

cinéart

PERSMAP

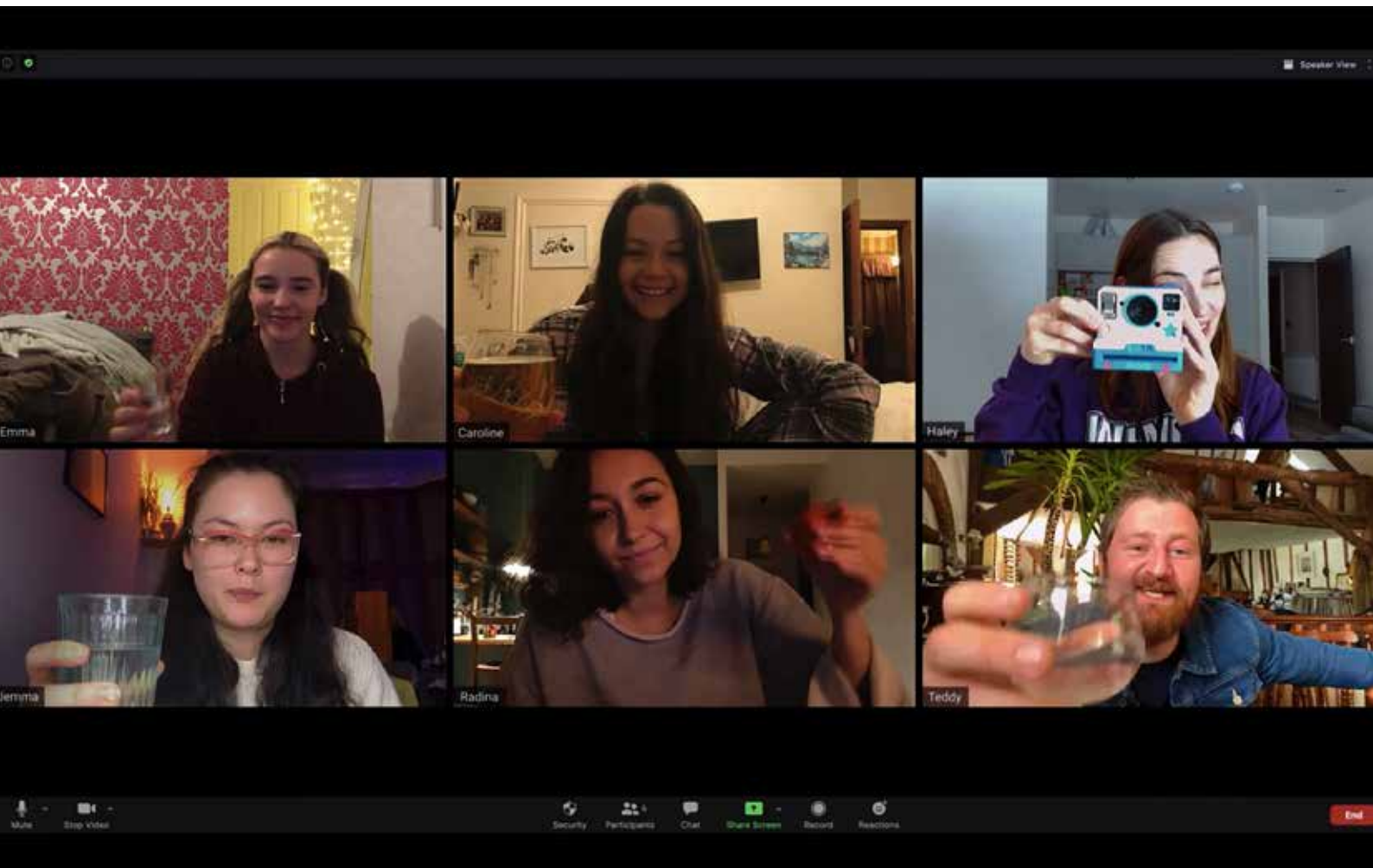


HOST



HOST

EEN FILM VAN ROB SAVAGE



Horror - 2020 - UK - 65 minuten
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SYNOPSIS

HOST is een overtuigende 'social distancing' horror die onder je huid kruipt. Tijdens een lockdown huren zes vrienden een medium in om een seance te houden via Zoom.

