

Posted Wednesday, September 28th, 2011

### **The Sex Merchants**

The best thing that can be said about the current crop of do-it-yourself movies – genre flicks that look home-made and feature Z-list talent — is that they tend to be blessedly short. No amount of bargain-basement gore, sex or special effects can turn a movie that wants to be 50 minutes long into a better picture that's 20 or 30 minutes longer. The best amateurs know their limits and abide by them. Even at 68 minutes, "**The Sex Merchants**" attempts to make up for a lack of good ideas with a lot soft-core sex and interminable nude modeling sessions. The movie's punchline arrives, appropriately enough, as the closing credits begin to roll, but, by then, "The Sex Merchants" has runs its course. I only mention this because some of DIY titles I receive from niche distributors are surprisingly watchable and the chances taken by unknown filmmakers pay off in interesting ways.

In "The Sex Merchants," Peter (Tyronne L. Roosevelt) is a photographer who appears to make a decent living photographing models for the fetish magazine, Esoteric. He's addicted to cocaine and post-session sex with his models — Jackie Stevens ("The Insatiable Ironbabe") and Mia Cobia ("Feeding Frenzy") — who couldn't possibly be more gullible. In addition to his cocaine "jones," Peter is unable to shake his dependency on his dominating mother, wherein lies the punchline. The problem is that the photographs he takes aren't even as hot as the ones used to tease amateur porn sites on the Internet and his publisher wants to cut costs. As a photographer who never leaves his loft apartment, Peter likely will find it impossible to repay his debt to his coke dealer. Unfortunately, there isn't much more to "The Sex Merchants" than that.

I'm just spit-balling here, but writer/director John Nifflheim might enjoyed more success if he had modeled Peter after the real-life fetish photographer, Richard Kern, who possesses the uncanny ability to coax young woman to strip down to their britches. After getting to know them a bit, he convinces them to pose in all sorts of uncomfortable positions or, maybe, allow him to photograph them brushing their teeth, gargling or arm wrestling. He also is known for lying between the legs of his subjects, who are wearing panties, and taking up-skirt shots of them. Admittedly, this makes him sound like a dirty old man, and maybe he is. Kern also is one of the best known artists in his field, well represented in the world of coffee-table books and niche websites. The women he shoots don't look as if they need to be coaxed into revealing themselves physically and personally, and the photographs are about as unpretentious as they can be and still cost money to publish. What makes Peter a perv and Kern an artist? The answer to that question possibly could provide the foundation for a movie a thousand times better than "The Sex Merchants." – *Gary Dretzka*