Written by Kelly Stewart
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I happened to check out a monthly short program of horror shorts called Little Terrors that director Justin McConnell (THE COLLAPSED) hosts in Toronto. On that program, one film that really stuck out was Michael Sharpe’s DEVILING. This one really has the goods in my two favorite areas in horror films: hyperkinetic performances and great atmosphere.

DEVILING starts off with a quote from Edgar Allan Poe. OK, hardly a new idea, but it does set the tone for the piece, despite it having a modern setting. We meet up with Ronald (Robert Haulbrook), a mortician doing double duty giving a man an autopsy and placing stalking phone calls to his attractive ex-girlfriend Charlene (Jodi Essex) on Halloween night. To say that Ronald is upset about the breakup is the understatement of the year. The first half of the movie flips back and forth between his lab and her house through a series of calls, as he assures her that her worst nightmare will come true if she doesn’t take him back. Things go from bad to worse in terms of Ronald’s emotional state, and the second half turns into a home-invasion scenario that feels very much like a haunted-house setpiece.

Haulbrook’s intense performance is the centerpiece of DEVILING; he channels Jack Nicolson's performance in THE SHINING, but also plays up to the kind of emotional turmoil you’d see Vincent Price enact in the Poe films. Sure, it can be campy and a bit over-the-top, but that’s what makes it work. Haulbrook makes you condemn Ronald and pity him at the same time. The slight Southern twang in his voice is a nice touch too.

DEVILING is writer/director Sharpe’s follow-up to his 2010 short MONOMANIACAL, and he really knows his stuff when it comes to creating atmosphere. He gives you the mood of an old Hammer film, but has his feet planted in a modern sensibility. The composition and cinematography are topnotch, with an excellent, subdued score by Alex Maudlin. No sloppy camera movements or bad shadows that seem dominate indie filmmaking these days, either. DEVILING gives you the pleasant experience of watching someone go through hell.

Read an interview with Sharpe (who also acts in other films like DEVIL’S CROSSING) here and check out
www.sharpeedgefilms.com
for more info on upcoming DEVILING screenings.