

Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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Tromadance Day 2 ? Reviews

Written by David on September, 27 2009

The following reviews do not express the opinion of the Strand Theatre.

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It is a rather strange, bizarre sensation to rise early in the morning and subject oneself to horror and vampire films in broad daylight. If Friday night's Tromadance at the Strand Theatre was the advance-guard of a cinematic assault, then Saturday's continuation of the B-movie festival Tromadance heralded the main forces of this visual and aural army. It was a day of shorts, features and mid-length movies all designed to either scare, entertain, enlighten or tickle the ribs of audience members.

This independent, cinematic invasion of the Strand's silver-screen consisted of 15 films, of varying quality, genres and thematic content, with the primary thunder provided by the "shock and awe," of one proven master and the unrelenting, dream-assault of a newly rising star.

The unexpected heavy artillery of total sensory attack came from a group of Michigan-based film-makers who physically appeared at the national debut of their phantasmagoric epic "The Italian Zombie Movie."

The other unexpected event was a visit to the Strand by legendary B-movie director Lloyd Kauffman, founder of Troma Studios, and a surprise showing of his latest film "Poultrygeist."

Each of these heavyweight events came later, after the initial landings made by several eerie morning visual waves. Of these early celluloid skirmishes, a 12-minute short, "Dilemma" offered a bizarre, fetishistic, mildly interesting corpse-drama folded into a wry take on sex and death.

The highlight of the morning, however, was an Indiana film "Zorg and Andy." This irreverently fun-filled movie was shot on location at Ball State, Wabash College and Earlham University. It is a strange, unfolding tale of a cosmic, comic plot that spoofs the B-movie clichés such as aliens, witches, monsters and college high-jinks, all accomplished in a highly polished campy-kitsch style.

The next film "Rise of the Evil Pancakes," continued this over-the-top madcap take on cinematic spoofs. This movie is kind of like a homage to Kaufman, who makes several sarcastic cameos in this exploration of vice, gore, soft, fantasy porn and purposely stupid plot-lines. In a unique, ironic twist, these killer pancakes haunted the streets of New York City preying exclusively on "hipsters," those highfalutin fans of low-brow cinema.

A differing approach to shock came in the next wave of video attack, "Pro and Cons." This film was a nearly mainstream-horror remake of the classic Greek myth of Oedipus, with a few bizarre twists and turns added for our modern times. Essentially, it is the sordid, mixed-up tale of a couple of "escorts" who eventually find out they are siblings being manipulated by a sleazy, slime ball pimp of a father.

Film festivals, like theater and movie making itself, often require a degree of creative improvisation, and this is exactly what occurred at the Strand early in the afternoon as Kauffman's latest epic was called in as reinforcement. "Poultrygeist," a 2008 Troma release, lives up to and beyond Kauffman's mantra to make films filled with "danger and stupidity." It is a classic politically incorrect tasteless spoof of everything from fast-food to gender stereotypes and patriotism. The unrelenting sarcasm and sheer grossness of the frivolous folly of this film was highlighted and heightened by a fully-clothed cameo of legendary porn-star, Ron Jeremy, in a rather sick parody of American pop-culture.

The ensuing film, "Love, Hate, Tragedy," however, more than made up for and revitalized the aura of drama in the Strand. This Canadian film is a very disturbing, violent and perplexing modern updating of the Shakespearian theme of "Romeo and Juliet." Essentially, it is a love tale of passionate nihilism and psychic necrophilia.

Continuing the emotional waves of mental assault, the next film, "Bikini Girls on Ice," returned to a more mainstream approach to grisly horror. In this tale a mute, human monster slashes and kills a series of bikini-clad coeds and their bumbling male friends. It is movie that exploits gruesomeness for the sheer sake of gruesomeness and drags on in ridiculous vacuous attempts at both cliched suspense and tired hunt, stalk and kill scenes. A tiring film in a tired, over-used genre.

Fortunately for the audience, the next movie was a cinematic tour-de-force produced and filmed by some of the most twisted, demented and sarcastic people imaginable. The people who dreamed up and acted out "The Italian Zombie Movie: Part I: Zombie Abomination," are some really strange and weird dudes and dudettes, and I mean that in a good way. This is a movie that asks how many varieties and forms of sarcasm are there and the first 100 minutes of Part I take a person through a macabre, surreal journey into this madness. Cinematographically, this movie is a nonstop visual and auditory bombardment of the senses that soon makes one realize that human eyes and ears are weak and fallible things that often cannot work at the speed or rhythms of normal, not-to-mention hyper-surreal levels of reality.

In fact, this movie so disturbingly mixes and blurs the lines of reality, unreality and hyper-surrealistic in such a manic, sarcastic way that it is nearly impossible to follow its absurdist multi-perspective plot-lines and humor. Fortunately, however, the film's producer, director and writer, Thomas Berdinski, devised a solution for such visual overkill: circular repetitions of plot-lines and repeating loops of special effects used to advance and enhance the story. In short, Part I of the "The Italian Zombie Movie," whetted my insatiable curiosity and left me both perplexed, overwhelmed and craving more mayhem, humor and deviant sensations.

The final feature, Saturday night's extravaganza at the Strand was Kaufmann's classic B- movie masterpiece "The Toxic Avenger." This film proves that it does indeed take a unique, creative and vivid imagination to make a movie this grotesque, hilarious and intentionally bad, all at the same time.

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