Het is 2020, we zitten middenin de pandemie. Door lockdowns en quarantaine verlopen de meeste sociale contacten via Zoomsessies en videobellen. Om toch weer eens iets gezamenlijks te doen, heeft Haley haar vriendengroep overtuigd om met z'n allen een griezelavond te beleven. Samen met een medium houden ze een seance op Zoom. Voor de gezelligheid, want echt serieus kun je dat niet nemen. Toch?

De kracht van HOST is dat hij de horror van de lockdown tastbaar maakt. Je vergeet dat je een film kijkt en wordt deel van een zenuwslopend Zoomgesprek...



ROB SAVAGE

Writer, director

Rob Savage is a multi-award winning writer/director and 2013 Screen International Star of Tomorrow, working in shorts, features and commercials.

He wrote, directed, shot, co-produced and edited micro- budget feature film STRINGS at age 18, which has screened at a number of prestigious International Festivals, including Raindance for its UK premiere and the Rome Film Festival for its European. The film has been acquired for release by Vertigo Films and won a British Independent Film Award, following in the footsteps of acclaimed director Ben Wheatley, whose debut feature DOWN TERRACE won the same award three years previously.

Rob is a Berlinale Talent Campus alumnus and has won a number of awards for his short films, including the BFI Future Film Award for sci-fi short SIT IN SILENCE in 2011. He has also developed a number of TV and film projects including DAWN OF THE DEAF with producers Rob Watson & Fodhla Cronin O'Reilly (LADY MACBETH), psychological horror SEAHOLME with the BFI and SALT with Chernin Entertainment.

Rob is represented by Jack Thomas at Independent Talent as a Writer and Director and Outsider for commercials.

FILMOGRAPHY

2021 SEAHOLME
2020 HOST
2017 SALT (SHORT)
2016 DAWN OF THE DEAF (SHORT)
2015 ABSENCE (SHORT)
2014 HEALEY'S HOUSE (SHORT)
2012 STRINGS
2011 TOUCHING FROM A DISTANCE (SHORT)
2011 SIT IN SILENCE (SHORT)
2010 ACT (SHORT)
2009 SEX SCENE (SHORT)

CAST

Haley	HALEY BISHOP
Jemma	JEMMA MOORE
Emma	EMMA LOUISE WEBB
Radina	RADINA DRANDOVA
Caroline	CAROLINE WARD C
Alan	ALAN EMRYS
Caroline's dad	PATRICK WARD
Teddy	EDWARD LINARD
Jinny	JINNY LOFTHOUSE
Seylan	SEYLAN BAXTER
Legs	JACK BRYDON
The Spirit	JAMES SWANTON

CREW

Director by	ROB SAVAGE
Written by	ROB SAVAGE GEMMA HURLEY JED SHEPHERD
Editor	BRENNA RANGOTT
Costume Design	ALEXI KOTKOWSKA
Makeup	DAN MARTIN BEX PALMER
Sound	CALUM SAMPLE
Special Effects	MIKE KNIGHTS
Visual Effects Supervisor	STEVEN BRAY
Produced by	DOUGLAS COX



INTERVIEW FROM THE BOSTON HASSLE

WITH ROB SAVAGE, JED SHEPHERD AND DOUGLAS COX

BOSTON HASSLE: It's kind of funny talking to you guys on Zoom, given the subject of the movie. Has it been weird for you at all using Zoom, having been through all this?

JED SHEPHERD (co-writer): Yeah. It's kind of weird, because people are a little bit scared to use it with us. [laughs] So we've had requests to use other things, like Squadcast- whatever the hell that is. And Skype. I've done a bunch of things on Skype, and like, who still uses Skype? This isn't 2005! But yeah, it is kind of weird. There's something quite beautiful and meta about it.

