

Fango Flashback: “DEMONS”

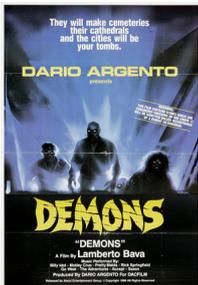
Written by Jorge Solis

Sunday, 08 August 2010 09:48



At the Museum of Arts and Design in New York City, the Zombo Italiano series presented Lamberto Bava's graphic shocker DEMONS. It tells the now-classic story of theater patrons watching a horror movie on the big screen who are suddenly cursed to turn into bloodthirsty creatures themselves.

A tall man (future STAGEFRIGHT and CEMETERY MAN director Michele Soavi) wearing a steel mask offers an unsuspecting young woman named Cheryl (Natasha Hovey) a free ticket to an advance screening at a new movie palace called the Metropol. Cheryl then finds her friend Kathy (Paola Cozzo) and the two casually ditch class to see the movie. Slowly, strangers gather at the front lobby, glancing at the props on display. No one can keep their eyes off a sword attached to a motorcycle and a replica of the steel mask.



A blind man and his wife arrive at the Metropol—but for the wife, this is a chance to rendezvous with her secret lover. Tony the pimp (Bobby Rhodes) is taking the night off with two of his hookers. A married couple are using their ticket as a cheap way to celebrate their anniversary. A pair of young lovebirds sit at the back of the theater. Two average guys, George and Ken, quickly jump at the chance to sit next to Cheryl and Kathy.

The film within the film begins with a group of friends stumbling upon the burial site of Nostradamus; one of them suspiciously resembles the masked man who handed Cheryl her ticket. As the movie proceeds, they discover an ancient book in the ruins, and as they read aloud some of its passages, the curse flows from the screen to reality. Events in the theater begin to parallel those in the film: One of the hookers is brutally butchered like one of the movie's victims. The Metropol patrons are soon fighting for survival, as they find themselves mysteriously locked in with no chance of escape.

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Do horror movies turn their audiences bloodthirsty? Is there a correlation between violence in movies and violence in reality? Bava doesn't answer these questions; he's mostly trying to scare his own audience, but the subtext is quite interesting. The script was written by Bava, producer Dario Argento, Franco Ferrini and Dardano Sacchetti—a roundtable of creative minds, which explains the inventive kills and action sequences, such as when George rides the motorcycle through the theater. With the son of the legendary Mario Bava (*BLACK SUNDAY*, *SHOCK*) directing and Soavi also serving as assistant director, the film excites and terrifies at the same time—though it lacks character development, as the filmmakers were clearly more interested in the visual spectacle. The story is filled with noticeable plot holes: What happens to Ripper and the other punk thieves after they separate in the theater? How does Hannah (played by Dario's daughter Fiore Argento) get lost after she was just standing right next to her boyfriend, even holding his hand? I could go on, but these mishaps aren't so bothersome when you're so enthralled by the awe-inspiring FX. Makeup artist Sergio Stivaletti designed some of the most impressively grotesque transformations in cinema history for *DEMONS*. Jagged fangs, growing nails and the notorious backbuster scene are exceptional. These demons are ferocious and hideous to look at, as green pus festers from their skin.



Another highlight is the pulsating score by Claudio Simonetti; two tracks in particular, “The Killing” and “Demon,” are quite catchy with their weird rhythms. The soundtrack also features punk and heavy metal songs by Billy Idol, Saxon and Motley Crue; this was Argento's choice, as he was still under the heavy-metal influence also heard in his previous directorial effort, *PHENOMENA*. The blaring music also relates to Bava's message about disenfranchised youth, particularly commenting on punk-rock culture during the mid-'80s. If you notice in the beginning of the film, Cheryl is surrounded by punkers on the subway train.

The film's highlight is the climax, when the survivors finally make it out of the theater. Demons are running rampant in the streets of Berlin, slaughtering anyone they can find. This is an epic war between humans and demons on a small-scale budget. The survivors zigzag through the chaotic streets, running past burning cars and dodging numerous beasts. The nightmare just

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never seems to end for the two escapees.

DEMONS boasts stylish visuals throughout, especially when the fiends with glowing eyes are running in slow motion. Insanely entertaining, it's a definite must-see for horror fans.

{jcomments on}