



Reel-Illusionary Zone, A film maker expresses himself Germanically

July 30, 11:28 AM · Richard Murphy - Boston Film Industry Examiner

The one unavoidable fact about John Hartman is that he loves movies. Maybe love is not a strong enough word. One learns this in watching the Behind the Scenes shots about his movie, Reel-Illusionary Zone(Riz). He shot over two hours of film to bring 89 minutes to the screen. One could be forgiven for thinking he would still be filming if time and money were not in question. I don't know if his co-conspirator and producer, C.G. "Zee" Zarbock told him that filming forever was not on, but the film did get produced.

Reel-Illusionary Zone is a tribute to German Expressionism. After the devastation of World War I and its resulting impoverishment, German film makers had to do more with less. The result was iconic films such as Nosferatu and Der Golem (though the first installment of Der Golem was filmed in the second year of the war, when Germany still expected to win). It is dark or, to expand a term, noirish.



Minimalist plot summary: The Toymaker (played by John) greets his creatures in the morning. He is a loving master. He is not much of a fuhrer, though, as the toys blithely go off and pass into the Reel-Illusionary Zone once they are able to escape. Even his Secret Groovy toy (XZanthia), sent to find others, takes off after crossing into the RIZ.

Horrors, the toys become human. At the end, the Toymaker sacrifices his own existence that they may live.

Though Reel-Illusionary Zone is a silent movie and filmed with much dark tint, I can't say I found it overly dark. The tone seems mostly playful and the main characters' lives, or existence that becomes life, somewhat joyful.

That does seem to fit in with John Hartman's worldview as expressed in Behind the Scenes. "It occurred to me recently, that if you are harmonizing with what you're doing, in the moment and if there is love and if there's joy expressed, that's the main thing." That's about as bright an outlook as can be.

Even the Toymaker's end is not that horrible. One may mourn the martyr, but that no greater love aspect is not tragic, rather, it is full of hope. If John meant to evoke only the dark, he missed. No matter, it is not to be regretted when light breaks through.



Filming takes place in many venues, New England, amongst others. Most interesting is a castle in Bulgaria. This is where there is homage to Nosferatu. The Vampirous Master of the Castle (Chadley Kolb) is more into the intellect. That is, he eats brains. Groovy Toy and another character, Beanstalk (Trevor Jackson) aided by the Master's servant (Mark Leonard), escape that fate. From there they meet The Castle Saint (Paul Kay) in the Sacred Love Temple. They hear the inner voice tell them go back to the castle's dark side and Groovy Girl avoids becoming a nun.

RIZ ties many diverse elements together, the Sixties, psychedelic experience, German Expressionism, Surrealism. There is a plot, even though John described the film as "not terribly coherent." It does not move in a straight line, but it does flow. Making it a "talkie" would have required too many words.

John and Zee's cleverness with the Super8 is not going to get people to abandon newer cameras or abjure audio. Reel-Illusionary Zone will not appeal to a mass audience in a country where the Fast and The Furious can't stop having sequels. Whatever that says, it is not an argument against making a different movie.

When you read what John said on [MySpace](#), you understand his devotion to the genre, **As a visual artist, I can hardly imagine anything more striking than what expressionist filmmakers painted on the screen of old: The exaggerated facial expressions; extreme camera angles; extreme light-dark contrast; surrealistic set design, etc. Thematically, expressionistic films usually offered solutions, which I find to be more karmically responsible than many new age films. My interest is to keep the flame of that movement burning (insofar as one filmmaker is able) by paying homage to it's artistic genius. Many of my films are largely based on expressionism, but none are totally faithful to the movement, because I add modern components to my films. Plus, I endeavor to inspire by leaving the audience with a bright light at the end of an odd and dark tunnel. Conversely, most expressionistic films were more politically motivated in lieu of inspiration...BUT I still try to match the powerful visuals of my all time favorite art form! yaaay!**

In the words of the Lightning Bug Princess (Ashley Satterfield) of the beautiful blue hair, "Flying backwards up a hill won't solve your problems." I'm not sure what that means outside of its context in the movie, but I liked it.

For more info: You can see a trailer at www.reel-illusionaryzone.com. John's production company's website is www.reelgroovyfilms.com. Zee's is <http://unfoldingstorypictures.com/zee.html>. John and Zee will be showing the Reel-Illusionary Zone in Massachusetts and the DVD will be available soon.

Copyright 2009 Examiner.com. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Author



Richard Murphy is an Examiner from Boston. You can see Richard's articles at:

["http://www.Examiner.com/x-2791-Boston-Film-Industry-Examiner"](http://www.Examiner.com/x-2791-Boston-Film-Industry-Examiner)