

HAUNTED CHANGI

If the blurb on the cover of the Seminal Films release of Singapore horror Haunted Changi filled me with the wrong kind of dread, with all its talk of 'documentary gone wrong', then I was pleasantly surprised with what I actually got here. 'Found footage' or similar movies and the inevitable shakycam which goes with them have more than overstayed their welcome in modern movies, but thankfully, Haunted Changi tempers its footage of people's feet with an interesting framing story, the rare gift of likeable twentysomething protagonists and, perhaps the trump card, a real-life location which has figured prominently in Singapore's often-troubled history.



The premise of the film is incredibly simple: a group of young filmmakers have been researching a place called Old Changi Hospital, and they want to investigate claims that it is haunted, by ♦ you've guessed it ♦ filming on site. This is a story that has been done numerous times before, of course, but this take on it got my attention with an intriguing potted history lesson at the start. I don't know as much about Singapore as I would like, but introducing some of the major events in the country's history via the story of the (real) OCH added a depth to the movie which really helped it along. By the time our filmmakers Farid, Audi, Sheena and Andrew (performing under their real names, Blair Witch style) are compiling footage, it's nicely-obvious that Old Changi is the site of interplay between old Singaporean folklore, with mentions of the Pontianak, a vampiric female spirit, as well as the history of British colonialism, Japanese occupation and finally OCH's status as a hospital for the poor. Accordingly, the sightings they want to investigate range through all of the above, from vamps to beheaded POWs to the ghosts of the neglected. It is, as one of our team puts it, a 'United nations' of ghosts. This is a varied haunting with a bit of historical fact and fiction thrown in, then.

Still, undeterred, the group starts filming. It is only when they get back at night and start looking over their footage that they spot mysterious phenomena. This is a neat little trick, and manages to be quite creepy at times, although I have to say ♦ this is a low-key film, with no showy effects, or many effects at all. A shadowy hand shown here, a distorted face visible there ♦ for most of the film, that is all you get.

Understandably, some of the group are reluctant to spend any more time in OCH after seeing things on camera they couldn't see in person, but Andrew is still keen. This may or may not have something to do with the fact he's found a (pretty) Chinese national, a woman called Xiao Juan, living rough in the building. When she uses Sheena's missing mobile phone to text him and ask him for help one night, the group reluctantly go...

OCH is an imposing-looking place, and it makes for an atmospheric backdrop for a horror film, although the 'music video' stylings used throughout were a little hard on my eyes and patience at times. Thankfully, the film consists of static-cam interview footage too, so it wasn't a relentless parade of camera FX. The (English-speaking) cast do a good job in their roles, enacting believable fear and unhingedness in turn. Whilst this isn't a flashy or a grisly film, it does what it does well, and because at 81 minutes it knew not to overstay its welcome, or to overcompensate for unoriginality of plot by dropping atmosphere in favour of a succession of grisly jump-out-of-skin moments, it maintained my interest throughout: that's more than I can say for some similar films (*cough*REC 2*cough*). Haunted Changi doesn't reinvent the wheel, absolutely not, but it's an enjoyable movie

with lots of strengths. I expected little from this, but got more out of it than I would have supposed.

The film looks very good: the colouration is quite high, but it works very well for the purposes of the film, and the sound levels are crisp and easily-audible (with the option of English subtitles). As for extras, a lot of effort has been made to do something a little different, so alongside the film trailer is some World War II archive footage, an archive of the crew's blogs, and the first few chapters of Sheena's book on her 'experiences' at Changi...

Review by Keri O'Shea

Released by Seminal Films

Region 1

Not Rated

Extras :

see main review

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