

'Fury' on the big screen

Film shot in Rochester premieres Sunday

By RICK KOLLINS
Finger Lakes Times

ROCHESTER — Independent filmmaker Liz Lehmann is not a fan of horror films, but if that's what it takes to get noticed, she's willing to be converted.

Lehmann is producer and director of the supernatural suspense thriller "Fury," which makes its world premiere at the Cinema Theater on South Clinton Avenue on 2 p.m. Sunday.

After being advised by film distributors that horror films are one of the only genres likely to be bought without a star on the billing, Lehmann searched long and hard for a script that could satisfy both her artistic and practical criteria.

"Serendipity played a great role in me getting this script, and if I hadn't locked my keys in my car in Los Angeles, I wouldn't have discovered it," she said.

Lehmann explained that while she was waiting in line at a "pitchfest," where independent filmmakers pitch their films to producers, she realized she had left her keys in her locked rental car and needed to call AAA for help, so she asked the man next to her to hold her place in line.

"That led to a conversation with the man — a screenwriter from Detroit named Oz Wilson — and I became quite interested in his screenplay, which was not your traditional horror story," Lehmann said. "Most horror stories have a monster and multiple victims, but this story had a three-way story line with a ghost, a drug lord and a group of kids." As it turns out, the ghost is a distant relative of Lily and her younger cousin Violet. The ghost begins to feed on Violet's anger toward the band members, causing further havoc, and Lily must convince the ghost to help her in return for the justice she believes she is due.

The language is R rated but Lehmann points out the film also contains a fair amount of humor.

Lehmann made the film on location in the abandoned second and third stories above Nick Tahou's Restaurant on West Main Street and the surrounding neighborhood, and she used local actors and students for the cast and crew.

"I had what you might call an ultra-low



Drug dealers walk through an abandoned building in the film "Fury."

budget, so the actors were all volunteers, and the crew came from the production classes at (Monroe Community College)," Lehmann said. "That's how they break into the movie business."

Most of the actors had extensive theater backgrounds, but this was their first time before the camera, Lehmann said. About half were products of Geva Theatre's "Enterprise Zone" — a program to develop actors, directors and playwrights of color — and Michael Yawin's IMANI Theatre Ensemble, and the rest came through RochesterTalent.com or by word of mouth.

The movie was shot on weekends over six months to accommodate the work and school schedules of the actors and crew, and filming also was not without its share of serendipity.

"The ceiling actually did fall on the set, so we decided to write this into the script," Lehmann said. "When one of the actors didn't show up, the sound man was cast as one of the drug lord's thugs." Lehmann is a Rochester native who grew up in Inondquoit and now lives in Fairport with her husband, Dan Kinsella. She holds a bachelor's degree in chemistry from Syracuse University and

a master's degree in computer science from Rochester Institute of Technology.

"I became interested in film in the early 1990s and took classes in screenwriting and video production and volunteered on lots of shoots," she said. "Then I picked up a camera and started shooting some short films."

She has won several awards for her short films, videos and screenplays; her science fiction script, "The Shadow Walker," was a finalist at the prestigious Moonance Film Festival in Los Angeles in 2002.

Lehmann previously ran the Rochester chapter of the Association for Independent Video and Filmmakers and established Rochester Lo-Films, a group of independent filmmakers who produced many short films featured at the Little Theatre's "Emerging Filmmakers" series.

She plans to take "Fury" to the Los Angeles film market next month to try to find a distributor. Her only previous feature, "The Apple Orchard," did not make it into general release.

"That's when I learned you need stars to sell a movie," Lehmann said.

"That is, unless it's a horror film.

If you go ...

The premiere of "Fury" will be at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Cinema Theater, 957 S. Clinton Ave. in Rochester.

Tickets are \$10 and include a reception after the movie. They can be purchased at Nick Tahou's Restaurant, 320 W. Main St., House of Guitars, 645 Titus Ave., the Rochester/Finger Lakes Film & Video Office, 45 East Ave., Suite 400, and at Bolton Jewelers, 7 Schoen Place in Pittsford.

The Cinema Theater is one of the oldest continuously operating movie theaters in the U.S., opening as the Clinton in 1914. It underwent extensive renovations in 1949 and again in 1985, when it was purchased by current owner Jo Ann Monroele.

Because of the festive occasion, audience members are encouraged to wear their "Sunday best" to the premiere.

You can read more about the film and watch a trailer at www.trilliumfilms.com/fury.