

Fantasia Day 3, Part Two: “THE THEATRE BIZARRE”

Written by Ariel Esteban Cayer
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Featuring the talents of THE WIZARD OF GORE's Jeremy Kasten, DUST DEVIL's Richard Stanley, COMBAT SHOCK's Buddy Giovinazzo, NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD's Tom Savini, SISTERS' Douglas Buck, SUBCONSCIOUS CRUELTY's Karim Hussain and PLAGUE TOWN's David Gregory, I couldn't wait to see THE THEATRE BIZARRE...and that evening had finally come. Not that I had particular expectations, but having heard all about it from friends David Bertrand and Kier-la Janisse and fellow Montrealers and filmmakers Buck and Hussain themselves, I was excited to experience the film on my own. People had given me their personal rankings of the segments, their thoughts on rough cuts and it all sounded quite marvelous.

Considerably packed, this was the first film of the fest so far—aside from the opening film, RED STATE maybe—that truly felt like an event. Half the theater was packed with various filmmakers, actors, producers and writers that had been involved with THE THEATRE BIZARRE at some point, and when the cast and crew took the stage at the end for the Q&A, it was quite the sight. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. (Also, a special thanks to Adam Abouaccar for taking these photos of THE THEATRE BIZARRE's cast and crew after its Fantasia screening.)

THE THEATRE BIZARRE opens with an appropriately Grand Guignol sequence, introducing Kasten's wraparound aesthetic, which reminds one of the filmmaker's WIZARD OF GORE remake, as well as establishes the film's host: a definitely fitting and endearingly creepy Udo Kier (pictured below, right).



Stanley's “The Mother of Toads” opens the ball and offers a simple “witch” narrative, which,

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while being visually accomplished—mostly due to Hussain's cinematography and the breathtaking location of the French Pyrenees—is far from being a standout. Hokey in its dialogue and characterization, the very TALES OF THE CRYPT-esque segment redeems itself with its glorious atmosphere, slimy batrachians (some of the most aesthetically pleasing beasts I can think of) and Lovecraftian elements. Quickly eclipsed by the other segments, Stanley's short does feature Catriona MacColl from THE BEYOND and will nonetheless find its fans.

"I Love You" takes us from France to Germany, as Giovinazzo revisits the crazed character study of COMBAT SHOCK. André Hennicke stars as a delightfully unhinged man madly in love with his understandably cheating wife. Hennicke carries the segment with mesmerizing insanity and Giovinazzo is great at creating tension and unease, which only builds and builds until the shocking conclusion. The dialogue sounds false at times, but you get behind the unstable quality of the whole short and start appreciating the isolated universe it takes place in.

Next up is Savini's segment, "Wet Dreams," which once again explores marital conflicts, this time via the deep, dark and unforgiving realm of nightmares. Although it features some gruesome dismemberments (SFX by ToeTag Pictures, not Savini), a striking case of vagina dentata, a campy performance by Savini and an interesting Russian doll structure, the segment trips in its own wires and fails to deliver any sort of interesting progression, momentum or resolution, aside from the nuggets of shock value that constitute it. United by the common thread of failed relationships and the monstrous feminine, the first three shorts strikingly demonize women in their assertion of masculinity, coming off as borderline misogynistic, yet perfectly in synch with horror's legacy of personal male-centric cinematic fantasies.

An interesting organization of the shorts, to say the least, this very masculine opening trilogy is given the perfect contrast with Buck's (pictured below, right) sublime "The Accident," which instantly and completely knocks it out of the park with its quiet and masterful meditation on mortality, as seen through the eyes of a child (Lena Kleine), who witnesses a life-changing accident. Hussain's cinematography is ethereal and the storytelling device is as refreshing as it is inventive and beautiful. A much needed breather after the intensity of the first three films, "The Accident" immediately struck me as a work of art far above and beyond its contemporaries and remained my favorite up until the very end.