

## “THE DEAD INSIDE” (DVD Review)

Written by Ken Hanley

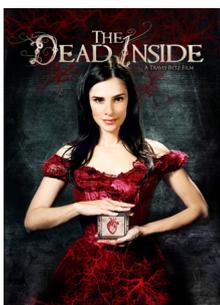
Tuesday, 08 January 2013 17:48

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One of the many struggles of independent horror filmmaking is finding a voice to attract your target audience, whether it's devoting whatever budget you have to a bloodier body count or opting for a quiet, atmospheric tension as a result of limited resources. However, from the oversaturated opening credits onward, *THE DEAD INSIDE* prides itself on defying expectations, offering surprises within its low-budget boundaries that make it a unique and satisfying genre offering.

Just from examining the cover of Monarch Home Video's DVD, *THE DEAD INSIDE* could be seen as one of the countless imitators of *HELLRAISER* or *THE EXORCIST*, but it's actually closer in tone to a *DR. HORRIBLE'S SING-ALONG BLOG* for the horror crowd. The film follows two struggling artists whose lives fall into turmoil when the presence of a spirit comes between them. But within this basic narrative, the audience is treated to dryly comedic zombie fantasies, surprisingly catchy musical numbers and black-and-white flashbacks to the spirit's previous life, courtesy of the strange and determined writing and direction of Travis Betz.



Front and center stand Sarah Lassez and Dustin Fasching, who tackle multiple roles in the film and project a level of charm and devotion to the material on which its success hinges. Lassez is a revelation as Fiona, a writer of horror fiction who finds herself suffering severe writer's block and then becoming possessed by a lonely and violent ghost, Emily. Lassez hits every beat perfectly, impressively bouncing between self-mutilation and vibrant musical performances and retaining an inherent charisma even during her most repulsive scenes. Fasching is equally as impressive as Wes, a Gothic photographer relegated to dissatisfying wedding assignments; his comedic chops are very much in evidence early in the movie, which makes his intense

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performance in the dramatic third act an unexpected wonder. On top of that, Fasching and Lassez are particularly great in the zombie fantasy sequences, the strongest of which gets the film off to a hilarious running start.

THE DEAD INSIDE's low budget does sometimes constrain the overall efficiency of the final product, particularly when it comes to sporadic audio problems, yet these issues never become glaring. Betz and his collaborator/cinematographer Shannon Hourigan mostly utilize the film's low budget for the better, keeping almost all of the action in the apartment and letting the two leads shine in their multiple roles. Betz refuses to compromise his vision, even for the sake of production value, although at no point does the film look like anything besides a labor of love. Special credit should also be given to Michael Brake and Joel Van Vliet for their original music, which complements the material more often than it stretches to meet the film's needs.

For fans of horror/comedy and Betz's previous LO and JOSHUA, THE DEAD INSIDE is a gratifying, rarely predictable experience that works as a musical, relationship drama and horror film simultaneously. It definitely has the potential to land a crossover audience, playing like a dark opera that is as likely to please the theater crowd as much as any hardcore horror fan. Additionally, the DVD's special features aren't too shabby; they include a deleted musical sequence that's catchy, but a bit too revealing for its original place in the film, a short making-of featurette that showcases the lighthearted but professional environment on the set, a basic trailer and two commentary tracks. These bounce between middling and entertaining, especially the actors' commentary, on which Fasching and Betz engage in mischievous (and possibly drunken) repartee.

MOVIE: 🍷🍷🍷👤

DVD PACKAGE: 🍷🍷🍷👤