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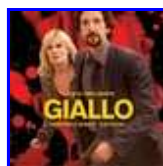
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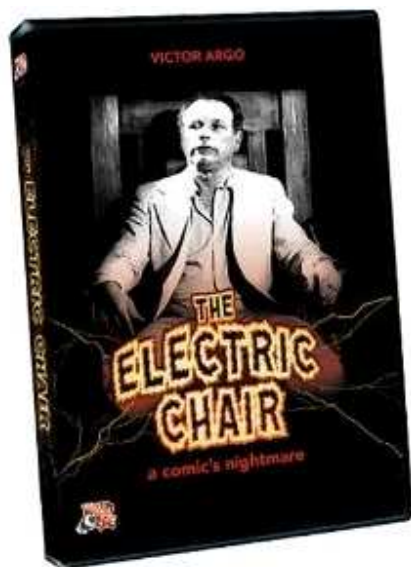


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THE ELECTRIC CHAIR Review



by [Ben Umstead](#), October 17, 2010 11:01 AM

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[Our thanks to Joshua Chaplinsky for the following review.]

The Electric Chair was screened Friday, October 15th at The 92Y Tribeca Screening Room in NYC. It will be available on DVD Tuesday, October 19th through Wild Eye Releasing.

What do you get when you Frankenstein scenic documentary footage of a desolate island with a filmed stand-up routine written for the stage? You get an avant-garde miasma of self-loathing and Jewish paranoia called **The Electric Chair**. Part **King of Comedy** part **Death of a Salesman**, director Mark Eisenstein's little (never?) seen black comedy is most note-worthy for being veteran character actor Victor Argo's sole starring role. In it he plays a shoe salesman turned comic working out his marital issues in front of an audience that includes his domineering mother and himself as a boy. On stage with him- an electric chair, which he is continually warned to stay away from.

An intriguing premise, but an intriguing premise does not a good movie make. Sometimes a man's opinion of a film is colored by the viewing experience itself. Unfortunately, this wasn't one of the best. Shown in a small screening room in NYC to a handful of intrepid film buffs, there was a distinct lack of respect during the film, especially considering the director was in attendance. The audience seemed to be populated mostly by friends of the distributor and acquaintances of the director who were already familiar with the material. Despite this, cell phones rang, cell phones were answered (!), and people came and went as they pleased, walking in front of the screen as they did. Then there was the gentleman behind me, who took it upon himself to punctuate every joke with an ill-timed gust of forced laughter. The film itself was funny enough without having to cue the audience when to laugh like we were at the taping of a bad sitcom.

All that aside, I tried my best to remain focused and not take my anger out on the film. Technically speaking, **The Electric Chair** was pretty rough around the edges. Due to the aforementioned intercutting of two films (shot almost a decade apart), the footage didn't always match. The same can be said for the sound editing. Scenes shot MOS lacked room tone or contained odd dubbing that contrasted with the shots they were cut with, giving **Chair** a distinct film school aesthetic. But it also gave it the charm of a bygone era. **The Electric Chair** is a true independent film, the kind poseurs habitually

lament the death of, not some multi-million dollar studio indie.

Normally, that kind of production value would be the kiss of death, but **Chair** is saved by a fantastic performance by Scorsese alum Victor Argo. Much of the film is comprised of an impressive monologue shot in long, uninterrupted takes. Argo transforms from Rodney Dangerfield to Lenny Bruce and back again, controlling the room as he figuratively dies onstage. His stream of consciousness ramblings are both profound and pretentious, and even the director admitted he didn't know what it all meant. Is the comedian a modern day prophet? Or a man suffering a nervous breakdown? Either way, it is the perfect showcase for a thespian to flex their acting chops, and Argo has chops like pork. The man effortlessly carries the film. Hell, his performance *is* the film.

Afterward, we were treated to a Q&A with the director, moderated by two representatives from Wild Eye Releasing. Despite his age (he claimed to be 110) Eisenstein's mental acuity belied his physical appearance. He regaled the audience with anecdotes of the film's production, including the near casting of Harvey Keitel and his creative differences with Argo. He also jokingly assured us that the wheelchair he rolled up in was not electric. The DVD release of the film contains a commentary track that, based on the man in person, promises to be both entertaining and informative. Eisenstein is witty and charming and seemed genuinely pleased to have the opportunity to present his film to an audience (even if they weren't the most respectful.) Hopefully it will find new life on home video.

TRAILER: <http://www.wildeyereleasing.com/electric.html>

Joshua Chaplinsky has also written for [ChuckPalahniuk.net](#). He played guitar in the band [SpeedSpeedSpeed](#) and alternately maintains/neglects his own blog at [thejamminjabber](#).

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