DOUGLAS COX (producer): Yeah. I mean, I definitely- and I think Rob [Savage, the director] will agree- he and I spent so long on Zoom when we were filming. We're talking like 12, 13 hours a day. We'd join the set in the morning, and then we just stay on and hop between locations. So I don't know about Rob, but I definitely had at least a week away from Zoom, near enough. I think it was maybe four days, actually, just to give myself a breather. But I'm really enjoying how much nervousness around Zoom has been developing from people who've watched the film.

BH: It's like people just got used to it, and now they've already got the Jaws effect on it.

JS: Just when you thought it was safe to go back to Zoom!

BH: I was curious what putting together the movie was like from a screenwriting standpoint, because for found footage or mockumentary, obviously it has to sound extemporaneous. Was there a lot of improvisation, or were you and the other writers very deliberate about what was being said?

JS: Well, what we had right at the start is, me and Rob came up with all the deaths first. We just had kind of an idea of all the cool stuff we wanted, how we wanted to kill our friends. So we had that. We knew it was going to be a Zoom seance, because that's what we pitched to Shudder. And we had a general structure, and then we worked with another writer called Gemma Hurley to make it what it is now. But I would say everything you love about Host, all the amazing lines- that comes directly from the girls themselves. They were instrumental in everything you love about it. Like, Emma saying "Happy spookies!" That was just an ad lib from her. All the interactions were just them being themselves, and the fact that they're real friends really helped. I think the best rehearsal for this is ten years of friendship.

DC: I think a lot of every part of the process, in fact, was sort of enabling the cast to have an experience which could just allow them to do what they do best. And I think those really grounded performances are one of the major things that really helps this as a found footage film. It really sort of set neatly in everybody's psyche a little bit, because it does feel just like a group of friends hanging out on a Zoom call, because it's exactly that. They are all friends. We've all been hanging out for years. So what Rob and Jed and Gemma pulled together in two weeks was this sort of 17-page outline which formed the skeleton structure for how the movie would play out. And then, throughout the filming process, Rob would improvise these scenes, and build on the skeleton, and allow the girls to improvise and work these lines around. And like Jed said, some of the best moments came from them riffing on things and sort of just going off on little tangents. The fact that they had such good relationships anyway really allowed that to bed in in quite a kind of natural way, an organic way of filming. It was a really fun process. [Director Rob Savage enters the chat]

JS: ...and Rob was the worst director we've ever worked with. Oh, hi Rob!

ROB SAVAGE (director/co-writer): [laughs]

BH: We were just talking about the screenwriting process versus the improvisation, and how you all put together the story and made it sound natural.

RS: Well, I don't know how much these guys have gone over, but yeah. We had, I think it was a 17-page outline, so every day I'd kind of turn up on Zoom with the actors, and we'd have a short paragraph to describe the scene. And me and the actors would basically have to rehearse it, and do take after take, and try to find what was working and what wasn't. We'd kind of shape it over the course of two or three takes, and get it down to what you see in the movie. We shot

it chronologically, apart from some of the scare scenes, which we shot earlier on. So it was really helpful to basically be able to see the movie happening in front of us day by day. It's nerve-wracking when you don't have the normal planning that you're used to. But it was really fun, actually, being able to turn up and just feel spontaneous. If something's not working, we can just try something else.

DC: And on that sense of really grounded performance, that whole process really helped in that way. Rob mentioned we shot a lot of the bigger stunt set pieces early on, so that we could finish them with a bit of editing and VFX and play them back to the cast, so they'd be able to react in real time to stuff that they hadn't seen before.

RS: And we hid a lot of stuff from the cast as well. They got redacted versions of the script with only their scenes in it, so they didn't know when people were going to go, and they didn't know where the scares were going to come from. Haley's chair pull-back, just as an example– that was all rigged to happen live. Haley's boyfriend, Kieron, was in the hallway with the rope, and he had a trigger word to go on, and the rest of the cast just thought they were playing a normal argument scene. They thought the scares were coming later. So when Haley gets pulled back and slams against the wall, those are genuine take-one reactions. It's got this element of prank video about it, which is really fun to do.

