

Blood Spattered Blog: In praise of "DARK SHADOWS"

Written by Chris Alexander
Monday, 14 May 2012 10:09



If you've read either my editorial in FANGORIA #313, or my review of the coffin box-set in #314, you'll have an inkling of my deep emotional and intellectual affinity with Dan Curtis' DARK SHADOWS and the two films his revolutionary soap opera spawned. I'm also more than a little fond of the world etched by professional eccentric Tim Burton, that incredible body of work that veers madly between out of control cartoon (he was an animator first and foremost, after all) and grandiose gothic horror tropes. In between those two extremes sits the Burton mystique and love it or hate it, it's *his* mystique.

And even though many of my fellow DS enthusiasts balked at the trailer, I for one was excited about Burton's and his muse Johnny Depp's massively pricey remount of the show as a PEYTON PLACE on dark drugs feature film. Funnily enough, now that the film has opened and been reviewed – and there's a sharp divide between those who adore it and those who abhor it – the true devotees of the original show are actually generally positive about it.

I thought it was a work of mad genius – a wildly defiant anti-Hollywood blockbuster that embraced the sincerity of the show while gleefully riffing on just how ludicrous and surreal its rhythms and clichés were. It is akin to watching 150 episodes of that glorious 1966-1971 soap on fast forward while on some sort of mind altering hallucinogen, and I mean that in a very good way. It starts as a gorgeously etched Gothic tragedy—controlled, detailed and evocative— and then quickly loses control, becoming something sickly, strange, campy and completely insane, before doubling back to become something almost meditative, then operatic, then ludicrous, then frightening, then ridiculous, dramatic, serious, silly, stupid, wonderful, outrageous and finally, moving, beautiful, fragile, bold and...

Yes, I loved it. Yes, it's insane. Yes, it defies any conventional sense of narrative cohesion. Yes, Depp is brilliant, channeling Jonathan Frid's iconic Barnabas Collins with devotion and craft in what may be a career best performance. Yes, it's faithful to many of the story arcs of the show. Yes, Michelle Pfeiffer is fantastic, echoing Joan Bennett and making the movie her

Blood Spattered Blog: In praise of "DARK SHADOWS"

Written by Chris Alexander
Monday, 14 May 2012 10:09

own with a sensual intensity.

And yes, it's a Tim Burton film. It's Tim Burton at his most self indulgent and deceptively simple (kind of like MARS ATTACKS!; Another "pure," but less successful Burton film). There's more texture and detail to this picture than meets the fang, and much of it is lost upon first viewing as the audience is madly trying to find and define its tone, something it refuses to settle on.

But I digress; let me tell you about my adventures in seeing this new version of DARK SHADOWS.

I do my part for FANGORIA here in Toronto, Canada. So months ago, I was in talks with Warner Canada to throw a private post-premier party for the film hosted by Jonathan Frid. See, Frid is actually Canadian—from neighboring Hamilton, Ontario in fact—and over a decade ago he retired here to the township of Ancaster, to live a quiet life close to his family. Since Frid was my neighbor, I began making moves to connect with him, offering to run errands for him, whatever he needed. I invited him to the premiere (he had flown out to LA on Warner's dime to provide a cameo for the film, much to loyal DS admirer Depp's delight) and offered to send a limo for him there and back, really make it both painless and a pleasure to attend. I was met with initial kind rejection, then the potential of possibility and then... well and then, John passed away on April 14th at the age of 87. I was crushed. He was so close to seeing this rebirth of the world he had played a huge hand in defining. But alas, was just not meant to be.

I did, however, begin to get close to his nephew, Don Frid and after several warm conversations, I arranged for Warner to let Don introduce the premiere Toronto screening as well as invite the rest of the Frid family. I was thrilled to make this happen. I live for giving back a small bit of the joy that this world of subversive entertainment has brought to me all these years.

It was great to see Don up there in front of an audience, who generally had no clue as to the original show's existence, and give them the proper context and emotional sting to further appreciate the picture they were about to experience.

Here is a terrible video of that intro, my only personal document alas.

Blood Spattered Blog: In praise of "DARK SHADOWS"

Written by Chris Alexander
Monday, 14 May 2012 10:09

{flv}IMG_4545{/flv}

The screening was such a jumble of people, press and other such chaos, that I never had the chance to speak with Don after the lights went up. Touching base with him later, it turns out he dug the film. The whole family did, with Don's son being especially fond of the picture, going back a second time on his own dime.

For me, it was the climax to a memorable chapter. From designing content and chasing editorial for DARK SHADOWS in FANGORIA, to seeing 14 seats branded "Frid Family" in the premiere screening at the multiplex theatre and then all the bittersweet twists in between, I'll never forget it.