

# INTERVIEWS



MICHELLE  
TOMLINSON

# THE COLONEL'S CRYPT



Michelle Tomlinson represents a new kind of scream queen in the horror scene, a beautiful but tough as nails chick who's not afraid to get down and dirty, bringing a strength to characters that would otherwise be considered vulnerable.

The actress gained notice with her performance in the indie hit *THE CELLAR DOOR* as imprisoned Rudy, a woman who engages a battle of wits with her abductor. She's followed that with a lead role in *GEORGE'S INTERVENTION*, a horror/comedy that is currently playing at many festivals across the United States, including the upcoming first annual Texas Bloodbath Film Festival.

To discuss her career, Tomlinson took time out of her schedule to talk intricately about her career and background, and what looms ahead for this talented actress in this Crypt exclusive.

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**COLONEL'S CRYPT:** What prompted your interest in acting that made you want to pursue it as a career?

**MICHELLE TOMLINSON:** Getting to put somebody else's skin suit on, walk around in it for a while and then getting to release it and then go back to myself if that makes any kind of sense? When you get dressed in the morning, you're still you underneath your clothes and I view acting in the same respect in a lot of ways. You might out on somebody else's skin suit but unless you show up to the party it's just no good. That to me was very appealing to get to play around these different characters, to try to get to do different things that I would never do and situations that I would never be in. It's exciting. I took a theatrical make up class in college and that's what started the whole thing.

**CC:** You took a video production class in high school. Were you planning a career behind the camera at first and then switched to be in front?

**MT:** That's exactly what happened. In high school, I got wrapped up in video production. I won a couple of awards writing and directing a few programs and was in a club called News 101. It was awesome because it was getting to create everything from a different perspective, from writing it out to shooting it to editing it to mixing in funny sound effects. We made a lot of commercials and funny little news clips in high school. That was what I thought I wanted to do with the rest of my life until I got to college. Everything changed when I took that theatrical make up class. Acting was more interesting to me.

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CC: You've done a lot of horror films as an actress thus far. Do you like the horror genre or is it a genre you've just found yourself being hired for a lot?

MT: Both. I grew up watching it from the time I was a little kid with my dad, we would watch all the Freddy's and all the Jason's as well as all the slasher flicks from the time I was around five. He didn't see a problem with it which was cool but my mom hated it. I grew up watching a ton of horror flicks with him. When I decided to become an actress, I veered myself more towards drama, the genre of an indie drama type of acting. I don't think I'm funny and I never thought about the horror genre at all to act in. I fell into doing a couple of horror films after doing a few dramas and I didn't realize that they would be so much fun. I liked watching them. I never knew I would like being in them as much as I do watching them.

CC: As an actress and as a fan of the genre, why do you think the horror genre is so appealing?

MT: From an actor's perspective, it's appealing because you get to do things that never in a zillion years in your normal, everyday life would you ever do. It's not like romantic comedy where people fall in love, they break up, have drama, and get back together. That's more like life. Horror films are like life personified and taken to an nth degree, and I find that to be exciting. When you're getting to be an actor and when you're getting to explore emotions that you think you never have to explore like being trapped in a box for days and days and days on end or anything like that, it's really exciting to take part in that and it's really exciting to see how they do things. When I did BRAIN DEAD, I learned a lot about special effects. I learned how they are done and conducted. I just found that to be fascinating to be able to be a part of that and to watch that whole process.

For someone watching it, it's the thrill of the ride of the movie because you don't know what's going to happen next or if something happens you will jump out of your skin and go to a point where you can't sleep some nights. When I first saw HOSTEL I couldn't sleep very for three nights because it scared the hell out of me. I think that's cool. It's fun when a movie has that kind of effect on you.

CC: Speaking of being locked in a box for days, that brings me to THE CELLAR DOOR. The first reaction I have upon seeing your character locked in this box is "The moment she's going to get out, she's gonna kick this guy's ass."

MT: Pretty much (laughs).

CC: How were you approached with the film and what is your reaction to the response it's gotten from the independent horror crowd?

