



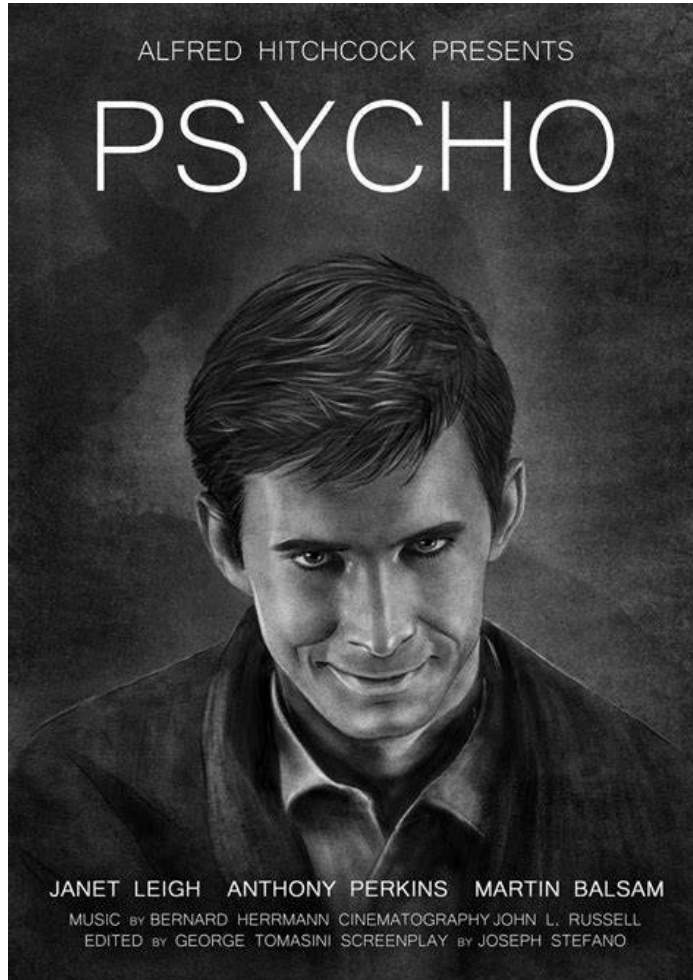
Marli — not to be confused with Myra — plays Marion

By R. Marc Kantrowitz
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Marion Crane was nervous. She had just stolen \$40,000 from her employer and was fleeing to California to meet her cash-strapped boyfriend. After driving a lengthy distance, she pulled off the road into a lonely 12-room rundown motel, named after the family who ran it.

Norman Bates, thin, nervous and gangly, made small talk with his lone guest and soon asked if she was hungry. She was, and Bates fetched her some dinner, which she ate quickly, anxious to get away from the strange young man and the eerie birds that he stuffed as a hobby and hung on the wall.

Wanting to unwind and relax after a long and stressful day, she went to her room, where she ran a hot and steamy shower. As she undressed, she did not feel the stare of Norman peeking through a small hole in the wall.



She stepped into the shower and immediately felt her tensions ease as the soothing hot waters cascaded down on her. So immersed was she in her newfound comfort that she didn't hear the gentle turn of the door handle to the bathroom. Nothing — until the shower curtain was violently ripped open and blows from a butcher knife held high rained down.

She caught only a glimpse of a shadowy figure, that of an older woman, stabbing and slashing, the strokes of the knife matching the beads of the water in their intensity and accuracy.

As her killer fled, Marion fell, grasping the shower curtain as she slowly went down. Landing half

out of the tub, her head came to rest on the cold tiled floor, one eye wide open as if searching for something she could not see.

As her blood slowly seeped from the portion of her body still in the tub, it mixed with the water as it swirled out.

Now a classic

So shocking the shower scene that Alfred Hitchcock shot "Psycho" entirely in black and white. Even with that, the film barely passed muster with the

Production Code. Today, the movie is considered a classic, and the disputed scene is thought of as one of the more iconic in all of film history.

