

NOW SHOWING

Filmmaking has always been in **Jeffrey Hollins's** blood. When Hollins was a kid, he and his brothers loved shows like “Star Trek,” “The Wild Wild West” and “The Mod Squad,” and soon they were inspired to choreograph their own movies, writing scripts and filming with a Super 8 camera.

“I love acting,” Hollins said, adding with a laugh, “I love make-believe, crying when I’m not sad. It’s fun.”

The Marrero, LA Branch 4323 member started going to acting auditions for movies in New Orleans with his brother Tim in the early 1990s. They appeared as “extras” (nonspeaking background roles) in some films that were shooting locally, and Hollins also was cast in a supporting role in the 1994 thriller movie “Cut Up.”

Along the way, Hollins adopted the stage name “King Jeff,” simply because it “looks cool on screen,” he says. “I wanted something that said I was good at this.”

The 16-year carrier would get callbacks from auditions, though many times, that required a trip to Los Angeles to meet with a director. “I’d have to pass on it because I had to work,” he said.

But that didn’t deter Hollins, who didn’t want to stop at acting—he and Tim created their own production company, JeTi Films (an acronym of the first letters in their first names), in 1992. When their other brother, **Greg Hollins**, known as “Gorio,” an Ocean Springs, MS Branch 3827 member, left the Air Force, the three joined forces.

They began going to post-production facilities, also called edit houses, and renting equipment. The crew would book time and frequently shelled out money, only to have to wait for others

who went over the allotted time.

“It got old,” Hollins said. So, they began buying their own camera, sound and editing equipment—in that order.

“Once we started doing all our own stuff, we started producing,” he said. They acted in their own feature and short films and would hire people to play other roles.

(Sadly, his brother Tim died in 2006, but he continues to work with his other brother, Gorio.)

Their movies usually are classified under the genres of action, horror, thriller or mystery. Films “Bang” and “Grip: A Criminal’s Story” were shown in theaters, and others such as “The Murder Men” and “Shallow Creek Cult” were distributed on video and DVD in the United States. “Bang” also had video and DVD distribution worldwide.

Eventually, to get his name out there, Hollins decided to put money into other, bigger-budget films (like 2016 music documentary “Bayou Maharajah”) by coming on board as a producer through crowdfunding sites. “I don’t want to just contribute,” he says. “I want to be involved as a producer and get my bona fides.”

That’s how he recently got involved as an executive producer with Mahal Empire Productions’ trilogy of horror films, beginning with “Attack of the



Jeffrey “King Jeff” Hollins

Unknown,” in which he also has a role as a police officer who faces aliens. The sci-fi movie premiered in Las Vegas in August (though Hollins did not attend the premiere because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic), with the two follow-up movies, “Bridge of the Doomed” and “Bloodthirst,” likely to be released in 2021.

After signing on as an executive producer, Hollins contacted the Mahal brothers’ production team, and told them that he also was an actor. They said that after filming in Los Angeles, they were going to shoot in Las Vegas, and soon wrote Hollins into the script.

Hollins doesn’t like to fly, so “I drove three 10-hour days to Vegas” from Louisiana, he said.

When he got there, Michael and Sonny Mahal asked, “Are you ready to get in a \$2 million helicopter?” The carrier thought they were joking, but sure enough, Hollins’s scene was to be filmed in the air.



Left: “Tales From the Murder Room” cast (from left) Gorio, King Jeff and Charlie Hollins Jr.
Below: A poster for “Attack of the Unknown”

“I didn’t tell them my phobia [of flying],” he said, adding that luckily his character was supposed to be injured at that point in the movie, so he was able to incorporate his fear into his role.

Some of his scenes from the helicopter were done on the ground afterward and later edited to appear to be in flight. And the carrier paid attention to how it all worked.

Hollins, who did not go to film school, said that during all of his time on movie sets, he observes closely what is being done on set by directors, actors and producers and tries to absorb the knowledge. In addition, he watches a lot of “making of” features to learn more about technical aspects such as green screens and lenses.

Hollins’s favorite actor is Bruce Lee, whose story and philosophy the carrier said “changed my life. He’s an underdog. Hollywood didn’t want anything to do with him.” Some of his favorite directors, Stephen Spielberg, Quentin Tarantino, Jerry Lee Lewis, Sergio Leone and Spike Lee, also influenced his craft. “They all stood out for having their own styles,” the carrier said.

Recently, he and Gorio created a TV series called “Tales From the Murder Room,” in which they star. It’s available on Amazon Prime, which also houses some of the brothers’ previous films.

“We love interrogation scenes,” Hollins said, and the anthology series depicts fictional Louisiana homicide detectives as they interview suspects, victims and witnesses to solve cases. It has the same characters as their 1999 movie, “The Murder Men.”

They have made two four-episode seasons, but have postponed filming the third because of the pandemic. “We’re revved up to do Season Three,” Hollins says, and they will aim to get a “safe set” certification signifying that they are observing proper COVID-19

protocols like sanitizers, masks and social distancing. Hollins said that they also had planned to do a feature sci-fi movie, but that plan also was squashed.

The carrier loves working with his brother because they think alike, though their working styles are like “yin and yang.” Their main rule is not to step on each other’s toes. It’s serious business, but also a family get-together, he says.

“He is good with all the technical stuff,” Hollins said of Gorio. “He makes the sound perfect. He learns the camera stuff, then teaches me.” For his part, the carrier likes to do the writing, put together the story board, and come up with shots and angles. They try to do these things simultaneously to save time on set.

Seeing a project come together is a unique thrill for Hollins. “When I write something, it’s blank paper,” he says. “Writing it and then seeing it at an editing table—it’s a trip. It’s out of your head, then on the paper, and then from the paper to the screen.”

Hollins has made his mark in his home state as well. He was the first filmmaker inducted onto the Louisiana Division of the Arts’ Artist Roster, which promotes performing and visual artists.

Hollins also was commissioned by New Orleans Mayor Marc Morial in 1997 to teach a filmmaking course to at-risk children ages 12 to 15. The course involved teaching kids how to make a documentary about jazz musician Wynton Marsalis. The youngsters came in knowing nothing about filmmaking. Hollins then taught them dos and don’ts about camera work, sound work, editing and music.

“I would let them pick the shots,” he said, then he would sit back and watch them. “I felt like a mother bird watching them fly away.”

Hollins was mostly able to keep his pastime under wraps at the post office, until a co-worker at-

tached a *Times-Picayune* article about one of his movies to the time clock. Arnold Mosley, a retired co-worker and former Branch 4323 member, remembers Hollins fondly, calling him “a great guy,” and adding that Hollins always made his co-workers laugh by telling jokes, and has long been very interested in writing and in films.

Hollins, whose company’s projects have garnered film awards at festivals across the country, hopes to eventually make filmmaking his full-time job.

“I haven’t done a feature film since 2012,” he noted, adding, “I’d love a three-picture deal and be able to take my time because [backers] have faith in what I can do.” The carrier also has an idea for a movie that he’d then be interested in turning into a TV series.

“I’ve enjoyed the ride,” Hollins says of his film career. “It’s who I am and what I do. I wouldn’t trade it for the world.” **PR**

