

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.

Tuesday, December 24, 2013

DVD Review: Caesar and Otto's Deadly Xmas

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Images from the Internet



Caesar & Otto's Deadly Xmas

Directed by David Campfield

4ourth Horizon Cinema

83 minutes, 2012 / 2013

www.caesarandotto.com

www.WildEyeReleasing.com

www.MVDvisual.com

This film has been compared to the Three Stooges and Abbott & Costello, but it really is a bit closer to the *Dumb and Dumber* franchise. Not a judgment call, I'm just sayin'.

Caesar DeNovio (director David Campfield) and his half-brother Otto (Paul Chomicki) live together in a squalid apartment, the former wanting to be an actor in the worst way (which he is), and latter is, well, a slovenly man who always has a 2-day beard stubble (and not in the *Miami Vice* kind of way).

Between the two of them, their IQs are probably double digits. Mind you, I grew up in Bensonhurst, so I'm familiar with the type.

It seems that Caesar has an obsessive fear of Mr. Coca-Cola....I mean Santa. His grandpa (played by Troma kingpin Lloyd Kaufman) played some mind games with him when he was just a tyke, and he's been terrorized since. Of course, he gets hired to play the man in the red suit. What to do, what to do... And now there's a disgruntled Santa (Deron Miller), whose name is Damien, of course, who is out to kill Santas, and has his sights on you-know-who. This all involves an evil company named Xmas, so naturally, this is a [fill in name of this film].

Yes, there are lots of Christmas themed horror films since the likes of 1946's *It's a Wonderful Life* (yeah, it's a horror: a ghost scares a man into believing he's never being born, including his young brother drowning), but an evil Santa with an ax seems to be a key plot turn. Also like Abbott and Costello, this is part of a series of both features and shorts with the same characters. This film is the only part of the collection I've seen other than the trailers, so I will stick with this one.

This is similar to many two-man buddy pix over the years, actually. Caesar is thin like Norton, Abbott and Laurel, and Otto is a large man, like Kramden,

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Caesar (David Campfield) and Otto (Paul Choricki)

Costello and Hardy. Otto is childlike and dumb, like Norton, Costello and Laurel, and Caesar is a self-imposed leader who not as smart as he actually thinks he is, like Kramden, Costello and Hardy. Caesar is fey like Costello, Laurel and one could argue, like Norton. You see, they're sort of playing against types, where the small one is the obnoxious one, and the heavy one is the goof. Saying that, you could also say that Caesar is similar to Lewis (could almost be his son...or perhaps

Eddie Deezen), though Otto is nowhere like Martin.

The one flaw with this film, or should I say the characters, is that even though Caesar resembles all these bullies, the others are still lovable. Caesar is shrill and uncompromising. The others had a heart under their gruffness, but not as much Caesar. Otto is definitely a more loveable-yet-unrequited guy, yet he's so ultra-Oscar Madison in the unkempt department, that he doesn't necessarily seem like someone you'd want to hang with. Hopefully, as time goes on, this will evolve. Even Bugs Bunny was obnoxious in some of his earlier films ("Ain't I a stinker?"), before being whitewashed in the late '50s.

One of the joys about this film is the myriad of cameos that run throughout. I've already mentioned Kaufman, and then there's Linnea Quigley as an agent who gets to revive an infamous scene in one of her earliest films. Brinke Stevens reprises a role from an earlier Caesar and Otto release, Joe Estevez makes a hysterical appearance as himself, sorta, the amazing Debbie Rochon shows up for a quick comic turn as a clueless emergency operator, and even Felissa Rose, the main character of 1983's *Sleepaway Camp*, has a bewigged and unrecognizable romp. Oh, and Robert D'zar appears (uncredited) during the funny end credits (stick around for 'em).

Another reason to watch is the sheer volume of references to other films in the genre. While I consider myself a horror maven, I admit that I lean more towards the monster / alien / supernatural area than the slasher, so I am grateful for director Campfield's commentary, where he points many of them out. I recognized all the films he mentioned, though I haven't seen many of them since the '80s.

This is a comedy of the most base, child-like, gross, pandering type, but in the context of the film, most of it works, and I laughed through the film. Some of it is Adam Sandler level, but in this case it is funny (don't think I ever even cracked a smile on a Sander disaster). There's a lot of low-budget self-references which are hysterical, such as the use of incredibly obvious blue-screen, which makes some of the comments made all the funnier. The blood and violence is cartoonish, making it somewhat palpable, such as a guy who keeps having his arms cut off and surgically reattached (similar to a character he played in an earlier film). Then Caesar is always beating up Otto (to the point of annoyance), surely a reference (homage?) to the Three Stooges, whose shorts are also a good indicator of the humor. The female lead, Summer Furguson, looks realistic, like she could have come from next door, which is always refreshing. Don't get me wrong, there are some incredibly beautiful women here, too, and even a requisite topless shot for a second.

An amusingly confusing thing is that while the film takes place in Bakersfield, California (I'm sure there's a joke in that alone, that I am missing), including flashbacks to childhood, many of the characters have (purposeful) Long Island accents. Another of the many bizarre choices Campfield makes that gives this a unique edge while borrowing from so much.

Lots of cool extras come with the DVD, including all the Caesar and Otto trailers and some from Wild Eye Releasing, which have been reviewed here. There are also a Behind the Scenes Featurette, some alternative takes, and a couple of short films: "Otto's First Job" and "Pigzilla." Included as well is an excellent short called "The Perfect Candidate," where Joe Estevez (again, playing a version of himself) is picked by a cabal to run for president (since his brother played one). Again D'zar shows up, this time credited. It really is quite funny. There are two commentaries just for this short.

For the main feature, there are three – count 'em, three – commentaries. I listened to the first one with Campfield, but I honestly just did not have time to watch the other two, one with the producer, and the other with the cast. While I enjoyed the film, it's rare that *any* film deserves this much of a time commitment. Perhaps at some time I will be able to get to them.

At the end of the film, they announce the next one, *Caesar and Otto's Paranormal Halloween* (though it's not even listed on IMDB yet). I'm looking forward to it. So, if you get the chance, check out the Websites listed above because you really don't even need to wait until next holiday season to enjoy it. And remember, when you order it, to keep the X in Xmas.

Posted by **Robert Barry Francos** at 12:01 AM

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