

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.

Saturday, October 12, 2013

DVD Review: Unsolved

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Unsolved

Directed by Lance McDaniel
Lost Empire Films
Oklahoma City University Productions (OCU)
88 minutes, 2009 / 2012 / 2013
www.lostempirefilms.com
www.MVDvisual.com

The DVD cover states: From the Director of *Children of the Corn*. I'm not sure that's something that would necessarily draw me in, having seen that film. And yet, throughout this film's credits, I see no mentioning of any director of the permutations of *CotC* associated with this film. But anyway...

I am going to take a stab here (pun intended) and make an assumption with no ego on whether I am right or wrong: this film is made by Oklahoma City University Productions, nearly all of it shot on the campus of Oklahoma City University, and some cast members were attending the Oklahoma City University at the time, so my guess is that this is a student project, possibly for a degree. Hey, that's the way the likes of Coppola and Scorsese started. But then again, OCU is no NYU.

There are some fine moments here, such as when the protagonist's actions mirror almost exactly that of the first victim (I'm not giving away anything really). There are also a few clever shots here and there. All in all, though, this felt very much like a Lifetime Movie of the Week with bloodlust.

It actually took me about 10 minutes after the opening credits to narrow the field of possible suspects down to two or three, and I had it nailed within half an hour. Now, mind you, I watch a bit of mystery shows on TV and usually get it pretty quick. While there are some imaginative bits throughout, story-wise this is a pretty standard thriller with about as much blood as there is in an average CSI, but less gore than that program.

During the prologue, which takes place in the '90s (aka 15 years before the rest of the film), a coed named Heather is brutally stabbed to death on the steps of her dorm after being manhandled by a couple of jerk jocks. She's white and her boyfriend is not, so naturally he gets the blame, but is let off for lack of evidence. Again, this is the opening scene, so I'm not giving anything salient away. Flash forward to the present (or approximately 2008), and we are joined in a university class that specializes in unsolved crimes (do I need to say what school?). Our central characters, Amanda and

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her boyfriend Nick, manage to get the cold case of, well, Heather, surprise-surprise. From there things get tricky and dangerous, with a decent body count in the long run.

Most of the acting in this film is about high school level. The line readings are either too flat or overly effervescent. Well, in most cases, such as with Josh Shideler, who plays Nick. True, his character is totally unlikeable as a pretty-boy hothead jock, but it's more the stilted way he reads the dialog that is troublesome for me. And, again, this could be totally wrong, and I apologize if that is so, he really sets off my gaydar.

A shining light, however, is **Jane Bunting**, who plays Amanda. I want to say to her, however, "who does your hair? Find someone else!" Jane has a very cute pouty lip and a mousey/nerdy appeal, but more importantly, she comes across as someone who can actually act, thankfully. There are lots of moments where she could have just gone off the scale, but she reigns it in at the right ticks, and is just the appropriate shade of expressive at high drama situations (e.g., the mandatory chase-and-hide).



Jane Bunting

What I found kind of interesting, and I'm not sure if it's my overly-sensitive filter, but there is a certain level of misogyny (the jealous ex-girlfriend, for example) and racist undercurrent, such as stereotypical patterns ("Yo, girl!" and eye-rolling). Now, to be fair, some of the strongest characters are African-American, and there is even an interracial element, but within that framework there are still a few "oy" moments.

There are other questions I have that need explaining (why doesn't she take off the wig, for example... see, I'm being vague not to give up too much), and the occasional chase clichés are definitely present. Despite all of this – and I know it's a lot – this wasn't a *bad* film, and it kept me interested throughout, even though I said "Really?" more than once. Again, it is Lifetime meets *CSI*, and I'm not sorry I saw it. It was entertaining on some levels, and that makes a nice evening.

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

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