MT: I have been filled with nothing with gratitude with the response that film has gotten. For everyone who worked on that film, it was their baby. It was everyone's little, fragile fetus that we gave birth to and we all worked extremely hard on it. When you put that much into something and you see for the most part people who really enjoy what you made and proceed to contact you based on how much they love it, it validates you as an artist to go "I am really in the right direction. This was so worth my time. This was so worth the lack of sleep and the absolute insanity of getting into that character's mind under those circumstances." It makes everything so worth it.

CC: In addition to being an actress, you are also an acting coach. Can you talk about what you do as a coach?

MT: I teach Amy Lyndon's 15 Guideline Technique. It's really a booking technique which in layman's terms is a really great way on how to approach an audition. You could be the greatest actor ever but if you suck at auditioning then nobody will ever know that you're great. What I do is I take actors at a beginning level and teach them the technique and how to utilize it. I coach them on auditions and I coach them on weekly teams where I give my analysis and watch them progress. Sometimes they'll go with Amy's class, sometimes they'll stick with me, and it's completely rewarding. I can't believe how rewarding it is to see somebody get it.

CC: Being that this is a course for actors, do you think that directors, writers, and producers should take this course to have a better understanding of the other side of the audition process?

MT: I love that you just asked me that! In a perfect world, every single director should take a few acting classes because I've worked with a few directors who don't know how to speak to actors and it's very difficult because it's not clear what they want from you and they don't really know how to convey it. For example, "Just do it again and do something different." OK, that's awesome. I'd be happy to do it again and do something different, but is there any specific direction you want me to go to? In a perfect world, it would be amazing if a few directors would take at least a couple of acting classes just so they can understand how it is on our side of things. On the other hand, I think it would be smart for actors to learn the production side of things, then you'll understand that you're just the cog of a wheel that's on a larger scale than you can imagine.

CC: Silly question time. You look like you enjoy kicking people's asses?

MT: (Laughs) It comes naturally for me.

CC: Do you specifically look for those tough as nails roles or is it just what you wind up being cast in?

MT: I fall into that a lot because it's an essence thing. When you're a girl who has tattoos and arm muscles, people automatically assume I am probably going to kill them. I think for the most part I am a nice person, well as nice as most people are, but it does come naturally for me to play the tough girl roles. I was raised by a Marine and an artist and I hung around with a lot of bikers. I've been around every walk of life from an ex-con to a multi-millionaire and everything in between so I guess because of that those roles seem to come my way.

CC: I look at your demo reel and BACKFIRE is an example, playing a tough cop. It does look natural.

MT: I was almost shot by the LAPD on that shoot.

CC: Oh, you have to elaborate?

MT: We were starting with interior shots of running down the stairs. I was dragging my friend Randall, who co-stars in the film, down these stairs with a gun in my hand and him in another hand. The director tells me "Michelle, keep running until you hear Alex, the cinematographer, yell Cut! I'm gonna

let Alex yell cut and I'll stay here." So I'm just running and I don't hear a cut so I just run out of the interior through the side door of a really quiet, small neighborhood. So I'm out there with a gun in my hands. I look up and see Alex from a window and he yells out "Cut!" Randall says "Oh, the cops." Now I have a gun in my hand so I'm asking "What cops?" I just thought whatever because I was so in the moment and I wasn't paying attention to what he was saying. I saw some movement out of the corner of my eye so I turned to look, gun in one hand, Randall in the other, and I saw two cops fly out of their car who just happened to be parked right there in that moment, guns drawn, yelling at me. I'm yelling at them saying that it's safe meanwhile everyone's telling me "Michelle, put the gown DOWN!" I felt like I was going to land on the evening news as a dumb ass waving a fake gun around in North Hollywood. I put the gun down gently and we had to walk backwards towards them with our hands in the air. One of the cops searched Randall and asked him what he had in his pockets. Randall was stuttering, trying to remember what he had in his pockets, and I just started laughing, I just thought this whole thing was ridiculous. The cop turned to me laughing and said "I'm assuming you don't have anything in your pockets," and I told her "Honey, my pants are so tight you'd be able to see a credit card." So with that the cops took off and I knew I'd remember that moment forever. Every time I drive down that street, I'll always think of the time I almost got shot by the LAPD.

CC: Can you talk about GEORGE'S INTERVENTION, which is doing the festival run now?

