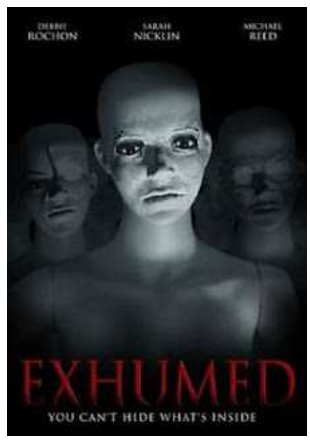




JUL 25, 2013

REVIEW: EXHUMED



The blinking cursor. It's been on the screen for a long time. Because I have no idea what to write. Because I have no idea what it is I've just watched. Part black-and-white art film, part David Lynch-esque eccentricity, part circa Night of the Hunter and The Innocents golden-age cinema, Exhumed is nearly beyond proper description. What it is, is certainly an examination of damaged psyche.

Debbie Rochon, the hardest working actress in all of horror showbiz, plays the Governess - the matriarchal head of a demented household populated by a band of eccentrics and misfits. When a "room" in their house opens up, a notice is placed at the local college advertising space for rent. When Chris (Michael Reed...of The Disco Exorcist!) responds to the ad, one of the household's occupants, Laura (Sarah Nicklin), becomes smitten with him. This doesn't sit well with the Governess, so she utilizes her own brand of "rules" in order to keep control.

Meanwhile, you've got Matthew (Nathaniel Sylva), the father (?), whose favorite past time has him down in the cellar with his mannequins, finding the right positions so they all perfectly encapsulate their household occupant's counterpart - right down to Chris' mysterious black eye, or his extended wine glass. When you add Rocki, a smart-ass siren who walks around in a slinky silk robe, and Lance, a seeming man child, you've got the dysfunctional family to end all dysfunctional families.



Except for Chris, every character in Exhumed is some level of insane. And though they all accept their familial roles, they aren't a "family" per se - more like a group of deranged individuals who somehow found each other and have managed to make a home. You've got the quibbling husband and wife dynamic, as well as the older and younger sister relationship, in which the former encourages the younger to exit her shell and experience



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more of the "adult" aspects of life. Only they're all out of their fucking minds, so, these dynamics are pushed to nearly merciless limits.

The most interesting parts of the film find Laura lost in her own made-up world where Chris wears a fine tuxedo and speaks to her as if he were Cary Grant. Really, her mind creates a world for her plucked from a film right out of the 1930s - even down to the antiquated (perhaps library) musical choices. Cigarette smoke smolders and the two share a rather beautiful bond; this is the world in which Laura wants to exist, not the "real" one, in which Chris lies - quite dead - in her bed.

Shot beautifully and confidently in black and white (utilizing color only for flashback sequences, of which there are many), director Richard Griffin (*The Disco Exorcist* again!) never hesitates to put forth his vision for how this film should look and how its characters should convey their own unique brands of psychosis. The Governess, for instance, isn't afraid to brandish a knife or a hammer to dispatch any unwanted guests, and Laura isn't afraid of a little... necrophilia...

Exhumed is just odd - there's no getting around that. It's flawed, but impulsively watchable. Even as the acting teeters between weak and just fine, and even as the film threatens to get lost in its own style as it occasionally becomes a bit heavy-handed, you do want to keep watching. It's the most fucked-up family you'll have cared about since your own.



A filmmaker's strength can shine through the lowest of budgets, regardless of whether his or her film is a success. Confidence and a steady hand are always obvious, and Richard Griffin has both. It is a decidedly far more subtle approach for the filmmaker than some of his previous efforts, and it's one I wish had been provided with just a bit more funding. The cast here is mostly fine, but a better one could have propelled this to the next level.

Still, check it out if you're in the mood for something dark and a little bleak. It's the stuff of fever nightmares.

Posted by TEOS at 12:00 AM



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