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## Provocative queer short screens at Woodbury Film Festival

By Gary Kramer - October 31, 2019 4:32 pm

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"Bathroom Troll," out gay and local writer and director Aaron Immediato's funny and bloody short film, is playing at the Woodbury LGBTQ Film Fest on Nov. 8 at 7 p.m. at Tiki Tiki Board Games.

The film, which recently won an audience award at QFlix Worcester, is a clever homage to "Carrie," but it also deftly addresses the trans bathroom bill issue. After mean girls torment the androgynous Cassie (Bianca Sanchez) in her high school bathroom, her mother (Melissa Connell) forces Cassie to raise a Satanic bathroom troll (Hannah Gold) to seek vengeance.

In a recent interview, Immediato chatted about his short, which he hopes to turn into a feature.

### You obviously are paying homage to "Carrie" here. Can you talk about the influence of that film?

It's a contemporary response. "Carrie" is complex; there's more to it than being just a pretty scary movie. It says things about gender and coming of age, and I wanted to create a new twist on that. The character in "Bathroom Troll" identifies as a girl, but it's a modern take on getting bullied and another take on gender; the film presents androgyny. ... I liked responding to a previous [film], but I also liked the idea of "Carrie" taking place in a parallel universe where things were flipped. Mom is a Satanist rather than an uber-Christian. She encourages Cassie to use her anger and rage. There's a sense of familiarity, but it is a different experience.

### Can you talk about the film addressing the trans bathroom bill issues?

This is a creative response to bathroom bill legislation. No one is trans in the film, and I identify as a cisgender gay man. For me, it didn't feel authentic to represent a trans experience. I don't know what that's like. But even though I'm not trans, the legislation bothered me. When I was growing up, until I had facial hair, I was often asked if I was a boy or girl. It didn't help that I had long hair and wore jewelry. I wanted to make this prejudice more universal, so I tapped into androgyny. I wanted to show that these absurd attacks are on trans people, but also gender nonconforming or nonbinary people. Even as a gay man, bathrooms can be scary places. Am I looking too gay in this public bathroom? I know many people in the LGBTQ community who fall into that spectrum, and they enjoy androgyny, and I wanted to exploit that by showing this girl having a traumatic experience in a public bathroom.



### Your short features young women dealing with body issues. Can you talk about presenting that?

A big part of it is analyzing and ruminating on gender as a performance. The other girls had to have clear contrasts — the mean girls were following specific rules and characteristics of typical feminine girls in high school. That performance is paramount in their lives. They have to be the best in performing as a pretty girl who runs the school. Cassie is not concerned with following rules to perform for an audience. She's much more authentic. She's not trying to portray a specific gender.

### The mother/daughter scenes are a bit camp. Can you discuss how you approached those moments?

Cassie's mom passionately believes in Satanism even though nothing has materialized. Her existence is built on following these rules devoted to vengeance. You must enact a ritual to get back at the mean girls. We played it serious, but I am not a fan of taking myself too seriously. We never played it for laughs, but I like to have a little tongue in cheek in the writing.

### How did you measure the appropriate amount of blood and violence to depict on screen?

I don't like realistic gory scenes, even in high budget films. I like minimal, surreal aspects — simple things like a blood splash. We never intended the attacks to be violent, except the first scene where the mean girls bully Cassie. But the troll scenes are much more symbolic, and the gore was just enough to accentuate the thing that hurt the mean girls' self-esteem.

### How did you create the imagery and costumes for the troll?

The troll is supposed to be androgynous but not look like they are trying to be. I wanted the troll to be genderless to tap into Cassie's androgyny. I wanted to go drag with glam, but the drag aesthetic overpowered the rest of it, so we tamed it back and went for less makeup and more traditional with horns and green makeup. We tried to mirror the troll as a mirror of Cassie. And a lot of fake blood goes a long way.

"Bathroom Troll" screens Nov. 8, 7 p.m. at Tiki Tiki Board Games, 164 S. Broad Street, Woodbury, N.J. For tickets and more information, visit <https://woodburycommunitypride.org/film-festival/>

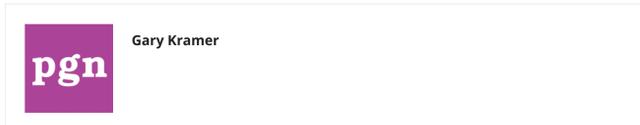


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