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As I am a big fan of the original *Showgirls*. I was pretty excited when I heard that arguably the hottest dancer from the original was putting together a follow-up. That being said, I began to get concerned when I read the title and began to wonder what it meant. Is Penny from Heaven? Does the copy editor from the production company not understand how to use apostrophes? It got me quite confused and should have been a warning as to what was coming. When I finally got the DVD, a second red flag went up when I saw the running time that pushes the two and a half hour mark. As a rule, I don't generally like long movies but ironically the original is over two hours and thoroughly enjoyable so I soldiered on hoping that writer/director/editor/star Rena Riffel had the chops to bring back the campy charm of the first one even without the budget, the cast of established character actors, and the satiric tone that made it a cult classic.

The plot is a real trip. Riffel took some of the main elements from the original and worked them into a bizarre journey of the lead character of Penny and her quest for fame in a bargain basement TV show called Stardancers. The movie opens with Penny and James (Glenn Plummer reprising his character of James) still living in Vegas but Penny has bigger aspirations. She leaves James and hits the road to follow her dreams. She is soon picked up by a suitcase-stealing jerk with a pompadour (Dewey Weber also reprising his role). Penny pulls a gun on him, they make out, and he steals her suitcase. Destitute and desperate, Penny runs into a trio of weirdos and makes off with a big haul of cash after the female in the trio murders the other two and is killed. On the lam, Penny winds up in a weird mansion, changes her name to Helga, and begins a relationship



2011 - 145m.

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with a sleazy guy named Godhardt (Peter Stickles) who becomes her manager and eventually screws her over. Penny also gets involved with a Russian dancer named Katya (Shelley Michelle) and they have a relationship that is somewhat similar to Nomi and Cristal from the original. Eventually, Penny gets her shot as the lead in Stardancer and all is good in the world as she sets her sights on Broadway to continue her adventures.

Riffel was clearly influenced by John Waters, David Lynch, and Paul Verhoeven while trying to come up with her own bizarre homage to the movie that gave her a taste of success. This crazy mix of influences definitely gives the movie a unique flavour that somehow held my interest as it kept getting weirder and weirder. Although the production is very, very low budget and many of the actors are very inexperienced, Riffel kept me engaged as she still has a rocking body and she plays the character as a self-aware clever idiot. I can't deny that this was a slog to sit through for two and a half hours but there are enough *Showgirls* references and whacked-out scenes that come out of nowhere that I was intrigued throughout. Some of the main set pieces include a lesbian love scene in a pool where Riffel does her best to replicate Elizabeth Berkley's sexual workout and a scene where Michelle smears face cream on her face in a manner that brings to mind Diane Ladd's breakdown in *Wild at Heart*.

While it would be difficult for me to recommend this movie, I did find it to be a unique oddity. Had Riffel assembled a more competent cast and received some help in the creative department, this could have been much better. A more seasoned director would have eliminated some of the glaring filmmaking no-no's (crossing the line, etc.) and a more experienced editor could have taken the mammoth running time down to a more manageable 90 minutes or so. It is plagued with sound and lighting problems typical of microbudget films but the movie is so long that I eventually stopped noticing them. I also wish that there was more of Glenn Plummer as I thought his character was funny in the original and hoped for more than his ten minutes of screen time considering he is top billed in this. Regardless, *Showgirls 2* is certainly intriguing and fans of bad movies will find lots to talk about. I was hoping for a lot more than trailer trash aspirations for Penny but Riffel has a surreal sensibility that makes me curious as to what she has up her sleeve in the future. As with the original, you really need to have a certain mindset to get something out of

this movie. If not, you will think it a complete disaster.
(Josh Pasnak, 11/3/13)

Directed By: Rena Riffel.

Written By: Rena Riffel.

Starring: Rena Riffel, Peter Stickles, Shelley Michelle,
Greg Travis.