

"SUSPIRIA" with accompaniment from Goblin (Live Review)

Written by Lee Gambin and Lisa Bartolomei
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Recently in Melbourne, horror film and music fans alike could hardly contain their excitement. In a world first, Italian prog-rock icons Goblin performed their intense, complex and mesmerising soundtrack to Dario Argento's surrealistic nightmare SUSPIRIA while the legendary film played. It's an interesting proposition having live musicians perform while watching a masterpiece like SUSPIRIA, especially when such a film combines striking visual language, dreamlike narrative and nail biting terror all masterfully commanding the full attention of the audience.

Unlike a normal live show there were no theatrics or pretences to hide behind. The music instead acted to amplify the encroaching sense of anxiety and paranoia as the American outsider Suzy Bannion (Jessica Harper) discovers the German ballet school she has just enrolled in is run by a group of murderous witches intent on making her their next victim.

Watching the much analysed and scrutinized SUSPIRIA is an extremely visceral experience; so much of what makes it frightening is what's left to the imagination of the viewer. The set pieces are lavish to the point of almost seeming unreal, the use of colour such as the deep reds, vibrant blues and sickening greens add to its expressionist roots and the exceptionally violent, but highly stylized murder sequences pull you deep into Suzy's almost hallucinogenic experience of fear and almost paralysing paranoia.

For most of the runtime, the killer is little more than a suggestion giving the film its voyeuristic undertone, which adds to the disturbing atmosphere created by Argento. Even in the film's final moments one still questions if what we are seeing is real or just a figment of a highly disturbed mind. SUSPIRIA lends itself to a myriad of interpretations, can be read on any number of levels and wholly inhabits a world of nightmares and subconscious desire. Goblin's soundtrack is fundamental in creating this terrifying feeling that permeates throughout the film. In moments, the music recedes to an unnerving silence anticipating a horror yet to come. When the music does reach fever pitch it was virtually impossible not to be swept away by the frenzy of emotion

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and fear playing out on the screen. Hearing the soundtrack performed live was a truly mind blowing, heart palpitating and blood curdling experience.



The sheer volume of the instruments acted as a full blown aural assault attacking from every angle. The rolling drums build to a crescendo of industrial mayhem, while the creepy, yet hauntingly beautiful synthesizers, bouzouki and guitars enhance the otherworldly quality and fairy-tale aspects of the storyline. It is important to note that one of Argento's main influences for SUSPIRIA was Disney's SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARVES. The faint whispers of the soundtrack eerily suggested the idea of black magic incantations reverberating through the walls of the Freiburg academy, even before the subject of witchcraft is offered as an explanation for the ghastly murders witnessed at the beginning of the film. Goblin's performance was flawless; it was as if we, the audience, had a window into when they first scored the soundtrack over 30 years ago. It was hard to believe that such textured wall of sound came from just 5 individuals and not an entire orchestra. The sound was so overwhelming that by the end of the film, the audience totally felt a deep pit in their stomach from the chilling effect of the performance. It was easy to understand how the soundtrack to SUSPIRIA is one of the most often imitated and highly revered soundtracks in horror history. It was a truly wonderful, once in a lifetime experience; a descent into both the stuff that dreams and nightmares are made of.

Goblin themselves were exceptionally gracious and so happy to be here in Melbourne and it showed as they took shots of the audience, happily signed fans LPs of their wonderful soundtracks and in their broken English, spoke charmingly and cordially to Down Under devotees of their magical musicality of the macabre.