

## "THE LOVED ONES" (Fantasia Film Review)

Written by Chris Alexander  
Thursday, 15 July 2010 13:34

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If it's twisted you want, look no further than first-time Australian director Sean Byrne's deeply damaged, dark and horrifying John-Hughes- goes-to-hell shocker THE LOVED ONES, which screens at [Montreal's Fantasia film festival](#) on July 26. The film takes the sweaty-palmed teen romance/melodrama and completely drags its screaming carcass across the bloody coals, taking few prisoners with its explicit cruelty but never sacrificing its deft character arcs or broad sense of black comedy.

The film sees pretty-boy Aussie teenager Brent (Xavier Samuel of ECLIPSE and Fango FrightFest's ROAD KILL)—who is saddled with tremendous guilt after the death of his father in a car accident where he was the driver—beginning to slowly pick up the pieces with the help of a new love. This new romance, however, does not sit well with his scorned secret admirer (Robin McLeavy), whose dotting dad (John Brumpton) then kidnaps him, dresses him in a tux and engages in plenty of prom-themed father/daughter torture in sequences that make the Grand Guignol in the SAW pictures seem more akin to so many dirty looks and slapped wrists.



The behavior of the father and his hideously sick little girl (McLeavy is so good you can almost smell her insanity) could be, if read by a different creative sensibility, just an exercise in cheap, empty nihilism. But here, under Byrne's playful but unsparing eye, it's like the dinner scene in THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE crossed with THE EVIL DEAD by way of THE ROAD WARRIOR; ultraviolent and depraved, yet so stylish, over-the-top and cartoonish, it's gleeful in its absurdity. None of this cheek-probing- tongue action negates the psycho-horror at the heart of THE LOVED ONES, however, and by the time Samuel (who is truly great in a straight, sensitive performance that grounds the flick in reality) meets his stalker's ex-boyfriends in the

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basement, all bets are off and the movie rides merrily off any rail that it may have been tenuously attached to prior.

Not for the squeamish but a major treat for genre followers who like their pop art out of control and unpredictable, THE LOVED ONES is a kind of masterpiece. Multiple viewings only increase its sting and reveal more layers to—yes—love. A must-see from a Down Under land that has long made movies that don't behave.



{jcomments on}