

“SANTA SANGRE” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Heather Buckley

Friday, 21 January 2011 14:41



Alejandro Jodorowsky's cult classic *SANTA SANGRE*, making its long-awaited U.S. double-DVD and Blu-ray debuts next Tuesday, January 25 from Severin Films, plays like a bizarre carnival parade staged by Tod Browning, filled with freaks, cults, and an elephant funeral. The oddities begin with the film's first shot of Fenix (Axel Jodorowsky) perched on a tree in an insane asylum.

On his chest is a tattoo of an eagle—an image that is then replaced by that of an actual eagle soaring over Mexico City. This transition takes us back to when Fenix was a child (Adan Jodorowsky), raised by religious cult leader Concha (Blanca Guerra) and circus knife thrower Orgo (Guy Stockwell). We also learn of his closest companions, a dwarf and mute mime girl Alma, who both also work at the circus.

As the narrative progresses, a series of tableaux occur which will shape Fenix emotionally and determine his future self: his mother's temple plowed to the ground, the death and funeral of the circus' elephant (Jodorowsky's admitted representative of Ganesha, and therefore the death of a god, and a transformation point between Fenix the boy and Fenix the man) and, finally, the apparent murder-suicide of his father and mother. Concha, however, survives despite having her arms severed, now resembling the armless saint worshipped at her destroyed temple of blood.



Fast-forward back to the movie's present, where Fenix is reunited with his Mother as well as his dwarf friend. And so the show begins again, as Fenix plays his mother's hands in elaborate stage productions and even in their home life. But like the Hands of Orlac—or better yet, *PSYCHO* with a thematic nod to Lon Chaney's *THE UNKNOWN*—a series of women and even an (obviously male) cross-dresser die at either the hands of Mother or the out-of-control hands of Fenix.

“SANTA SANGRE” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Heather Buckley
Friday, 21 January 2011 14:41

Through many have called this film “surreal,” it never has that episodic quality of many European Surrealist films. Bizarre, yes, but that may be a reflection of the protagonist’s feverish imagination projected back to the audience. I would even compare SANTA SANGRE closely to the literary mode of magic realism (which has deep roots in South America, where Jodorowsky is originally from), a genre that meshes fantastic elements with “reality,” creating something that is never explicitly fantastic, but usually mythic and visionary.

This is also one of Jodorowsky’s most linear films. While his previous THE HOLY MOUNTAIN and EL TOPO are encrypted with obscure layers of meaning, like a 19th-century symbolist painting or his beloved Tarot, here we can watch and understand without annotations. The acting and framing are exquisite, and the visions Jodorowsky creates are unlike anything else: sequence after sequence of Fellini-esque spectacles; parades down the darkened streets of Mexico City, filled with freaks and drag queens in gaudy sequined gowns; scene of Grand Guignol deaths; the dead, painted white and shrouded, rising from their open graves; a giant elephant coffin pushed down a cliff, only to have townfolk fight over the meat...this movie *is* cinema, in that it is image—prophetic arrangements unique to its author and enhanced by Simon Boswell’s exquisite score. No medium could convey the story better, and here Jodorowsky is at his most masterful.

Having owned the Anchor Bay Region 2 release for many years, it is a gift to finally have Severin’s Region 1 release, which features supplemental material not on that previous release. The widescreen transfer and audio are wonderfully clear, and the extras are mind-boggling—over five hours of them, not including a feature commentary track on which journalist Alan Jones interviews Jodorowsky. This discussion covers many aspects explored amongst the other supplements—symbolism, inspirations, collaborators—but in more detail. Other features included on the first of the two DVDs are the American and Japanese trailers, which have not been cleaned up for this release. Plus, for the first time, we get to see SANTA SANGRE’s deleted footage, with the director’s commentary. They depict scenes at the temple, the father teaching Fenix how to throw knives and hypnotize and an extended performance between Fenix and the drag queen/woman. The A/V quality of this material is also fairly rough.

