

Review by Julian Shaw - FILMINK Magazine

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Wednesday 6 April 2005

Love And Honour

LIBERTY IN RESTRAINT is 100 minutes of graphic yet humanising investigative filmmaking that peels back the leather and skin to show BDSM for what it is - sane and consensual. FILMINK's Julian Shaw speaks to Australian director MICHAEL NEY to get the inside story.

The pop cultural explosion enjoyed by BDSM (officially Bondage/Discipline, Dominance-Submission, Sadism/Masochism) has ripped through advertising, cinema, music, the fashion world and even WWE wrestling. But despite this, BDSM has yet to overcome some of the myths that cling to it like grubby condensation. Perhaps no one is really talking about it - they're just making noise.

By sizing up all aspects of the fetish universe, filmmaker Michael Ney wants to show us that two themes are at work in every aspect of BDSM: compassion and trust. With a detached but relentless eye, Ney takes his camera into the underbelly of this world and obliterates the notion that S&M is a form of violence.

"I'm doing the doco to address a lot of misconceptions about the whole lifestyle," Ney says of Liberty In Restraint, an unashamedly heart-felt documentary that attempts to find the big heart throbbing deep within the most hardcore of sexual expressions. "It does range from very mild stuff with people being tied up to very extreme blood-letting. There have been very few good docos about it. They give an inkling of the story but no one tells the whole tale."

Liberty In Restraint was born two-and-a-half years ago. Fetish photographer Noel Graydon had been recommended to Ney, who was looking for a documentary subject at the time, as a case study in complexity. While LIR is an invigorating mix of cinema verite, recreations and interviews, the heart and soul of the film is Noel's winding journey. A one-time photographic apprentice in Brisbane, before getting hooked, literally, into the clandestine BDSM scene, Noel later succumbed to a crippling heroin addiction. But having now bounced back in the strongest possible way, with a wife and children and unblemished sobriety, Noel's unusual candour is the human keyhole that opens up the mysteries of this fetish universe. Graydon no longer practices BDSM, but continues to create chilling, singular and precise photography not unlike an Australian answer to Mapplethorpe or Helmut Newton.

"Noel Graydon comes from a difficult past, and has been persecuted and branded because of the way he has gone about his business," Ney says. "We've all done things in our past which we may not like the world to know about. To his credit, Noel says 'This is how I am and this is how I got to be the way I am.' This is a strength."

Noel was obviously receptive to Michael's ambitions to make a film that would not promulgate more myths. "What is it about these people that makes them do these things? How does society perceive it and what can an artist do to put it in people's faces and change perception?"