The talented Janet Leigh, then a noted actress, received an Oscar nomination for her brief portrayal of the doomed Marion, done in by a mother and fixated nut job. Both she and Hitchcock spoke of the many difficult days, a week or so in all, filming the three-minute scene featuring dozens and dozens of different camera angles.

What was not discussed was that while the face was Janet's, the body was not. Indeed, the person repeatedly stabbed and slashed, although the blows were not actually seen, and ultimately wrapped in the ripped-down shower curtain and rudely dumped into the trunk of the car was that of Leigh's comely body double, Marli Renfro.

The participation of the green-eyed, red-headed 23-year-old beauty remained a well-guarded secret. What also remained hidden was that 8 miles from the set and less than a mile from where Marli lived, a real Norman Bates, Henry "Sonny" Busch, was acting upon his irresistible urge to victimize and kill women.

Even bearing an uncanny resemblance to Bates — shy, soft-spoken, late 20s, thin, tall, gangly and odd — Sonny also had a mother, who turned out to be his much older half-sister, who he thought to be overbearing, overprotective and jealous.

While Marli unconsciously dodged that bullet, she also managed to avoid the never identified Bouncing Ball Killer, who at the time was raping and killing at least six women in the area. Marli could not, however, ultimately avoid what appears to have been her fate, although it took three decades to arrive.

In the meantime, though, she cashed in on her looks and drive. Despite receiving no acknowledgment for her role in "Psycho," Marli's exposure nonetheless exploded. In short order, she moved up from appearing in various men's magazines to gracing the cover of Playboy, serving as one of the first bunnies in the newly opened Playboy Club in Chicago, appearing on television's "Playboy After Dark," briefly dating Steve McQueen and Lenny Bruce, dancing as a Las Vegas showgirl, and starring in a movie directed by a soon-to-be superstar director, Francis Ford Coppola.

While Coppola might prefer to bury his first movie, it's out there, albeit nearly impossible to find. "Tonight for Sure," a so-called "nudie-cutie" released in 1962, highlighted Marli's obvious physical attributes and is rarely, if ever, listed in Coppola's voluminous filmography.

Art comes to life ... and death

On March 16, 2001, The Associated Press reported that a 34-year-old handyman had been convicted of strangling two women, one in 1988 and the other 10 years later, including an actress who was a body double for Janet Leigh in "Psycho."

How strange the coincidence, which the media quickly grasped and ran with for years: a victim of a deranged killer in a movie played out in real life years later.

So, the demise of Marli Renfro, who somehow also avoided two other serial killers living and murdering near where she lived while filming "Psycho," supposedly was a violent one.

The news came as Playboy was celebrating an event, and in doing so the magazine received a call from an interested party. A secretary answered. When asked who was on the line, the caller replied: "Marli Renfro." "Oh, she's dead" came the reply as the receiver was slammed down.

More bemused than upset, Marli took the news of her demise in stride and quickly forgot about it. After all, she had moved on from the wild days of her youth. Married three times, she had two children and traveled around the country. Entering the mainstream of life, she earned real estate licenses in Arizona and California and, in 1986, auditioned and was selected to appear on the television game show "Wheel of Fortune," winning three of four games.

As it turned out, the reporters, unlike Marli, had been confused. The real victim was not Marli but Myra Davis, who had been a stand-in for Janet Leigh; one fully clothed who helped set up camera shots and angles. Marli, on the other hand, was Leigh's body double, replacing her in the actual shots that appeared in the movie. Somehow, when the media reported that Leigh's body double died, they assumed it was Marli. Blinded by the allure of the story, they got it wrong.

The ironies abound — that nearby psycho killers were murdering while “Psycho” was being made; that a stand-in for Leigh, soon to be murdered in the film by a psycho, would be a victim of a psycho decades later. In the end, though, the greatest irony might be that the spirited Marli, in short order, appeared in two movies directed by two of film’s greater directors.

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