

Written by Don Kaye

Wednesday, 08 December 2010 12:31



It has been a little over a year since Paul Naschy, the beloved King of Spanish Horror, passed away at the age of 75, and so we thought it would be appropriate to look back at two of Naschy's films—THE NIGHT OF THE WEREWOLF (his ninth turn as Polish nobleman-turned-werewolf Waldemar Daninsky) and VENGEANCE OF THE ZOMBIES—that Don Kaye reviewed on DVD back in 2007.

Legendary Spanish horror star/screenwriter/director Paul Naschy (real name: Jacinto Molina Alvarez) gets respectful treatment from Deimos DVD with these two new releases, the first of a proposed slate of six Naschy titles (including his classic HORROR RISES FROM THE TOMB) that the label plans to give deluxe treatment. After years of incomplete, bleary videotape releases of Naschy movies in the States, and little real DVD love until now, Deimos (a division of BCI Eclipse) has done right by both films, offering up the most comprehensive, pristine prints available, along with multiple soundtracks, deleted and alternate scenes and personal onscreen introductions by the man himself.

Naschy's vast genre output is far from consistently good, and his reputation perhaps rests more on his sheer, zesty love of horror cinema rather than his attributes as a filmmaker. As a result, the two films represent a stark difference in quality. 1972's VENGEANCE OF THE ZOMBIES (LA REBELION DE LAS MUERTAS) finds Naschy laboring in three roles under the clumsy direction of Leon Klimovsky, who drags scenes out interminably, lacks a feel for pacing and uses some of the most incongruous music ever to score a horror picture. Yet his star gives his all in this tale of a woman named Elvira (Carmen Romero, a.k.a. Rommy), haunted by the murder of her sister and father, who visits an Indian mystic (Naschy) to find some sort of peace. It turns out the mystic and Elvira are linked through both the murders of the latter's family and a series of other killings, along with the mystic's evil brother (Naschy again), a hideously scarred sorcerer who is now using voodoo for his own nefarious ends. Naschy also plays a creepy satanic figure in one nicely done dream sequence.

The actor wrote the screenplay as well, and it's a sloppily constructed hodgepodge of zombie picture, *giallo* and voodoo mystery, which doesn't help when paired with the leaden direction. There are a few potent sequences involving the pasty-faced, eerily smiling titular ghouls, and the bloodletting is copious, but it's still a long and muddled 88 minutes. The fullscreen image is nicely presented, with bright colors and detailed night scenes, and the disc also includes a short selection of alternate takes that replaced nude scenes in the international version with the same sequences filmed using clothed actors.

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THE NIGHT OF THE WEREWOLF (EL RETORNO DEL HOMBRE LOBO) arrived eight years after VENGEANCE and is a much more effective production in every way, from the acting to the writing to the glossy production values. This was Naschy's ninth outing as his most famous character, Polish nobleman-turned-werewolf Waldemar Daninsky, and his first attempt at directing himself in the role. While the screenplay retains some of the kitchen-sink feel of VENGEANCE, it's handled more skillfully this time and comes across as more of a celebration of various horror genres rather than an attempt to mash them together. NIGHT is clearly inspired by the British (mainly Hammer) and Italian horror pictures of the '60s, not to mention the Universal monster rallies of the '40s; a rotting corpse even pops up looking suspiciously like one of the Blind Dead from fellow Spaniard Amando de Ossorio's quartet of films.

Daninsky has always been a tragic hero, and NIGHT is no different. The opening, set in 16th-century Hungary, finds the long-suffering lycanthrope sentenced to a sort of living death—with a mask sealed over his face in a nod to Mario Bava's BLACK SUNDAY—as the servant of none other than Countess Elizabeth Bathory (the chilling Julia Saly). Centuries later, Daninsky is inadvertently awakened by graverobbers, while Bathory is returned to life by a student of the occult (Silvia Aguilar) all too willing to sacrifice one of her friends in the attempt. Another pal, Karin (Azucena Hernandez), falls in love with Daninsky, and the couple soon find themselves battling Bathory and her vampire slaves—knowing also that Karin must ultimately kill Daninsky herself to give him final peace.

Naschy has his own limitations as a director, and some of NIGHT's 96 minutes feel unnecessarily padded. But this is one of his best performances as Daninsky, and he's aided by terrific werewolf makeup as well as the many beautiful women populating the cast. The movie is soaked in Gothic atmosphere and, while not as overtly violent as VENGEANCE, still manages to turn out a number of creepy moments that fall squarely in the Eurohorror tradition. The cinematography and authentic locations also contribute to the movie's lavish mood.

Instead of alternate takes, the NIGHT disc contains a small smattering of deleted/extended

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footage that provides a few small character moments but was probably wisely left behind. The widescreen image is once again nearly flawless, doing even more justice to the film’s high quality, although our review copy did freeze up once or twice. Both VENGEANCE and NIGHT offer Castilian Spanish mono soundtracks in addition to dubbed English mono and surround tracks, but the Spanish is the way to go for both, especially on NIGHT. Each package is also rounded out by a theatrical trailer, original Spanish opening credits, still and lobby-card galleries and liner notes by Naschy expert Mirek Lipinski. While this writer doesn’t hold Naschy’s prolific output in as high regard as the filmographies of other Spanish horror mavens like de Ossorio or even Narciso Ibañez Serrador (Dark Sky’s deluxe DVD of his classic WHO CAN KILL A CHILD?, coming in June, is long overdue), a restoration and reappraisal of his long and still active career is richly deserved.

THE NIGHT OF THE WEREWOLF

MOVIE: 🍅🍅🍅👤

DVD PACKAGE: 🍅🍅🍅👤

VENGEANCE OF THE ZOMBIES

MOVIE: 🍅🍅🍅👤

Fresh From the Archives: "THE NIGHT OF THE WEREWOLF"/"VENGEANCE OF THE ZOMBIES" (DVD Rev

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DVD PACKAGE: 🦋🦋🦋

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