

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.

Friday, October 5, 2012

DVD Review: Terror of Dracula

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Images from the Internet



Terror of Dracula

Directed by Anthony DP Mann

World Wide Multi-Media (WMMM)

100 minutes, 2012

wmm.info/

MVDvisual.com

In the DIY world, if someone won't do it for you, take it into your own hands. Can't get a gig? Get some bands, hire a hall and equipment, and put on your own showcase. Can't get a record deal, even from the indies? Put it out yourself. Fixated on 19th Century literature and want to make a film about Sherlock Holmes or Count Dracula? Get some likeminded friends together who need some exposure and, as they say in Canada, *get 'er done*.

Oh, I may have forgotten to mention that *Terror of Dracula* is a Canadian film, based in the lovely (seriously) granite-capital of Kingston, Ontario, a "place I know right well" (to quote the song "Leaving of Liverpool").

So, Anthony DP Mann, along with Bill Bossert, wrote a screenplay supposedly meant to be accurate to the original 1897 Bram Stoker novel, and then Mann added himself to the main role, and also directed the film, such as he had done with his previous two films, *Sherlock Holmes and the Shadow Watchers* and *Canucla* (aka *Dracula in Canada*). I have not seen these others yet, but would be willing.

As the moving picture show begins, we are presented with title cards, explaining that this release predates most the others, including the Hammer Films, and it has been restored. This is a nice touch, as this was obviously shot on digi, and just released this year. Not a complaint though; just the opposite, as it was appreciated.

With the help of the city's local Theatre Five troupe (whom I had seen perform a few times in the late 1980s). Actually, I got excited when I saw that Dr. Seward, who runs the institution that houses Renfield, and is the father of the Count's first on-land British victim, Lucy, is played by Dick Miller. However, it was not *the* Dick Miller. Oh, well, unlife goes on. Apparently, none of the other cast members have any film credits other than either this, or Mann's previous *Sherlock* release.

Oh, there's lots of other unintentionally amusing bits – and again, this is not meant as a dig, just the eye of a viewer of many indie films – such as the cell where Renfield is kept at the institution is

Blog Archive

- ▼ 2012 (21)
 - ▼ October (2)
 - DVD Review: Zombie Babies
 - DVD Review: Terror of Dracula
 - ▶ September (3)
 - ▶ August (5)
 - ▶ May (5)
 - ▶ April (2)
 - ▶ March (4)

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obviously the same we Jonathan Harker's bedroom at Castle D.

A reason I was hot to watch this film is *because* of its reputed loyalty to the book, one I've read a number of times. It really is nearly impossible, as the novel takes place in various forms of correspondence, *after* the fact (for example, a paraphrase may be something like, "Oh, what a horrible series of events occurred last evening, and here is why..."). Like all other retellings before this one (while Hammer was especially bad for loyalty to the original, they were usually great films), there is – and has to be – quite a bit of original input by Mann and Weil... I mean Bossert, including the unsurprising yet fun ending.

One disappointing aspects of this film is the slow pacing. In a stilted verbal manner or through chewing of scenery to express angst, the cast plays this like a stage drama, with overwrought tones and non-literal handwringing, in part due to way the cast reads the 19th Century-ish dialog, a trap that most period pieces fall into. This is not helped by the extreme and claustrophobic close-ups that are the core of nearly every scene. It's sort of like when you watch a filmed concert, and they focus on the strumming hand rather than both that and the one playing the chords. I kept wanting more visual information that just when eyebrows are lifted. I was almost expecting the actors to turn around too fast as hit their nose on the camera (yes, Mel Brooks did perfect that).

Another is how dreadfully serious they seem to be taking the production. Truly, a low budget and a newbie cast is much better serving the audience if there seems to be some sense of camaraderie with those on- and off-screen. Sure, the tale of Dracula and his ilk deals with evil beings out to suck the world dry in high drama fashion, but even in the original novel, one could argue that Renfield and his insistence on entomophagy was a comic thread on some level. The Hammer Films versions also had moments of dark humor. Mix together the dead (pun intended) seriousness and the stilted language and acting, you end up with a product that is self-important and pretentious, even if that is not what was meant as the outcome. I'm just sayin'...

Mann plays the titular character either with static intensity or overdrawn – er – intensity. The beard looks okay, but there is no explanation of why it turns from white in Transylvania to dark in Kingst... I mean England.

While I'm at it, there were a few parts in the book that are terrific, but were left out here, I'm sure due to financial constraints, so I'm not blaming, I'm just noticing. An example is the terror aboard the Demeter, the ship that brings of Drac and his many boxes filled with native soil to the UK. In the book, it is a very palpable set piece, and it is even well done in the original *Nosferatu* (1922), though I do have to admit it is barely shown in the more famous Lugosi-led *Dracula* (1930).

The rest of the cast also meanders over stilted language and emotions, as I've indicated above, although Angela Scott fares well as Lucy, with minimal ham-foolery. It would have been easy to do the dying character as a *Camille*, with arms amok, but she stays true. However, the three women who play the "wives" of the Count are jaw-droopingly overdone performances. To be fair, this is actually a hard part to play, because there's three of them vying for notice always in the same scene, and again, there's an overwrought level to them; even in the book, as they cower from their "master" and bound after their prey (a baby), so perhaps I'm being too hard on them.

I respect what Mann is trying to do, but perhaps he is doing too much. He needs a cinematographer who knows how to back the hell up, a dialog coach (especially if he continues to film costume dramas), and an AD who will have the balls to tell him that he needs to either ramp a scene up, or clamp it down.

Note that this film has been getting a lot of really good notices, so I may be one of the few who had some difficulty with it. The only extras on the disc are two versions of the trailer, so if you watch the VoD version, you won't miss much. Perhaps check it out for yourself. See it... for your mother's sake.