The rest of the Blu-ray/second-DVD bonus features are:

“Forget Everything You Have Ever Seen: The World of SANTA SANGRE”: Much like the annotations to Joyce’s ULYSSES, this 90-minute documentary decrypts some of the symbolism in SANTA SANGRE: The Tattooed Lady, The Elephant God, The Eagle and The Mother. It also includes interviews with the cast and co-writer Roberto Leoni about working with the director,

“SANTA SANGRE” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Heather Buckley
Friday, 21 January 2011 14:41

the film’s real-life origins...and which gang bosses to pay off when you’re shooting in Mexico.

“For One Night Only: Alejandro Jodorowsky”: Jonathan Ross (of the beloved INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILM SHOW) hosts this Channel X documentary, which looks at SANTA SANGRE as well as the filmmaker’s FANDO AND LIS, EL TOPO, TUSK, HOLY MOUNTAIN and THE RAINBOW THIEF. Ross interviews actors Dennis Hopper and Omar Sharif and critic J. Hoberman, among others, about the influence and reach of Jodorowsky’s films. We also get to hear from the maestro himself, on everything from his father’s career as a circus performer to his own work with Marcel Marceau in Paris, plus theories characterizing his attraction to violence, mysticism and semiotics when it comes to creating his visionary cinematic artifacts. Jodorowsky’s association with the French artist Jean “Moebius” Giraud (with whom he creates comics to this day) is also touched on, as well as his three years of preproduction on a film version of DUNE that was shelved due to budget and scope issues.

“Goyo Cárdenas: Spree Killer”: The documentary on the Mexican murderer who served as the real-life inspiration for SANTA SANGRE sheds both insight and doubt onto one of the country’s most notorious villains. Cárdenas’ “experiments” of choice were prostitutes, whom he strangled with a rope and buried alongside dead rabbits—shown in black-and-white crime-scene stills. Upon his capture, Cárdenas became an instant media sensation, with the prominent focus on his hands (a theme explored in SANTA SANGRE); after his trial he was locked up in an asylum (again echoed in the film)—but as you learn in this piece, his adventures did not end there...

On Stage Q&A With Jodorowsky: Taped after a SANTA SANGRE screening at ICA London in December 2002, this conversation covers the director’s point of view on art and commerce, mysticism, EL TOPO’s midnight-movie status and his admiration for Takashi Miike and that fellow cinematic bad boy’s film VISITOR Q.

Jodorowsky 2003 Interview: This one is presented in contained segments covering Jodorowsky’s point-of-view on Hollywood, normalcy, and RAINBOW THIEF’s Peter O’Toole, plus projects that never were—DUNE as well as THE STORY OF O.

Composer Simon Boswell Interviews Jodorowsky: Subjects covered here include death, the Tarot, and graphic novels. We’re also treated to two Boswell/Jodorowsky shorts: BLINK JODOROWSKY, which consists of a close-up Jodorowsky slowly blinking, accompanied by the music of a Latin guitar, and a “Close Your Eyes” music video, in which Jodorowsky repeats the titular phrase behind a montage of SANTA SANGRE clips and singer Allison Mosshart croons in

“SANTA SANGRE” (DVD/Blu-ray Review)

Written by Heather Buckley

Friday, 21 January 2011 14:41

the background, adding to the haunting, nearly Lynchian quality to the sequence.

ECHECK: The first movie by Jodorowsky’s son, a silent, black-and-white Surrealist short complete with French title cards. The story revolves around a mob trying to push the Eiffel Tower down, and a man and woman falling in love, and this also features optional commentary by its creator.

Remarkable and complete, Severin’s SANTA SANGRE will allow new fans to find this film and current ones to meditate on the symbols, theories and philosophy of Jodorowsky, one of cinema’s most important visionary filmmakers.

MOVIE: 🍷🍷🍷🍷

DISC PACKAGE: 🍷🍷🍷🍷

{jcomments on}