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# Elvira Picks Her Top 5 Women-Led Horror Movies

By Meredith Woerner ▾



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Queen of camp, priestess of the double entendres and the official “Mistress of the Dark”: Elvira was light years ahead of her time. With her iconic sky-high bouffant, black nails and tight dress, Cassandra Peterson’s spooky hostess persona is now a staple in the annals of horror.

But it wasn’t all wigs and laughs when Peterson first started out.

“When I first was Elvira, and I had that cleavage, people just *couldn't* believe it,” Peterson told *Variety*. “The station where I worked got complaints. We’d have a billboard [advertising her show] and get complaints from people driving by. People wouldn’t let me come on their show because of the cleavage. They’d asked me to wear a little panel across my boobs, which I refused to do.”

Peterson wouldn’t think of “watering down” Elvira to make her more palatable to the masses. “I know it’s just cleavage, but it’s kind of like taking away the triangle on Superman’s chest, it’s a part of who he is.”

Forty years later, a revolution of body positivity helped normalize the once-scandalous decision to show one’s décolletage on TV. “Every time I watch the Grammys, I think everybody on there has Elvira cleavage now, it’s totally fine. No one’s shocked by it. And the black nails, oh my god, I used to get looks just for my nails... Now everybody has black nails. Everybody has tons of cleavage. I love that. I think it makes women feel like, ‘I can dress any way I want to. And I’m not asking to be attacked or fired or talked down to or anything else.’ I hope I was sort of a forerunner and it helped in some weird way.”

Peterson details more of behind-the-scenes stories like this and more in her recent memoir, [“Yours Cruelly, Elvira: Memoirs of the Mistress of the Dark.”](#)



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In the book the actress also reveals her 20-year relationship with a woman. She describes herself as “sexually fluid.” Peterson told *Variety* she felt like carrying around this “big heavy duty secret” felt like it was poisoning her life, and saw the perfect opportunity to speak her truth with her own words in print. So how did the fans react?

“Fantastic. My fans loved me more than ever. Horror genre people are so dedicated, so loyal. They love me no matter what. I wasn’t worried about them. The people that didn’t like me, it turns out were horny old guys who thought they were going to end up with me someday, I guess. It’s like, ‘Hey, guys, I’ve got bad news. Even if I wasn’t with the woman, I wouldn’t dating you.’ The first weekend my book came out around 11,000 people bailed on me [online]. Just little things like, ‘Elvira you’re a liar. You’re a phony. You’re a fake.’ And then I got 60,000 *new* people who liked me even better because of coming out so it worked out great. I feel really good about it.”

But will Peterson ever retire her black bouffant?

“I think I will retire, but I do not think that Elvira will ever retire. Elvira can completely go on without me even if I die, which I will at some point, I think the character will continue to be around. I think it can kind of be like Santa Claus is to Christmas.”

Peterson sees a future for Elvira in animated films and in licensing, however she’s not entirely sure another actress can take on the role.

“I tried it. I did this television show, ‘Search for the next Elvira.’ We got hundreds and hundreds of girls auditioning and we picked one. I thought, I’ll let this person be me and we’ll send her out to parades and shopping malls, and it just didn’t work. She was very good. It wasn’t their fault. [Fans] didn’t buy it, they wanted Elvira... If I did a biopic or, say, a Broadway production. I think somebody else could definitely play me. But I don’t think that they would permanently become Elvira. Unfortunately, I’d love to have somebody do that, but I don’t think it’ll work.”

To celebrate the legacy of Elvira, and hopefully if we’re all very lucky, a musical retelling of her story, we asked the queen of the night to reveal her favorite woman-led horror films for this spooky Halloween season. Below are her picks...

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**1**

**Carrie (1976)**



Photo : Courtesy Everett Collection

It's a film mainly populated by women – Sissy Spacek, Piper Laurie, Amy Irving, Nancy Allen and Betty Buckley. As if being a teenage girl isn't already hard enough, throw in a religious zealot of a mother and some taunting, female bullies and it's no wonder Carrie White develops telekinetic powers to put them in their place.

## 2 Dracula's Daughter (1936)



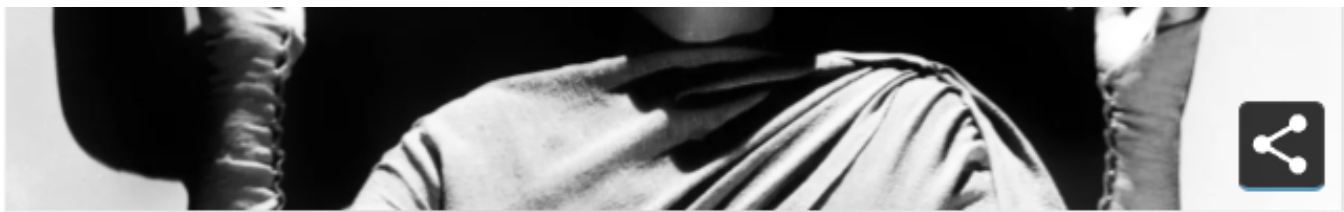


Photo : Courtesy Everett Collection

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Dracula's Daughter shows Daddy how it's done! This 1936 female vampire movie with serious lesbian overtones was way ahead of its time!

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### **3** Rosemary's Baby (1968)



Photo : Courtesy of Paramount Pictures

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Not only does this diabolical chiller about a satanic cult star the waif-like Mia Farrow as Beelzebub's mom, it also features the brilliant Ruth Gordon in a tour-de-force performance.

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## 4 **The Exorcist (1973)**



Photo : ©Warner Bros/Courtesy Everett C

Linda Blair may have given us the scariest movie of all time. She's just a little girl but this movie proves there's nothing more frightening than kids!

## 5 **Attack of the 50 Foot Woman (1958)**





Photo : Courtesy Everett Collection


A class-sick! So much woman, so little plot.

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