

Fango Flashback: The films of Lincoln Center's Scary Movies 5

Written by Samuel Zimmerman
Tuesday, 01 November 2011 15:58



Indisputably, Lincoln Center's Walter Reade Theater is one of the best places to catch a film. It's a wonderful space only bettered by its seemingly nonstop barrage of quality series and festivals. For five years now, the Film Society of LC has celebrated the most wonderful time of year with a series simply titled Scary Movies. It often boasts New York premieres of eagerly awaited new fright flicks (this year hosted *THE INNKEEPERS* and *KILL LIST*), but it also works wonders in the repertory department. This past weekend's rendition was tops and in addition to classics *POLTERGEIST* and *HOUSE OF USHER*, I was introduced to three gems: *DARK WATERS*, *SEVENTH VICTIM* and *EYE OF THE CAT*.

DARK WATERS (1993)

Mariano Bano's surreal and lyrical film is a tale of finding oneself... amidst a secluded island, an ancient convent and murderous nuns. The story sees Elizabeth (Louise Salter) journey to her birthplace, a stunning and stunningly eerie convent afloat in the Black Sea. It houses a religious sect her father's will deemed worthy of the continuation his regular contributions, thus she makes an effort to understand the locale and her origins.



Operating on that infamous nightmare logic, *DARK WATERS* is hard to hold onto, as its (sometimes too) deliberate pace and disorienting qualities often slip through one's fingers. It's best to let its gorgeous weirdness wash over you as Elizabeth explores her surroundings, observing the nuns' secret, often bloody meetings, a blind prophet's violent paintings and searching for evidence of and information on her deceased mother. Best viewed on as big a screen as possible, *DARK WATERS* has some absolutely stunning images (the nuns on a hill, fish littering the beach) that really speak to the assured hand crafting them. It's not a noisy film, instead creating a calmly unsettling atmosphere that builds toward the inevitable horrifying, and

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yes as most point out, Lovecraftian truth.

Seemingly out-of-print, the film is available on DVD from Netflix. Baino also introduced the film, saying it was the first time the remastered print had been screened, so hopefully, a Blu-ray is on the way.

{youtube}ldB7793MSsE{/youtube}

THE SEVENTH VICTIM (1943)

From legendary producer Val Lewton, THE SEVENTH VICTIM is an expressionist tale full of shadows and sorrow, and fortunately readily available in the Lewton box set. The young, naïve Mary Gibson (Kim Hunter of PLANET OF THE APES) sets off to New York City in search of her missing sister Jacqueline (the beautiful Jean Brooks), who's gone into hiding after betraying a Satan-worshipping cult. Murder, romance, melancholic poetry and paranoia all ensue and make for a truly remarkable production.



What's most notable, aside from the astounding cinematography of Nicholas Musuraca (who's long and varied career included noir classic OUT OF THE PAST and Fritz Lang's CLASH BY NIGHT), is just how dangerous THE SEVENTH VICTIM feels for its time period (and in turn, how effective its downtrodden atmosphere remains today). Aside from the blunt evil of the occult, the story and characters are awash in adultery, love lost, madness and even a subtle undercurrent of homosexuality; Jacqueline's closest friend inside the cult is very clearly in love with the "traitor," torn to pieces by the impending consequences of Jacqueline's actions.

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Interestingly enough, her transgression was revealing the nature of the group to her doctor, one Louis Judd, a character reprised by Tom Conway and originally seen in the previous Val Lewton horror classic CAT PEOPLE.

While I'll refrain from openly discussing the details of its ending, know that its bleak nature for all involved is exactly what makes this film stand out, especially in light of the then, in-effect Hayes Code. SEVENTH VICTIM is an absolute small treasure.

{youtube}P9H7rUJi7NQ{/youtube}

EYE OF THE CAT (1969)

The best of the rep selections is also sadly, the hardest to see. EYE OF THE CAT is wild. Featuring a bit of supernatural and family relation weirdness, 60s cool and noir trappings (bad people scheming to do bad things); it's a truly nasty bit of fun. The film sees would-be femme fatale and total fox Gayle Hunnicutt (THE LEGEND OF HELL HOUSE), convince free-living smart ass Wiley (a great Michael Sarrazin, who went on to essay Frankenstein's monster in FRANKENSTEIN: THE TRUE STORY) to return to his sick, lonely and very rich Aunt Danny, so that he may gain her fortune upon her murder. Wiley quickly moves in with Aunt Danny (who fiercely and inappropriately loves the boy) and his brother Luke, who currently acts as her caretaker. Wiley's literally crippling fear of cats soon proves to be an obstacle however, as the house is overrun, and an old superstition about the animals may be true.



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Written by Joseph Stefano, who adapted Robert Bloch's PSYCHO for Hitchcock's immortal film, EYE OF THE CAT is twisty and endlessly entertaining. Despite its tiny body count, it shows great suspense (an excellent wheelchair-in-danger scene), vibrant colors amidst a slew of 60s style (iris, split screen) and one incredible aside in the form of a catfight in a ladies' bathroom that's just legendary. Sarrazin is also a fantastic bastard—and one of the most fun protagonists I can recall—shaping a real character understandably damaged by all those who surround him. Not to mention, Tim Henry as uptight and unloved brother Luke is an excellent foil. It's a total shame EYE OF THE CAT isn't easily accessible for consumption.

{youtube}3DvYRoiP_p8{/youtube}

For more on Film Society of Lincoln Center's upcoming slate head to its [official site](#) .