

## **‘The Midnight Hour’ showcases local talents**

Halloween may have come and gone, but there’s always room for a good fright. That’s just what “Lee Martin’s Midnight Hour” intends to do.

Broadcasting from greater Detroit Comcast and WOW! stations, the program is Michigan’s first sustained, homegrown TV series. Noted for its “1950s horror comic book” attitude, the show has gained a following of local horror buffs, including fans outside Michigan, since its debut in September 2008.

Lee Martin of Redford is the brains behind “Midnight Hour.” Writer, producer and director of the series’ 12-episode seasons, Martin is renowned as one of the best screenwriters in the Midwest, and sometimes referred to as “Detroit’s version of Stephen King.”

“The show is a thriller anthology that combines the format of Rod Serling’s ‘Twilight Zone’ and ‘Night Gallery’ with the 1950s comic book vibe of films like ‘Creepshow,’” says Martin.

Many of the cast and crew live in Oakland County, where the show airs in Farmington, Farmington Hills, Novi, Royal Oak, Troy, Auburn Hills, Rochester, Rochester Hills, Clawson, Ferndale and Oakland Township.

“I’m incredibly proud of Michigan and the unsung talent we have here. I also enjoy forging new paths and being the first to hit on new resources,” Martin says.

Having filmed in local areas including Royal Oak and Pontiac, Martin and his crew have immersed themselves in Michigan’s film economy. He credits Susan Dorris, marketing coordinator for the Oakland County Film Office, for facilitating shooting locations.

“The Oakland County Film Office occasionally supports ‘Lee Martin’s Midnight Hour’ with requests for special location assistance,” says Dorris. “In the past, we’ve located unique venues like local, historic cemeteries and schools interested in working with the local film community.”

The newest, upcoming installment to the “Midnight Hour” series is titled “Masque of Horror.” The episode focuses on a bitter, vindictive wife who suspects her shop-owner husband of being unfaithful. She enlists the aid of a friend who gives her a mysterious mask which has the power to exact a gruesome revenge.

Chere Bernhard of Troy stars in the lead role as the jealous wife, Deidre. She also has numerous other projects attached to her acting resume, including a previous episode of “Midnight Hour.”

“She’s one of our discoveries and her emotional intensity and spot-on delivery makes her compulsively watchable,” Martin says of his actress.

Bernhard admits to having loved horror stories all her life. “My dad was the first one to introduce me to the likes of Stephen King, Alfred Hitchcock and ‘Tales From the Crypt’ from a young age,” she says. “Thanks to him, I learned to appreciate the moral lesson of the horror story and the creative genius it takes to get into another person’s mind and bring their darkest faults to light.”

Also starring in the upcoming episode is Kristen Nickl of Wayne County, who plays Louanne, the friend who provides the cursed mask.

“The character is deceptively evil and an instigator. In the end she has a big surprise, but you’ll have to watch it to see what happens,” Nickl says of her role.

Michael Vanderpool of Ohio and Katie Haddad also star.

The “Masque of Horror” episode features the special effects makeup of Jason Hiltz, who operates a workshop in Novi. Working with “Midnight Hour” since 2008, Hiltz has also worked with heavy metal bands, haunted house attractions, student films and television. However, working with “Midnight Hour” is an accomplishment in itself, says Hiltz.

“It was my first film/TV project that was a finished product and people actually saw it,” he said. “The ‘Masque of Horror’ was a fun episode to shoot. We filmed in a huge warehouse (in Allen Park). There are a lot of great things happening in this episode, there are some nasty things with a clothing iron, and of course black magic, relationships filled with drama, and the usual dark twist in the final act.”

Bernhard, Nickl and Hiltz all describe Martin as a true professional, both easygoing and considerate of his cast and crew.

“Having worked with Lee now on two episodes, I’m amazed to see how down-to-earth he is. I’ve asked Lee where he comes up with his methodically crazy characters. He sits, smiles sweetly, and says the people he knows inspire him,” Bernhard says.

“Lee Martin’s Midnight Hour” has opportunities for anyone wishing to join the all-volunteer crew and cast for future episodes.

“I would tell anyone interested in acting to work hard and follow your dreams,” Nickl offers for anyone wishing to become an actor. “Nothing comes easy, but the reward when you achieve what you work so hard for arrives, it’s priceless.”

## **FYI**

The “Masque of Horror” segment of “Lee Martin’s Midnight Hour” airs at midnight Thursday on Comcast and WOW! Channel 18. The show will run at midnight Thursdays and at 10:30 p.m. Saturdays through December. More information, including air dates, episode guide, cast and crew list and employment opportunities, can be found at [www.leemartinthemidnighthour.com](http://www.leemartinthemidnighthour.com)