

Candyman actor Tony Todd talks Providence

Tony Todd is the face and voice behind one of the most iconic characters in horror films: *Candyman*. He's also appeared in hundreds of other roles across TV, films, video games and his first passion, the stage. He'll be one of over 100 celebrity guests attending this year's Comic Con at the RI Convention Center November 5 - 7. We caught up with him just before he headed out to the Con from his home in California.



Mike Ryan (Motif): I usually ask Comic Con guests if they've been to RI before. But in your case, you have some real local ties.

Tony Todd: I did spend some time at Trinity Rep, long ago near the start [of my career]. It was an

amazing, formative experience with a group of people who were invested entirely in their art - fermenting creativity in ourselves and each other constantly, and in every part of the artistic process theater involves. The acting, finding the character, but also writing and music and set design and costuming - we were all involved in all of it.

I lived on Federal Hill and would walk to Trinity. It was a fun, interesting neighborhood. People would be sitting in front of the shops talking to you. There was a bakery where they would say, 'There's that kid, that theater kid - give him a cannoli!' Those were great cannolis.

But mostly we were at work creating. We were in the theater twelve hours a day and it was the most intense artistic experience. I think three of us from that group are still acting professionally. I still work with Bob Sacchetti on scripts we write together today - we met in that program. We had talented people working very hard there, and it was remarkable.

MR: What is the difference between commanding a stage and commanding the camera, or a film environment?

TT: Nothing compares to working on stage. There's something organic and exciting about being in the same space with your audience. You feel a connection and there's an energy that flows back and forth. You have to rely totally on the human instrument. Don't get me wrong, I love film too, but it's very different.

MR: What about working in video games?

TT: That's a whole different process. They do MoCap [Motion Capture] and cover you in little dots. You have to move and speak very precisely, and everything - everything - has to be in your imagination. You're acting against nothing, with no set or costume, so you have to have these things in your head. I enjoy it, but it's a whole different process.

MR: Are you a gamer yourself?

TT: I am. I don't have a lot of time for it, but I go back to Colecovision - remember that?

MR: Yes! [Coleco made a gaming system in the early 80s] What have you been playing lately?

TT: I've been doing a lot of sports games. And *Call of Duty*. That's a good one. But surprisingly, I don't even have a PS5 yet!

MR: Are there any Rhode Island landmarks you're looking forward to seeing again?

TT: I want to get some of those hot dogs - the NY System? There used to be these great music clubs around the downtown, like the Heartbreak Hotel, Leo's. The Met had \$2 beers. David Byrne had just graduated from RISD and you could walk into a venue and listen to his music with just a few people in the audience. And the Brothers, near city hall.

MR: Haven Brothers?

TT: Right, Haven Brothers. And you could smell the Providence River from there.

MR: They've fixed that!

TT: There were a few good dive bars downtown too.

MR: You like visiting dive bars

TT: When I visit a new city, that's where I like to go first. A good dive bar is real. That's where you find the locals, people who really have a sense of the place.

MR: You're involved in other areas of the arts?

TT: I love all the arts. Painting, music, performance - it all brings people together and builds communities and energy. It helps people think outside of themselves, and that's important. I think that's something we're missing more right now - society is split into these little cultural slivers that don't interact the way they used to. We used to have a lot more elements of common culture. I also love to read - you gain so much by reading the classics, starting with Shakespeare. But I just read 11 works by August Wilson. You take so much from that. Writing and directing were my original focus in college and at Trinity, but then I got more into acting.

MR: Let's talk a little bit about your most iconic role. Why do you think *Candyman* has had such a lasting impact?

TT: I think it just resonated with people. The director, Bernard Rose was looking to capture a fable, but when he moved the setting to Chicago, it came to life with an urban perspective that hadn't really been exposed before, not so much in the horror genre. The film and the character really resonated.

MR: What was it like to revisit that character again after all this time?

TT: It was a pleasure. That whole film was just a great experience. With Jordan Peele there was so much creativity, and the film was able to deal a lot more head on with some issues. And it was wonderful to work with Nia DaCosta. Working with a female director was great, and I think so important right now. I think it's a great continuation of the story.

MR: Was the recent reboot a handing off of the Candyman baton?

TT: What is the last shot in the film? That has your answer!

MR: What projects do you have coming up?

TT: There are three unpublished screenplays I'm working on with Bob Sacchetti. No one has picked them up yet, but we keep working on them. I also just finished shooting *Travelling Light*, *LOOK UP CAST*. It's an amazing cast, and that should be coming out. I just did some video games as well - we shot one in Sweden, that was interesting. *Venom 2* and a new Spider Man game are coming out.

This interview was edited for length. Tony Todd is at RI Comic Con Nov 5 - 7