MT: It is so wacky. It's unbelievably wacky. It's a really fun comedy, or what I like to call it, a horromedy. It's very tongue in cheek. It takes a look at being a zombie in a completely different light that I've ever seen. There are so many interpretations of zombies in the comedy realm, like SHAUN OF THE DEAD, but this is fun because the movie is saying that being a zombie is fine, but eating human flesh is not fine. That's in fact a really big problem and you need to get help if you're eating human flesh. That's the crux of it. It's to show an intervention mixed in with SHAUN OF THE DEAD mixed in with fabulous blood splurting gory horror. That was a lot of fun. JT Seaton directed it, he was a lot of fun to work with. Everyone on that film was awesome.

CC: Who do you play in GEORGE'S INTERVENTION?

MT: Sarah Stephens and she is the ex-girlfriend of George, and she brings her current boyfriend to her ex-boyfriend's intervention so that unto itself for my character is absolutely silly fun because who in the hell in their right mind would do that? She's a step away from being a tough chick. She's a girl with a slight edge to her so she's a little different from the "I'm gonna kill you" girl.

CC: Could you explain Mighty McT Productions as featured on your website?

MT: Kimberly Amato nicknamed me "The Mighty McT" so when it came to me starting baby steps in forming my own production company. As I was thinking about it, I thought it'd be funny to call it Mighty McT Productions. We talked about the logo and I thought that Mighty McT would have a black brick wall and there would have to be something feminine involved with that wall as well. We came up with a black brick wall with a couple of Stargazer Willies which is my favorite flower in the world and then it looks like it's been tagged. Amato made the logo for me and we're working on several projects together. We are producing a feature film that a friend of mine wrote for me to star in. We are going to shoot it in New Mexico so we're in the baby stages

of that. I'm in the middle of script revisions right now. We are also going to be putting together a fabulous reality web series that's going to be very tongue in cheek but involved in the horror world. If I say anymore, she'll probably kill me. It's going to be so silly.

CC: I normally ask this question but being that you are an acting coach, I'm going to give it a little spin. If someone came to you and said "I want to be an film actor" and they asked for five films to watch learn the craft. Which films would you choose and why?

MT: The first film that comes to my mind is SILENCE OF THE LAMBS because Anthony Hopkins does something with stillness. He is not blinking and the pure focus and concentration simply by just standing there in his cell is fascinating to watch. Then you have the juxtaposition of Jodie Foster. It is one of my favorite films to watch. I would also recommend HEAT, the Pacino/De Niro movie, that scene in the coffee shop is perfect. What I also loved about the scene is it was not rehearsed. They did not rehearse the scene and it was just absolutely flawless. It was a great example of how interesting something can be when there are two people not doing a whole lot of movement. I know I keep going back to stillness and that is because most actors, especially when they're first starting out, think that they need to move around, shake their hands all over the place, and all this superfluous stuff that is not necessary at all. It's just as interesting to watch someone with very little movement. Those would be my top two favorite ones. REQUIEM FOR A DREAM was really unbelievable because that shows humanity in its extremes. Ellen Burstyn is flawless and brilliant in watching how a human can become unwound and that's something that I really appreciated with her although the movie made me want to slit my wrists after watching it. My fourth is GANGS OF NEW YORK for Daniel-Day Lewis.

CC: I'm surprised you didn't say THERE WILL BE BLOOD.

MT: Oh, there's a toss up. I'll go with GANGS OF NEW YORK though. He's so fascinating because he is a Method actor. When he did THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS, he wore the gun that Hawkeye wore around him everywhere he went throughout production. I understand his wife finally got pissed at him. They sat down to have a holiday dinner with the gun at the table. I think she said to him "Can you let it go for just a minute?" but that shows how passionate he is about his craft. My final choice would be GIA for Angelina Jolie because that is one of the roles I really felt that she was beyond, beyond, beyond in. I thought she was in, full throttle in. GIA is a brilliant film. It attacks how an actor can play drug addiction and the whole birth/life/death of a human being and how she was able to capture so many different levels of a character just going through life and it was based on a true story. I think trying to bring anyone to life that is based on a true story is one of the most difficult feats for an actor to ever portray accurately.

CC: Where do you see the horror genre going within the next five years? Do you think the independents will rise again over the glossy remakes?

