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DVD review

Oddly, Kate Jackson is the best thing about this movie. Of course, not knowing that much about her, other than the fact (of which I have no experiential knowledge) that she, at some point, was a Charlie's Angel, I couldn't really say from personal knowledge if it's surprising that she was pretty good in this.

At any rate, she's the best thing here. And because this was a 1973 made-for-TV occult thriller (emphasis on the made-for-television bit), she's the best thing, not because of anything connected with prurient interest (though she was quite pretty) but because her acting and emoting were pretty much better than the rest of what this movie had going on.

Sometimes, sheer overwrought (and unintentional) badness can make a movie sublimely "great." More rare are those cases in which mediocrity - which normally invalidates a movie's entertainment value on either the good or so-bad-it's-good spectrum - can actually lead to the same result as outlandish badness.

Satan's School for Girl's is an OK flick. It has no surprises. We know from the title what the big whoopity-doo secret is. And even if the title was more vague (and I'm glad it's not because the title is the other great thing about this movie), I don't see how even a basic plot synopsis could avoid hinting around, at least broadly, at what the Hell's (literally) going on at this snooty private school.

Of course, thanks to Rosemary's Baby and The Exorcist and any number of (mostly lesser) movies that were quick to jump on the bandwagon, Satanism and the occult were an official BIG FUCKING DEAL in 70s cinema. (Yes, I know Rosemary's Baby is a 60s movie but it helped kick this shit off.)

I suppose in an era when made-for-TV horror movies weren't uncommon (remember, Wes Craven got in some early licks via TV with Stranger in Our House a.k.a. Summer of Fear; Tobe Hooper got in his other good movie [besides Texas Chain Saw - I don't count Poltergeist cuz that was more Spielberg's baby IMHO], Salem's Lot; Moon of the Wolf sicced lycanthropy on television viewing audiences; etc.....), it really wasn't a shock that, following in the wake of better films, something like Satan's School for Girls would come out on TV. Hell, it's actually a pretty tawdry come-on for TV 30 years ago. I could be wrong but I bet a lot of kids got sent to their bedrooms before this one came on.

Anyway, the title says all that really needs to be said about the plot, other than that the lead girl comes trying to figure out what the hell happened to her sister, which is obvious to all of us outside the movie who know that aforementioned lead girl is in a scenario called Satan's School for Girls. That, and we see in the movie what happens to chickies who fall out of favor at this educational facility.

There's not a lot of tension. It's kind of a tepid movie. Like I said, mediocre. So what makes it actually kind of entertaining, rather than listless in a kind of gently sinks to the bottom kind of way? Hard to say. Partly, I got frustrated with its bare level of competence to the point that I started getting snarky with the movie, which is a form of entertainment to me.

And then, at the end (where, by the way, there is actually a kind of neat twist, though I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised), when we meet who I think is supposed to be Satan Incarnate, we get the most ho-hum devil-in-the-flesh kinda guy around. Since when is the Prince of Darkness bland? What, is he the lentil soup of evil? OH MY GOD!

And I think that's the key to this movie's "success" as a Cheezy Flick. It may not be gloriously bad, but it is so gloriously mediocre that it transcends to the same basic level as movies that are out and out gloriously bad. If you've seen this then you know what to expect and whether or not you want to see it again. If you haven't seen it, you still know what to expect.



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Upchuck Undergrind listens to a little bit of a lot of things - just note the eclecticism of his reviews. He also reads voraciously and loves movies. He is a very open-minded Episcopalian (and student of Buddhism and Hinduism) who thinks Slayer is one of the greatest metal bands. Ever. In addition to his work with Corazine - for which he has written since its inception (he is a Fishcomcollective veteran) - he also writes for DJFix.com.

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