DC: There was real commitment from all to make sure that we held that as a surprise as well. Even the stunt team, and us in production, would make different versions of call sheets and different versions of risk assessments that would go to specific cast members, that didn't have stuff that didn't pertain to their day on it, so there was no way they could figure things out. It's fun sort of playing tricks!

JS: It's quite sadistic, isn't it?

RS: It's very sadistic, yeah. [laughs]

JS: But you need that with found footage. That's what the creators of *The Blair Witch* did. They essentially cajoled the actors into these situations where they would be at their best, and that's by making them fear everything around them. [laughs]

BH: That actually goes into my next question. Obviously, there are a lot of practical effects, which I'm sure are complicated on a low-budget shoot anyway, but especially given that it was all done remotely. How did you coordinate some of that?

RS: Well, our VFX supervisor, Steve Bray, would come onto the calls and help the actors set up their shots, and make sure that we were getting clean plates, and all the things that you need to piece these shots together. Of course, it's never going to be the same as being there on set, and being able to get the exact footage you want. There were certain scenes that we knew probably couldn't be shot by the actors themselves, so we came up with ways of me being able to shoot them. For instance, Emma's scene with the flour footsteps and the cupboards exploding is probably one of the biggest effects sequences in the movie. That was actually shot in my kitchen, with me dressed up as Emma with the bunny slippers on. We just did a hidden cut, and then I became Emma's point of view. So then, because I've done a lot of work in VFX before, I was able to set it up and get exactly the footage we needed.

For other effects, it was just about getting the actors to understand how the shots are put together. The scene where the sheet goes over the ghost in Emma's room, she shot that for real. The way she did that is, we got her a little tripod for her camera phone, and she sort of walks it up to the door handheld, and she's able to place the camera down and keep it rocksteady, so our VFX supervisor is able to work his VFX magic, and then we add a handheld effect onto it afterwards. So for her, it's quite a simple thing– she just needs to plunk the thing down– but as soon as she understood the principle of why we needed that frame not to move, and there not to be any interference in front of the camera... As soon as they clicked with that, they all learned really fast all of those principles, and cinematography principles, and all the extra things we were asking them to do. They really rose to the challenge, all of them.

DC: I think, as well, it's worth noting that we were all drawing from our experiences on bigger productions, as well as our shared experiences working on our short films previously, where we'd have to find these creative ways of making things look cool and finding workarounds for stuff. Applying both of those experiences to something like this was a big part of how we problem-solved each of these moments, and figured out how to do it.

BH: Obviously, it's a challenge to shoot remotely, but I imagine it's also a challenge to get it distributed without the traditional film festival circuit. How did you wind up getting this movie to Shudder and in front of people?

RS: Shudder saw, I'd done a kind of prank on the actors in the movie— because they're just our friends, we were all just hanging out on Zoom before all this— and I did a kind of stupid prank video where I'd pretended that a zombie had eaten me on a Zoom call. And we put that online, and that ended up going viral, and we got millions and millions of views on it. So Shudder had seen that, and we had a lot of people reaching out after that video went viral, asking if we could do a longer piece on Zoom. We had some ideas, but Jed came up with this idea of the Zoom seance, and that was kind of all we had when we went to Shudder. We had other companies bidding on it, and there was actually a bit of a bidding war on it, but Shudder was the only company that got how we wanted to do this— the fact that we didn't have a script, we didn't know how long it was going to be, we didn't really know anything about how it would work. Our pitch was, "We think it's gonna be really cool, we want to get it out as quickly as possible, we want to try to capture a moment, but you've really gotta let us figure it out. You can't try to impose the way that a normal film production would work. You can't just copy and paste that and put it onto remote filming. It doesn't work that way." And they totally got on board with that, to their credit. They were totally supportive, and it was nice knowing that we had a launch platform that was aimed at the audience we were hoping to connect to. We made this as horror fans for horror fans. And it's been amazing how well the horror community has embraced it, but it's amazing as well that it's transcended the horror community and has entered the mainstream conversation in a little way, which is something we never expected.

