

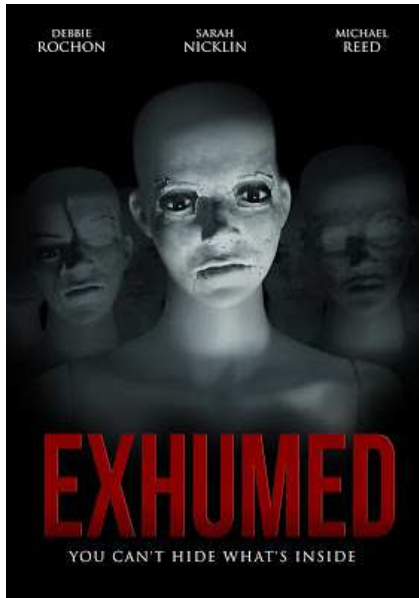
Indie Horror Films

All genres of suspense, terror, and horror will be reviewed by Richard Gary. His address to send preview copies supplied upon request to rbf55@msn.com.

Thursday, September 5, 2013

DVD Review: Exhumed

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Exhumed

Directed by Richard Griffin
Scorpio Rising
Wild Eye Releasing
90 minutes, 2011 / 2013
www.WildEyeReleasing.com
www.MVDvisual.com

Wow. Just...wow.

This is going to be a tough review to write because there is so much I could discuss, but to do so would be to give away too much of this thriller. But here we go.

The last Richard Griffin film I saw was a horror sex comedy called *The Disco Exorcist* [HERE], though made the same year, it is the polar opposite of this one, a dark, black and white noir set piece. Think of when Woody Allen goes all Bergman, except this remains interesting, from shadowy beginning to blacker end.

The press release posits this as like a Hammer-like film, but I humbly disagree. To me, it is more reminiscent of a twisted gothic noir Tennessee Williams, or more something more equivalent to *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* (1962) or *Hush... Hush Sweet Charlotte* (1964). Like these latter two, we are focused into the mysterious goings-on in a house where you just know it's going to get bad. Also similar is the use of high-contrasting black and white, used here more effectively than I have seen in a long time.

During one of the two commentary tracks, director Richard Griffin talks about how nearly everything clicked during the 11 days shoot, and it shows in the final product. He also states how he tends to muck around with scripts, but only made one (fine) addition to the original, by Guy Benoit. It is a story that beginning fuzzy as to what is going on and the possibilities of why and who everyone is in relation to each other, but as time goes on it focuses, while still leaving little mysteries scatter about like its characters.

The film starts out as a "huh?" mystery, as you wonder about the relationship of the five house members, who are stirred up by the introduction of a sixth. Each is distinct in their personality, each

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one bringing their own baggage, and all brought together for reasons that become clearer as the film plays out.

There is what could be considered leading roles, but honestly, this is a true ensemble cast, some of whom are part of the Griffin troupe of Rhode Island theatrical players, and others bring new blood (pun intended) to the stalwarts.

Let's start with the somewhat peripheral yet pivotal characters. Lance, played by Rich Tretheway, who had a hysterical turn in *The Disco Exorcist* as a badly accented (Italian?) janitor, (un)wise in the ways of the spiritual, Here, however, he is a lonely and pathetic unkempt man living in the house, rarely seen out of his gray sweats and messy room. Where he is the "low" personality, Rocki, personified by the exotic and beautiful Evalena Marie, is the most hyper and spunky resident. She is the Loki character, the trickster and mischief maker, relative to the reest. Evalena keeps her quirky without being cloying or annoying, for which I am grateful. Well done.



Evalena Marie



Michael Reed and Sarah Nicklin

Michael Reed and Sarah Nicklin, the stars of the aforementioned *The Disco Exorcist*, appear as core players this as well. The married-in-real-life couple appear in many of Griffin's films, though just after this was filmed, they moved from Rhode Island to California to strike out on a more – er – professional (?) career to increasing success. Again opposite of their previous "skins," Michael has a bit of a subtle role as Chris, the newcomer to the house, but will he stay or go? Or both? Sarah's Laura has been emotionally scarred terribly; she is now child-like and

somewhat innocent, but definitely warped. Sarah has some great scenes where she spits out some wonderful dialog with just the right pitch and tones.

Giving an incredibly strong and nuanced performance, possibly the best in the film but only by a hair, is Michael Thurber. While apparently second in command within this strange group, he is also somewhat set apart from the rest, and probably has the most realistic view of the situation. His moves are subtle and relatively insurgent, such as the whole bizarre mannequin fixation, but Michael is interesting to watch. Bob Fosse-like, every movement of the actor's body says something at all times.



Michael Thurber



Debbie Rochon

Then there is the unofficial matriarch, played strongly, scarily and at the same time with an undercurrent of sheer insanity (through desire of power? Self-righteousness? Zealousness? Fear?), as rendered by scream queen icon indie goddess, Debbie Rochon. Much of the more than 200 films she has made have been horror comedies, but she certainly proves her dramatic chops here. Her performance is nothing less than stellar.

It is hardly surprising to me that a number of awards have come out of this film, such as Rochon winning Best Actress at the Pollygrind Film Festival, Nicklin being nominated for Best Actress, plus many other festival nods. For a film that is dark in both story and image— no, I mean that literally as there is a lack of lighting, and while it's easy to make out what's happening, the level of shadow is extreme – this is just an example why this film deserves to be seen as a full theater project, rather than assumed as just another oddball indie film.

Even the extras are worthwhile. The making-of, shot by Reed and Nicklin and edited by Griffin, is 46 minutes long, and follows the taping nearly all 11 days. It is kept interesting throughout, seeing how much work, and also how much fun is had by the cast, getting it done. There are two commentaries, both also noteworthy. Watch the second one first, which is Griffin, Thurber and one of the producers. There is very little wasted time, but is nicely focused on the filming processes and interesting anecdotes. The second one to watch is with Griffin and the writer Benoit, who discuss the process of getting the film from idea to completion. You'd think to watch it the other way around, but this way is better for this particular flick.

I say this as a compliment: Griffin is going to have to work freakin' hard to top this one, and I look forward to future projects to see him do just that. That being said, when I look at the trailer for, say, *Hush...Hush Sweet Charlotte*, I believe this film is actually better, in acting, writing and look, as well as effectiveness. One of the best films I've seen this year.