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November 12, 2010

## Movie Review: The Electric Chair (1986)

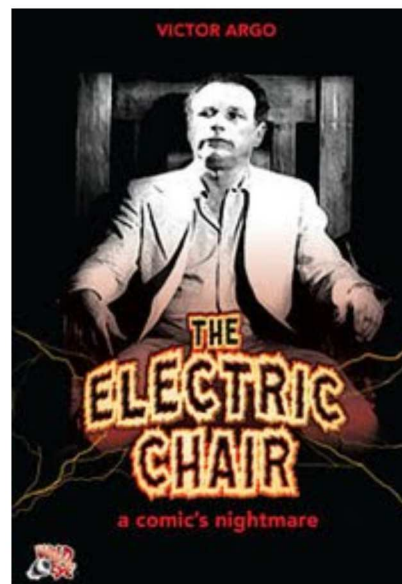
Posted by Jeff at 7:35 PM



As someone who's dabbled in the furious world of stand-up comedy (not so effectively), I've undoubtedly seen numerous interesting characters in my travels. Most of which are sad and angry individuals. I've come to the conclusion that angst can breed brilliance in comedy and other forms of entertainment. I do recall throughout my formative years when I was exposed to the likes of Sam Kinison, Bill Hicks and other immense comic talents that, well, these guys have some seriously fucked up, troubled lives. Arnie Schwartz, the lead character of Mark Eisenstein's *The Electric Chair*, is no different than Kinison or Hicks - he's just make believe.

Buy [The Electric Chair](#) on DVD!

Veteran character actor Victor Argo plays the bitter and pathetic stand-up comic, Arnie Schwartz. Arnie is a shoe salesman by day and a bombing nightclub comic by night. Schwartz performs in front of a sparse life-less crowd as if it were standing room only. Like many seasoned comedians, Schwartz' act is getting old and as life-less as the crowd. Beside Arnie, while he performs is an electric chair that he constantly gets warned about from a heckler. You're probably thinking, he's bombing on stage doing these bits, how is that going to be entertaining for us the viewer? Amazingly much of the dialogue in his parts are

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brilliance of Arnie's act. If you have ever seen old Lenny Bruce routines, that's exactly how it it looked. Argo takes full command of the stage. Sure he's playing the Schwartz character, but it seems much of Argo himself lives in this hypnotizing persona.

To put it simply, *The Electric Chair* is funny, depressing and haunting. Eisenstien's usage of shadows is very impressive and gives this shot in super 16mm black and white feature a look that's almost dream-like . You really get the feeling you're in a seedy, smoke-filled nightclub located in hell, Arnie is your entertainment and if you don't like it, Arnie will happily tell you to go "shtoop" yourself. The film really starts to take a turn for the absurd when Arnie, who has been warned several times about the electric chair beside him on stage - sits down on his throne. Soon enough, "The Comic" is spouting jokes and rants off at his now growing audience, that seems to relish the fact he may die in the chair. I really find it amazing that films like *The Electric Chair* become "lost". Why not the *Matrix* series or *Avatar*? Argo is an absolute gem of an actor. Watching him inject the amount of energy and passion into Arnie is one of those special things in cinema that stay etched in your film-going existence.

Wild Eye Releasing and director Eisenstien dug up several supplements, including a commentary with director Eisenstein and several short films: *Smog*, *Eight Tragedy Term Papers Plus 3*, *The Professor*, *Mark Eisenstein: Inventor of The Frame*, *Citizen Eisenstein* and a featurette titled *Roach*. There's also a commentary with Eisenstein where he elaborates on the facts about the film. Some of *The Electric Chair* was actually shot in the '70s and the Victor Argo material(which does look sharper) was shot around 1986. Eisenstein is a big admirer of German expressionism - something you can clearly see in the finished film. The commentary is moderated by Wild Eye Releasing's Rob Hauschild and Keith Crocker, who is also an independent filmmaker. It's a fun commentary that answers a lot of questions your likely to have after finishing this very unique film.

Once in a while, there's a film that completely surprises - The Electric Chair is one of those special experiences. It's dark, poetic and an infinitely fascinating piece of subversive art. This feature was a great discovery by Wild Eye Releasing and hopefully it will give some more exposure to the masses as to the talent of Eisenstien and the unheralded, Victor Argo.

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