

## Palm Beach International Film Festival — "Peelers" Reviewed

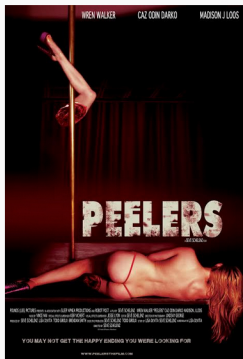
ON APRIL 8 | IN COMMENTARY, MOVIE REVIEWS | BY MICHAEL PARSONS | WITH 1 COMMENT

"NOTE: THERE ARE A POST-CREDIT SEQUENCES/DIRECTED BY SEVÉ SCHELENZ/STARRING WREN WALKER, CAZ ODIN DARKO AND MADISON J. LOOS/HORROR/95 MINUTES/PREMIERING SATURDAY APRIL 9TH AT PALM BEACH INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

SUMMARY: ★★★★★

A few years back, I spoke with a guy named Sevé Schelenz, who was out peddling a found-footage flick that he wrote and directed called "Skew" on the festival circuit. I caught him at the Spooky Movie Fest in DC where I took maybe the best photograph of a Canadian horror filmmaker ever. Then I found out that Sevé wasn't a horror director per se, but more a crafter of the immensely understated, partially because of a shoestring budget, but also because he has a knack for moody minimalism.

But for the next one, there was going to be a lot of blood and T & A, the director told me. Fast forward to 2016, when "Peelers" is premiering at the Palm Beach International Film Festival (April 9th at 10:00 PM), and I'll tell you that he wasn't kidding. A movie about a strip club that becomes ground zero for a violent confrontation with bile spewing creatures, Schelenz's second feature is a fitting bookend for his (hopefully) yet-to-be-filled horror catalog,



opposite his initial foray into the genre, which relied almost entirely on the imagination.

"Peelers" is not the subtle, thought-provoking psychological thriller of its predecessor, as might be surmised by the poster art. No, this one is a skosh more visceral. Schelenz takes a stab at the grindhouse femme fatale vs. (insert monster) sub-genre, leaving no head un-topped and no breast veiled, as many of its post-"From Dusk Till Dawn" ilk do. But there's that certain *je ne sais quoi* that makes a good horror/comedy, and Schelenz operates mostly within that sweet spot, so to speak.

Let's start tech. From an aesthetic standpoint, creative (and smart) camera angles and use of lighting already put the film above par for its category (courtesy of DP Lindsay George). You can get arterial spray anywhere, but I've seen films with ten times the FX budget that aren't shot half as well. Production quality aside, the script (from Lisa DeVita from a concept by DeVita and Schelenz)

finds itself stretching at times, but the cast is strong enough to stop the film from stalling when things start to get a little redundant.

Baseball bat wielding, fastball hurling badass biker chick Blue Jean (Wren Walker) is the owner of the ill-fated adult establishment, but only for one more night, as she's just sold the bar to a Boss Hog-type investor. Enter four coal miners, who look beaten beyond a reasonable day's work but are in festive spirits nonetheless, and a Justin Bieber-inspired ne'er do well (Madison J. Loos) who's stolen a car and has cops in tow. Things are about to go south in a big way. A well-rounded roster of strippers, a good-hearted bouncer (Caz Odin Darko) who clearly has feelings for Blue Jean, and a few random assholes, and we have the perfect petrie dish for the impending plague, which manifests with a lot of black ooze and projectile vomiting. Turns out that the miners dug up more than they'd bargained for in the bowels of their ambiguously situated little town.

Gore galore ensues, but the splatterfest is more a bi-product of the film's crazy, go-for-broke attitude than its core ambition. Schelenz began his career in the comedy realm, and "Peelers" is best during its laugh-out-loud moments. And I don't sling that term around lightly; there's a sequence or two that caught me completely off-guard. Let's just say that if Schelenz was inspired by "The Evil Dead", he's almost equally paying tribute to Raimi's "For Love of the Game" (Yes, you read that correctly). Most surprisingly, though, is how likable the characters are. Even the peripheral players show some signs of a soul, a little detail that a lot of filmmakers disregard.

"Peelers" will make its world premiere tonight at 10:00 PM at the Palm Beach International Film Festival. **Make sure to stay all the way through the end credits.**

— M. Parsons



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