



**ScreamTV Interview: Kim Amato** - Written by Theron Neel – Tuesday, 22 January 2008



### **See Me – Getting to Know Kimberly Amato**

Kimberly Amato didn't take the usual route to a career as an actress. After studying criminal justice and receiving a master's degree in forensic psychology, she decided to explore her creative side. And it's paid off well for her—she's getting great reviews for her turn in *Under the Raven's Wing*, in which she stars as Raven, a disturbed young woman with a taste for the bizarre. But Kim's talents don't end at acting. She's also a published author as well as a producer. ScreamTV recently spoke with Kim about video games, horror movies, and the criminally insane.

**Thanks so much for taking time to talk with us, Kim. I've been looking over your bio. I see you used to work at Bellevue, in the prison ward? Some people might see acting as quite a departure, but I get it. I mean, Hollywood versus the criminally insane? Makes sense to me.**

Yeah, I did that job for a few months. At the time, I was earning my master's degree in forensic psychology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Students had to write a thesis or do an externship. I opted for the externship and was interviewed at Bellevue Hospital. Funny thing about Bellevue—I got along so well with the correctional officers and most of the inmates. After the externship, I interviewed for a job on Riker's Island. I got it, but decided it wasn't for me. Acting really isn't that far off from working in Bellevue. It's all about appearances. Once you can break down the outside facade by hard work, patience, and communication, you get to see the real person. Beyond that, it's all about behavior. I am pretty good at reading how someone views something without them having to say anything. It helps a lot when rehearsing, performing, and just plain getting along with cast and crew.



**First things first—I know you write as well as act. How is the current writers' strike affecting you? Are you getting it from both ends?**

It's tough. I would love to pitch some of my finished scripts or even my newer ideas, but I believe that the writers deserve to be treated better. Basically, I support the WGA [Writers Guild of America]. From the acting standpoint, it's been difficult as well. Many shows have ceased production, so there is less background or smaller principal auditions.

**I'd like to talk about your background. How did you get in to acting?**

I have always performed. Even if it was singing in my room to my brush or accepting my Oscar in front of my mirror. My first actual performance was the holiday play in my grammar school. I was a cuckoo clock with one line. Every time another character said the word "time," I got to jump in with "Time? The time at the tone is cuckoo, cuckoo." See, I still remember my line! There was even a song with the dancing cuckoo clocks. I played a lot of sports, so acting was usually put on a back burner. In high school, I did stage crew for various plays, chorus concerts, or other special engagements. I started doing some extra work, got a lead role in an NYU student film, and I was truly hooked. Since then, I've had the pleasure of doing various films and characters.

**You're a very intelligent woman in a business where women are often perceived as being the opposite. Have your "smarts" ever worked against you?**

I wish I could say it hasn't, but the reality is it has. I have been told on more than one occasion that a real actor needs a degree in acting. I've been cast in more than one project where other actors would grill me about my training. After they realize I only have acting classes under my belt, some turn their nose up at me. Others ask more about my master's in forensic psychology and what it means for acting.

I've also auditioned for psychological thrillers/dramas where my character has a mental disorder. So, considering my degree and experience, I go out and do the best I can with all the information I have about the disorder. In some cases, the casting director will give me some pointers on what they are actually looking for within the disorder, but this is rare. If allowed, I will try to incorporate the information and do the sides [audition script] again, but again this is rare. In other cases, they say "thank you" and you leave. However, there have been more than a few occasions where the casting director will tell me that my choices are wrong because I didn't understand the disorder. They will go into great detail about it and be totally wrong. You don't know how many times I have played catatonic as an unmoving or fixed-position character only to be asked why I didn't move. I ask which catatonia they want: excessive motor activity or motor immobility. That, usually, ends the audition. No matter how it happens, I don't let it get to me. I am who I am and do the best I can every opportunity I get. That's all I have control over.

**I know you're based on the East Coast, Kim, and you seem to be doing great. Do you ever see yourself making the fabled move to Los Angeles?**

I would love to go out to California. It all depends on the circumstances and if that move would be the best for me. It also depends on how I would be integrated into the industry out in California—as a producer, writer, or actress.

**Hollywood puts both men and women into boxes, such as "he-man" or "hot chick," but I believe it's worse for women. Men seem to get to be more leeway in their type casting. How do you feel about that?**

That's a very difficult question to answer. I do feel that the industry still classifies women in specific roles more than the men, but it isn't solely [the industry's] fault. Ultimately, the public buys the tickets and gives the feedback via those tickets sold. If more people saw women in action films where they are the main/sole lead, the producers might be more inclined to release more of them.



**Are there any actresses you model yourself after or whose career you admire?**

In the case of my career, I want to be able to make any type of film and fill those theater seats. Angelina Jolie and Jodie Foster, both actresses I admire, have managed to fill those seats regardless of their characters. I hope to be able to do this as well in the future.

