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Tagging this as a movie review is actually a bit of a misnomer, as THE DEVIL’S CARNIVAL, appropriate to its title, is just part of a multimedia circus, with assorted sideshows surrounding the main attraction. The film itself runs a brief 58 minutes, but there’s enough on the overall Road Tour bill to comprise a full entertainment experience.

The Tour’s New York stop took place at the Times Scare haunted attraction, where they packed the house even on a Thursday night. On hand were (left to right below) director Darren Lynn Bousman, writer Terrance Zdunich, music producer Joseph Bishara (who got the biggest applause of the night when it was revealed he played INSIDIOUS’ red-faced demon, to Bousman’s mock annoyance) and actress Briana Evigan, who also appears in Bousman’s MOTHER’S DAY, which hits select theaters this Friday and disc next Tuesday. Associate producer/Tour organizer Spooky Dan Walker was around as well, but kept a low profile as the quartet first took the stage for an opening Q&A with VIP ticket holders. As befits a city full of striving artists, the majority of their questions didn’t have to do with CARNIVAL’s production, but sought advice and inspiration for careers in the film/acting biz. The thrust of Bousman’s answers reflected the theme he returned to all evening: Be true to yourself and do your own thing your own way, much as he and Zdunich put CARNIVAL together themselves, following years of frustration making movies for others (including MOTHER’S DAY, which spent three years on the shelf before its belated unveiling this month).

Once the rest of the crowd was let in, in keeping with the sideshow feel, the next portion of the event was a performance by contortionist Jared Rydelek, who demonstrated his ability to turn himself into a human pretzel and force his limbs in body through tennis and squash racquets (as pictured below). There followed a lengthy and often very funny collection of behind-the-scenes footage from Bousman and Zdunich’s REPO! THE GENETIC OPERA, complete with follow-the-bouncing-organ singalongs of many of the film’s tunes (not that the rabid crowd needed any encouragement for that). Reinforcing the fan interactivity, samples of the winners of an on-line contest to create videos for the CARNIVAL song “In All My Dreams I Drown” were then projected, followed by a costume contest in which Evigan picked the winner among the audience entrants—who turned out to be a lovely young woman seated next to this writer who sported “cotton candy hair.”

Then it was time for the movie, preceded by Bousman leading the audience in a raised-right-hand oath not to tape, capture or otherwise bootleg what they were about to see. THE DEVIL’S CARNIVAL follows very much in the rock-opera vein of REPO!, albeit in a less grandiose, more dark-whimsical mode, as befits the setting. In Zdunich’s scenario, hell is a place of rides, carnie acts and clowns overseen by Lucifer (played by the writer himself), where three sinners arrive to be judged. John (Sean Patrick Flanery) has taken his own life following the death of his beloved son; Ms. Merrywood (Evigan) is a chronic thief who got gunned down by cops; and Tamara (Jessica Lowndes)…well, it’s not clear just what her sin is, unless it’s her lousy taste in boyfriends, which has proven fatal. Each of them encounters assorted members of Lucifer’s menagerie, played by a Who’s Who of offbeat pop-culture folks, from REPO! veterans Bill Moseley, Paul Sorvino, Nivek Ogre and Alexa Vega to newcomers including Marc Senter (bringing his usual panache to the Scorpion, hell’s resident bad boy who torments Tamara) and musicians such as Slipknot’s Shawn “Clown” Crahan, the striking Emilie Autumn and Five Finger Death Punch’s Ivan Moody (who makes an especially strong screen impression as Hobo Clown).

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