

Strand Theatre Shelbyville, Inc.

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Night of the Living Dead ? Preview

Written by David on October, 15 2009

The following review does not express the opinion of the Strand Theatre.

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For most people the 1960's recall images of peace, love and flower-children. This weekend, however, patrons of the Strand Theatre will get a different vision of the hippie decade: a dark, twisted, and subversive film, ?The Night of the Living Dead.?

This independently made, low-budget, classic movie, is much more than mere gore and zombies, according to writer and director George A. Romero.

?It was 1968, man. Everybody had a message,? Romero said, about creating his now legendary film. ?I was trying to come up with a concept about a new society, revolutionary? in political terms, that?s taking over society and devouring it.?

For 1968 audiences, however, the zombies, gore and violence were so shocking that many missed the more political aspects of this macabre tale. In fact, Reader?s Digest, initiated a national campaign to have the movie banned, not for revolutionary rhetoric, but for explicit graphic violence. Similarly, several Hollywood studios refused to touch his low-budget, \$114,000, zombie apocalypse.

?We couldn?t imagine a happy ending,? Romero said about his ?guerilla cinema? filmed entirely in the small-town of Evans City, PA. ?Everyone wanted a Hollywood ending, but we stuck to our guns.?

Ironically, ?The Night of the Living Dead,? would gross more than \$42 million within a decade of its release and by 1999 Romero?s subversive horror masterpiece would be enshrined in the National Film Library? by the U.S. Congress.

This weekend, Strand Theatre patrons will get two evening opportunities (Friday at 8 and Saturday at 11) to either enjoy the carnage or attempt to deconstruct the several threads of revolutionary satire that Romero encoded into his suburban movie mayhem.

In a strange twist of cinematic fate, Romero found inspiration in weird triad of sources: actor and director Orson Welles, opera and most bizarre of all, PBS legend ?Mr. Rogers.?. As a small child, Romero decided to create film after seeing a British film based on Offenbach?s opera ?Tales of Hoffman.?. It was, however, working on an episode of ?Mr. Rogers? Neighborhood? that sparked his nasty, allegorical vision of ?horror in a suburban nuclear family consuming itself.?

Filed with a hand-held 35 mm. camera and gallons of Bosco chocolate syrup, the initial revolutionary aspect of the movie was casting an African-American male as the lead during the social turbulence and overt violence of the Civil Rights Movement in America. Further, Romero wove in issues of nuclear waste (radiation spawning zombies) and mocked the militarization of society during the war in Vietnam. Think of "search and destroy" missions as you watch zombies die only by "killing the brain." These themes now seem cliché, but they were unheard of at the time and made Romero a film- pioneer who fused political commentary into horror films.

Equally, ?The Night of the Living Dead,? practically reinvented the concept of zombies. Prior to this film, zombies were ?Voodoo? monsters remote from reality. With this movie, zombies become a metaphor for society. ?I have always liked the monster with in idea,? Romero said. ?I like zombies being us. Zombies are the blue-collar monsters.?

As an aside, note that the word zombies is never uttered in this improvisational, black and white film spoof of the newsreels of the Cold War.

More specifically subversive, and relevant to our times, however, are questions Romero asks in the finale of this movie that mirrors society. Encoded within the final scene is are two terrifying rhetorical and hopefully, unanswerable queries. Which is

a worse fate, to be consumed by the reanimated, living dead or to be destroyed by the living, but mentally-dead, fury of a posse run amuck? And who, why and what are the real the zombies in this film?

Images on this post:

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