**Actresses definitely have a “glass ceiling” in the biz. They make less than men, plus their career seems to end in their fifties. But many women are moving behind the camera. Do you have a lifetime career plan?**

I do want to expand beyond acting. The industry has so many avenues to work within it, I hope to learn a bit of everything. Not necessarily so I can do it all, but so I have a better understanding of how it all comes together. Beyond that, I’m an avid writer and have dabbled with co-directing already. Two shorts I wrote, co-produced, co-directed, and starred in should be finished sometime in 2008. I also co-produced *Under the Raven’s Wing*, which was a wonderful experience.

**Let’s talk about *Under the Raven’s Wing*, your new film with Susan Adriansen. I liked the film quite a bit, and you were wonderful as Raven. How did you get involved in the project?**

I went on NYCastings.com and submitted an old headshot of mine to Susan. I got an email asking me to audition on a Wednesday in August for the character of Raven, and she emailed me audition sides to review. I remember it being the hottest day of the entire summer. I showed up with my hair in a ponytail, no make-up, a muscle tank top, and my long shorts, trying to deal with the heat. I must have looked horrible, but I sat in an air-conditioned room and auditioned anyway. It paid off in the long run.



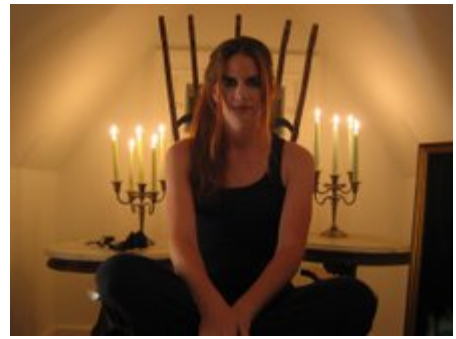
**Raven is quite a disturbed young woman. How did you approach this character? You really fleshed her out into a real person.**

Raven is such a complex and layered character that it required a lot of work for me to flesh her out. I actually sat and read the script a few times and emailed Susan a lot. I have to admit I felt bad at the time, but I wanted to understand her vision for the character as well as the film. The script had so many wonderful hints about Raven’s life, so I just fleshed out the experiences. Once I had all that information together, I opened up my DSM-IV, which is the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Psychology. I did my best to figure out what she might have been suffering from. After all that, I made a playlist of music only Raven would listen to. Before any scene, I played those songs and became the character.

**Music apparently is a quite powerful tool. I’ve talked to several other actresses that use it as part of their preparation. Can you tell us what music you used to get into Raven’s head?**

I felt that Raven would listen to Evanescence, so I went out and bought their CDs. There were so many songs that I could use, specifically “My Last Breath” and “Going Under.” I found those two and Linkin Park’s “Somewhere I Belong” were excellent in helping me prepare for the emotional roller coaster that was the character of Raven.

**Not to focus on appearances too much, but you are a beautiful young lady...and Raven looks nothing like you. Not that Raven isn't attractive, but when I saw your head shot, I had to really work to see Raven. Who designed Raven's unique make-up? I'm sure that helped you get into character as well.**



Raven has various levels to her at different stages in her life. So, the make-up had to reflect those differences. Susan actually did my make-up on the second weekend of filming. Then she worked with Chiara Fattorusso, a young make-up artist still in high school at the time, and the two created the faces of Raven. Usually, it involved making me look pale and then shocking with black everywhere else. The two of them were simply phenomenal.

This might seem very odd considering the level of the make-up, but the music was more pivotal for me to get into character. I think it had to do with the timing since I would either listen to it before the application or during. Sometimes I would run lines with Chiara, or I would already be in character and talking to Susan or Chiara as if I were Raven. Since I couldn't see the make-up, it was more Raven being made-up for her performance. The make-up to me was the finishing touch. It completed the character for me. Once that was done, I was Raven, and not Kimberly. In fact, Susan actually referred to me only as Raven once make-up was on, especially during the more vigorous and emotionally draining sequences.

**Outside of acting and writing, what are your passions, Kim? Turn-ons? Turn-offs? Hobbies?**

My passions are my family and friends. I am very blessed with a large family and friendships of 14 years or more. They help keep my passion up for my craft even when times are thin for work. They also keep me grounded when I need to be.

My hobbies are varied. I love going to Mets games...I have been a fan since I could remember. I love doing as much outdoors as possible. Heck, I bike ride, roller blade, play softball, and I even garden! I love being outside when the weather is nice enough. I love to drive as well. There is nothing like a nice long drive with friends, music, and a theme park on the horizon. I'm also an Xbox 360 gamer and play online with some friends. I love talking shop and sports as well.

My turn-ons are as different as people. I love people with wit—dry or otherwise. I adore people with intellectual capability, and I don't just mean in the academic sense of the word. Compassion, drive, patience, openness, and heart are qualities that I look for in others as well.

My turn-offs are probably very common complaints [that] a lot of other people [share]. My biggest pet peeve is if someone treats you like you're less of a human being for whatever reason. It doesn't matter what your gender, race, ethnicity, religion, etc., are—I am a human being, so treat me as such. I dislike people who talk loudly on their cell phones during a highly anticipated movie or on the Long Island Rail Road while others are trying to enjoy reading a book. Finally, I hate getting lost on those long drives I love to take.

