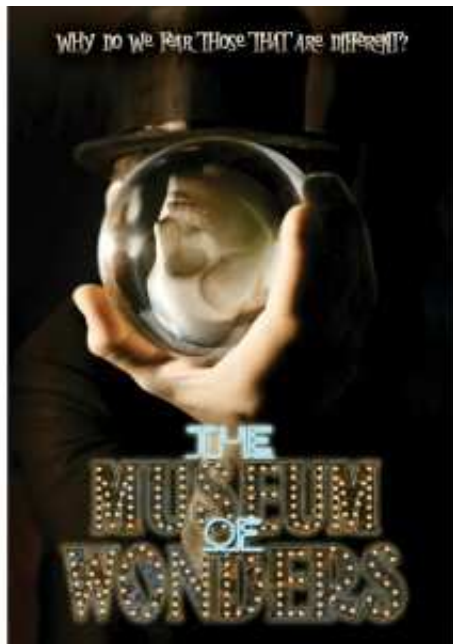


# The Museum of Wonders



(<http://www.dvdsnapshot.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/museumofwonders.jpg>)

(<http://www.dvdsnapshot.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/museumofwonders.jpg>) **Official Synopsis:**

When the beautiful dancer Salome learns that the dwarf circus owner Marcel has just received an inheritance, she marries the lovesick, diminutive performer. All the while planning to steal his fortune and run off with her lover, strong man Sansone. When Marcel and fellow performers discover her evil plan, they band together to carry out a beautiful revenge.

In this theatre, *The Museum of Wonders*, frozen somewhere between reality and a dream, we find ourselves facing a mirror reflecting our souls, through the embodiment of our utmost fears. Perhaps we wouldn't stare in amazement if we thought for just one moment, that these masks... these characters, are simply us.

## Our Take:

It's not by mistake that Domiziano Cristopharo opens **The Museum of Wonders** with a face in the moon clearly inspired by film pioneer Georges Méliès. It reminds the audience that with creativity and the sparest of cash, any filmmaker can stamp of personal vision upon a movie.

Essentially a retelling of Tod Browning's **Freaks** set among a side-show experimental theater company: Treacherous beauty wiles her way into the heart of a dwarf performer and, upon betraying him, faces the wrath of his true love and the extended family of oddities. There's still some lovingly photographed physical deformities (and the world's scrawniest strongman), but these sword-swallowers, bearded ladies, mimes and the rest make up a self-selected family of outsiders to which she doesn't really belong. Is it any wonder her transgressions must be punished?

The mannered dialogue has a formality designed to remind you of the philosophical, obtuse poetry of Neo-Realist film. Everyone speaks in a kind of obvious "profound non sequitur" that reminds you this is all theater (but this dialogue would never fly in one today). The story seems less propelled than adrift down its own

river, more concerned with building this world than rushing its story. Along with Méliès' **La Voyage Dans La Lune**, the visuals evoke a perverse and bargain-basement Cirque du Soleil. Along with hints of silent film, Grand Guignol, and the Nine Inch Nails video "Closer;" **Cabaret, The Cook, The Thief, His Wife, and Her Lover**, and even 1989's art-house **Dr. Caligari** are evoked here through strong choices and art direction. (While unrated, this is one for adults.)

As surreal and dreamy as the visuals, the actors vary in skill. Many being real "freaks" and circus performers, they can hold attention just by being on screen. As a company, though, they convey an overall style that suggests a strong "actor's director." Domiziano Cristopharo is clearly a talent to watch, and proves to have a strong personal vision. For a casual viewer this may seem an "art-house mess." It can frustrate over the top choices. But focus past the capital-A "Art" non sequitur dialogue and stop-start pacing and the low-budget creativity of **The Museum of Wonders** weaves a spell through striking images, vivid style, and beautiful music.

This theater would never make money in our real world. Luckily it lives in a dreamworld of aesthetic outsiders.

### Special Features:

The disc is fairly bare-bones, and had moments of visual artifacting during the credits. Stereo Italian audio with automatic English subtitles and presented in full-framed 16×9, **The Museum of Wonders** has three extras:

- *Murrugun The Mystic*: A six minute performance by the sword-swallower from the film
- 18 minutes of "bloopers" and outtakes
- 9 minutes of deleted scenes

### Conclusion:

Domiziano Cristopharo's **The Museum of Wonders** has confident vision, over the top style, and artistic intention to burn. It's also a frustratingly over-the-top remake of Tod Browning's **Freaks** that won't hold appeal for many audiences.

### Overall Picture:

Movie: **B-**

Extras: **C**

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Published on April 24, 2012

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