

Long Live the New Flesh – "V/H/S" Reviewed

Written by Dave Pace

Wednesday, 18 July 2012 08:45



If the online buzz didn't confirm the hype, then the sold-out crowd at the Toronto After Dark Summer Screenings certainly did. The packed house was full of anticipation for a film whose intense trailer and anthology angle has made it an official Big Deal in the horror scene. The movie has a reputation for being both terrifying and original, so I guess what we all want to know from the Canadian premiere is: Was it really?

V/H/S is a found footage anthology featuring the work of six different directors, Ti West (THE INNKEEPERS), Glenn McQuaid (I SELL THE DEAD), Adam Wingard (A HORRIBLE WAY TO DIE), David Bruckner (THE SIGNAL), Joe Swanberg (SILVER BULLETS) and film collective Radio Silence.

The story that the vignettes hinge on is a tale of sleazy videographers, breaking into a house to steal a videotape with some lurid footage on it that promises to sell for a lot more than the scum they've been producing. Sorting through what they find, the criminals stumble across shocking and inexplicable footage on five tapes, each the vision of one of the directors.

What I love about the format, is that each segment is a really cool idea that somebody might have tried to extend into a feature, but because it's all trimmed down to be a vignette, the fat is cut. We get in and get the good stuff right away. Characters are developed only so long as necessary and there is no stopping the bus so the tour guide can explain the sights; you get dropped right into it. This allows you to really do a lot of your own thinking about what the hell is going on in the individual segments and in the film's overarching plot. I like this approach – V/H/S is all killer and no filler.

But is it terrifying?

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While there was no threat of me voiding my bowels due to *The Fear*, what I got were some *really* good scares, and concepts introduced in the tales that have lingered with me and get more frightening the more I consider them, and the more I let my own mind fill in the blanks. The high may not be like the first time, but *V/H/S* is still a top quality shot of black tar smack for your bloodstream.



So am I really going to call a found footage film anthology “original”?

Yes I am, as a matter of fact. Neither concept is anything new under the sun, but what elevates *V/H/S* is not only that it combines the two concepts fairly seamlessly, it takes everyone back to school on how found footage should look and feel. Everything has an authentic and urgent feel of actual people recording events in their lives. I don't recall ever wondering, "who the hell records this stuff?"

The vignettes themselves are all quite unique in concept and execution, and although some stand out more than others, each is a little conceptual experiment in its own right. I was really impressed with the creativity that went into each segment. I don't want to get into the specifics of each, because I think one of the joys of the movie is letting each piece's individual logic unfold before you, but suffice to say this is a showcase of some serious creative muscle and the future of horror is in excellent hands.

Scares and technical quality aside, *V/H/S* is wickedly fun to watch and brought down a lot of laughs from the crowd. I get that it might undermine the “scariest movie of the year” hype, but the movie is consistently hilarious and has this grim comedic timing; plus, the touches of how

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every guy who gets his hands on a camera in the movie is asking some girl to take off her shirt, are funny and ring true to my ear.

There's one leap we get asked to make, that is a bit tricky; the mystery of why/how some of this stuff is even on VHS tapes to begin with. But personally, I enjoyed making my own contributions to the film in this way. I feel more engaged with it, I feel I've taken a step towards the artist instead of just waiting for them to reach me.

Horror fans need to see this movie at their earliest possible opportunity, because it's a contender for best of the year. I'd love to sit in with a mainstream Friday night multiplex crowd watching this. V/H/S would blow the minds of the PARANORMAL ACTIVITY set into a fine pink mist and some poor Cineplex kid making minimum wage would have to mop the audience out of there.