**Who are some of your favorite filmmakers, Kim? What about your favorite films?**

There are so many filmmakers I respect and admire, like Wes Craven, James Cameron, and Sam Raimi to name a few. I really do enjoy watching Disney films a lot, especially *Lilo & Stitch*. I have a very extensive horror DVD collection right next to my *Stitch* stuffed animals and my Mets hats. Odd, right? The *Evil Dead* series was great. They made an off-Broadway musical from the first two films in the series. The first few rows of the theater seats got splattered with fake blood in the second act, and I was in the thick of it. It was awesome, and the musical was pretty hysterical, too. Other horror/thriller movies I enjoy include *Silence of the Lambs*, the *Resident Evil* series, *Underworld*, *The Bone Collector*, *28 Days Later*, and *28 Weeks Later*, to name just a few.



**Let's talk horror. Why are you such a fan?**

I love the genre for many reasons. First, it's so much fun to be a performer in a horror film for obvious reasons.

**Such as?**

You get to let loose. You get to say or do things that wouldn't normally be seen or heard in everyday society. Not to mention you get to play with fake blood a lot—just make sure it doesn't dye your hair.

**Fair enough. What else do you love about scary movies?**

Each film can make you run the gamut of emotions. I remember seeing *Nightmare on Elm Street* when I was very young. I was so scared I slept with the lights on for a long time. The movies *Saw* and *Silence of the Lambs* require you to pay attention every step of the way. The fear was not in the supernatural evil, but about darkness that lives in our society. Finally, more often than not, this genre allows one to have a campy fun time with friends.

**You mentioned you're a gamer. I'm sure that's something you have in common with our readers. What's your fave Xbox 360 game?**

Yes, I am an avid gamer. My favorite Xbox game...wow that's a tough one 'cause there are so many. I love the Xbox live arcade games like *Geometry Wars* and the classic Atari games they are re-releasing. That being said, right now I have been playing a lot of *Halo 3*, *Lego Star Wars*, *Assassins*, *Gears of War*, and baseball.

**What's your best score?**

My best score? I honestly never paid attention. On Xbox 360 you gain achievement points while playing games when you complete certain tasks. My gamer tag is kimiekat76, and I currently have an achievement score of over 10,000.

**Whoa! So, what's next on the horizon for you? Is it hard to predict due to the strike?**

*Under the Raven's Wing* is currently making the rounds at various film festivals and continues to garner critical acclaim. I've also starred in, co-produced, and wrote two shorts that are almost completed and should hit festivals in fall 2008. Beyond that, I am looking to develop two different webseries. One, which my associate Amanda Ramirez

and I are working on, is a behind-the-scenes look at developing a television series and the struggles to get it written and sold. The other one is a solo effort that's more of a crime-riddled drama which will be shot with a handheld style.

Beyond that, I continue to audition and submit for various roles. The strike is taking its toll on a lot of actors, and I hope it will come to an end soon. I just hope to continue working regardless of the genre. I love what I do and I hope to get the opportunity to entertain audiences for a long time.

**Okay, now for a real geeky question. You were in *People* magazine, in a picture with Lucy Lawless. Just how awesome was that?**

It was so much fun! There were a bunch of photos taken during the shoot. In a few of them, Lucy was standing right next to me. You know, she really isn't that tall to me...but then again, I am 5'9". The *People* magazine shoot and meeting Renee O'Connor are still two of my favorite moments.



**Are you a big fan of Xena? You'd be great if they ever decided to do a Xena movie. You could be Xena's long-lost sister!**

I have to admit I used to travel to various conventions dressed up as the character Gabrielle from *Xena*. I am very tall for the role, but I had a bunch of people who knew me and they always wanted me to dress up. I remember, once, I dressed up as the character Callisto and a few people were upset that I had switched and made their Gabrielle evil.

As far as the film, I would love to be a part of it. What fan wouldn't? I can't do the Xena yell though, but I do know all the great sidekick lines.

**One last thing. How does your family feel about you choosing acting and show business over a more stable, traditional career?**

My family has always lived by one rule: if you try your best and fail, you have done your best and that is all that matters. Deciding to put my psychology career on hold was a very difficult decision especially since I had the job offer from Riker's Island. I was so indecisive, that I actually applied and interviewed for doctoral programs as well. The day before the interview for the school I wanted, I sat down with my mother about my options. She was a four-star thespian in college, and she wrote poetry as well. If anyone could understand the pull of the entertainment industry, it was her. So, we sat down over coffee and talked about the pros and cons of what I was doing. I realized that in the psychology field, I was being forced into a box of how other people thought it should run. There was no room for change or creativity, at least from my perspective on things. I went into my interview the next day [and] basically spoke my mind about everything. Needless to say, I was rejected. I have no regrets. I did my best, and they didn't want it.

I am able to focus on my entertainment career because of what my parents have given me. They always provided guidance, assistance, or a sound voice of reason when I needed it. I am very blessed to have a very solid family that supports me no matter what I do. I just hope I can make them proud in what I can accomplish.

That being said, most members of my family can't watch my films. They say they can't get past seeing me in funny make-up, accents, or clothes. Ultimately, they always see me. I have to say that's a wonderful thing, because no matter where my career takes me, I always want them to just see me.