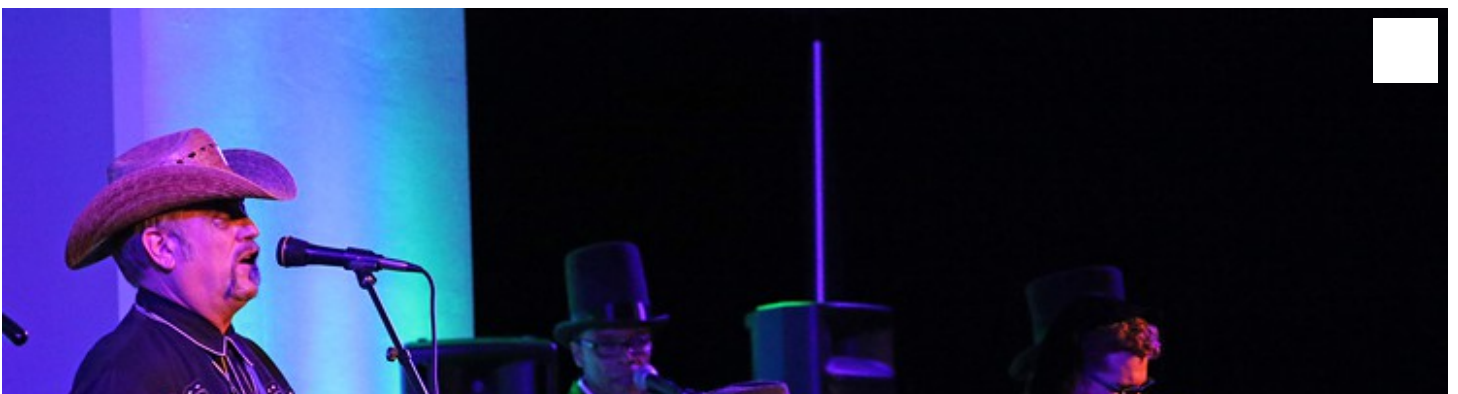




A couple of Halloween fans show off some ghoulish gear.

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In the humongous showroom, among the hundreds of exhibitors selling Halloween masks, memorabilia, jewelry, props, delicacies, clothing, music, as well as other products and services, there were many entrepreneurs whose unique exhibits typified the passion that Halloween imbues in its devotees. Ryan Batcheller, of Costa Mesa, provided demonstrations of his virtual reality haunted attraction, **Virtual Screams**. The Blackthorne Haunt has been an increasingly popular and notorious home haunt, which has finally been chased out of Lakewood for becoming too big; now, for the first time since 2004, the haunt is expanding its operation and opening **Blackthorne Screamfest** at an arena in Pico Rivera. Given the increasing popularity of escape room attractions, Juliana Patel and Ariel Rubin, from LA, have created **Escape Room in a Box**, a home kit with everything you need to throw an escape room party; the box comes complete with refill material to keep things fresh for more than one experience.





Oingo Boingo Dance Party performing at the Midsummer Scream after hours party.

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Two additional highlights included the Ghoulmasters Gallery, a horrific art gallery featuring horror-themed images and sculptures by dozens of contributing artists, and the performance of **Oingo Boingo Dance Party**, which took place at the Noche De Los Muertos after hours party on Saturday. Overall, there might have been a few hitches here and there (particularly in regards to a few lines and periods of waiting) but nothing that overshadowed the grandeur of the event – particularly since this was its maiden voyage. Given its lineage and the promotion of its impressive, Halloween-themed panelists, performers, and purveyors, Midsummer Scream was essentially already a staple of the Halloween / horror community before it took place. The fact that it did take place cinches it! SoCal children of the night now have a little bit more Halloween to look forward to each year.

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