MT: I don't think \$80 million dollar budget feature films will go by the wayside because there is a big chunk of Middle America that loves that crap. Those movies make a substantial amount of money for these idiot, I mean, awesome executives who continue putting out that kind of product because they do make some cash, especially in the summer where they release Something Part 13 because people couldn't get enough of the first 12! At the

same time, I really agree with the insurgence of indie films becoming more and more prevalent. I have seen it start to happen. I go back to Nia Vardalos with **MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING**. It isn't horror but it was an indie film that was made for a few million bucks that ended up grossing a zillion dollars. Eli Roth's first film **CABIN FEVER** was made very cheap and it became a bidding war between Lionsgate and whoever wanted to pick it up and it made a lot of money. He made it and now he's got **HOSTEL** and **INGLORIOUS BASTERDS** and he started out as an indie filmmaker. There's a lot of room for indie filmmakers to start scooting into Hollywood. I definitely see the horror genre specifically be a large part of that because people are tired of seeing the same re-productions. I didn't even see the new **FRIDAY THE 13TH**. I saw it as a small child. I'd rather remember that and the memory of watching it with my dad as a small child then getting annoyed at some "Slick Rick" movement in the now. I do believe that indie horror is massively on the rise because there are too many fans. There are too many festivals. There are too many outlets for it not to scoot into the mainstream more and more. **THE CELLAR DOOR** and **BRAIN DEAD** got limited theatrical release, but it was still out in theaters. They are out there and they are getting in theaters. It's just going to be a matter of time before it's more and more.

CC: Do you think the rise of digital technology is helping or hurting the indie genre?

MT: Both because any jackass can pick up a camera and declare themselves a filmmaker by making something stupid. It is helping because there are legitimate filmmakers with a real vision, a real plan, a real story, and all this fabulous juice. At the end of the day when you're working with 35mm, you have to get just the film itself, the stock itself, then you have to process and color correct, and now you have to digitize that to show in theaters, people can't afford that anymore. That's a good sign but it's sad when any schmuck makes a horrible movie to put up on Youtube and it gets hits. Something that gives me hope is that there are a lot of bad movies out there and they are on video shelves, which means that there is plenty of room for great movies to be out there and be put on video shelves.

CC: What's coming up for you?

MT: I am wrapping up shooting a crazy film where I play a racist girl which is the ugliest character I've ever tackled in my life called **SECOND CLASS CITIZENS**. I have the sequel to **THE CELLAR DOOR** coming up. I got the script and I remember I was reading it and was walking from my couch to my bedroom, but I stopped in the hallway and read 30 pages right there. It's so good. It's very layered and very twisted. I also am in the sponsorship phase of producing the very first LA Boys and Girls Club Film Festival with my producing partner Simon Karl. We've been working our tails off with that. We set it up where kids would take several weeks of filmmaking classes, from script writing to producing to directing to storyboard, holding cameras, the whole kit and caboodle including acting classes. I've pulled in thirty of my friends in the film industry including Kevin Tenney, JT Seaton, Chris Nelson who wrote **THE CELLAR DOOR**, Heidi Martinuzzi who runs **PrettyScary.net**, and a bunch of my friends as volunteers to come in and teach these classes to these kids. The outcome was that these kids shot their own short films in a seven week period. They're getting edited right now and the whole thing concludes in a gigantic red carpet event next February 23rd. It was like producing Sundance, it was a tremendous amount of work. I would start work at 4:45 in the morning, go teach the acting class, and then go and

**teach these kids. I've never been involved with a project more fulfilling than that. I also just booked an all out comedy called THE PATHETICALLY CHEAP ADVENTURES OF X-TRA MAN. I'm playing an ex-stripper who's a bit of a bubblehead. Not only am I playing in a genre I've never done before which is comedy but I'm playing a character I've never tried before which is just a total airhead.**

CC: Well you're out in LA so you'll have a lot of people to study for inspiration.

**MT: (Laughs) It won't be hard! I'll be associate producing this project as well.**

CC: That's all I have. Thanks so much for your time Michelle and good luck with all of your future projects.

**MT: Rock on!**

*You can learn more about Michelle at her official website at [www.michelletomlinson.net](http://www.michelletomlinson.net)*

*(Special thanks to Andrew Rose)*