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"A sinister cabal of superior writers."

DVD Review: *The Disco Exorcist*

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It is 1979 and blithely charming narcissist Rex Romanski (Michael Reed) spots sultry Rita Marie (Ruth Sullivan) across the disco floor. Dancing inevitably leads to hot sex and they meet up at the club again the next night. But Rex's eye is already roaming and he makes contact with the woman of his dreams, pornstar Amoreena Jones (Sarah Nicklin). Rita Marie doesn't take rejection well; scorned, she unleashes hell in the form of a voodoo curse. Before he knows what's happening, Rex is surrounded by murderously possessed women and ultimately finds himself at an orgy being attacked by zombies Rita Marie has raised from the local cemetery. An impromptu exorcism is called for, though it might not be a lasting success...

The Disco Exorcist (2011) is Rhode Island director Richard Griffin's ode to '70s exploitation and as such is difficult to criticize. What it does, it does very well... the question is whether it's actually worth doing. Although it's shot on digital video, cinematographer Jill Poisson (along with some post-production enhancement) has caught the look of '70s exploitation perfectly – the garish day-glo colours, the overuse of star filters, the slightly overlit cheap sets dressed with lava lamps and black velvet paintings. This movie has a kind of visual authenticity lacking in



Grindhouse, Robert Rodriguez and Quentin Tarantino's similar attempt to honour the sleaze of bygone days.

The cast for the most part achieves a perfect balance between playing straight and mocking the period's cheesy acting. The three leads in particular, and a brief turn by theatre actor Michael Thurber as an amusing stand-in for Anton LaVey, indicate that regional filmmaker Griffin definitely has talent. For the most part, within its limited intentions, the movie is well-directed and edited. Gore and makeup effects are effective... it's all very much like a lost grindhouse movie someone dug out of a forgotten basement.

Perhaps, in a way, it's too successful. Pastiche is a tricky thing. Too faithful to its inspiration, and what's the point? Too mocking, and why bother because condescension towards what's being parodied may seem wasted effort. There are many reasons why some of us enjoy watching low-budget exploitation movies: sometimes they actually overcome their limitations with imagination; sometimes they're illuminating about the time and culture they rise out of; and sometimes they're actually entertaining in their awfulness, which makes them good party viewing. *The Disco Exorcist* aims for the latter, trying to be funny by being bad, but in an affectionate way. To some degree, it succeeds, but the script (by Tony Nunes) isn't as funny as it needs to be, so as a viewer you fall back on the narrative to maintain interest.

Continued on the next page

Page 1 — [Page 2](#)

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