Lewis Furey's Shadow Dancing

Shadow Dancing is a hybrid film that mixes contemporary dance with supernatural romance. It is an old-fashioned Gothic murder mystery spiced up with a heavy dance beat and an odd mixture of classical and jazz/MTV-style dancing. Director Lewis Furey, mostly known as a composer of film scores, holds the mix together for about two-thirds of the film, then he bogs down trying to make sense of it all.

Nadine van der Velde plays a pretty young dancer named Jessica who nervously auditions for an innovative new dance company at the rundown Beaumont Theatre. There she meets the demanding and skeptical choreographer Philip Crest (the National Ballet's Gregory Osborne), who is determined to reopen the theatre with his own work. Jessica is accepted into the company, but at first with only the grudging approval of Crest. Living above the stage is the theatre's original owner Edmund Beaumont (Christopher Plummer) who stalks about, reliving his past. His unfaithful wife Liliane, a temperamental prima donna, died on the stage 50 years ago under mysterious circumstances. It turns out that her spirit still haunts the building and, with predictable inevitability, comes to possess Jessica.

Interwoven into this overwritten plot is some of Canada's best on screen talent playing an array of characters, including Chauncey King as a wealthy patron and former lover of Edmund, Shirley Douglas as the dance company manager, Brent Carver as Liliane's lover Karnov, and John Colicos, as an arts reporter and lifelong fan of the dead dancer. Their performances hold the silly story together. Unfortunately, the two leads create few sparks. As an actor, Osborne is a great dancer with a commanding presence but little emotion; as a dancer van der Velde is a plodding actor with limited range. Together they are good, but simply aren't strong enough, nor is their dancing dynamic enough, to forgive the weakly plotted line.

While putting all the elements in place, director Furey builds the film with a series of sweeping camera movements through what is essentially one set. It was shot in one of the greatest buildings remaining in downtown Toronto, the old Polish Community Centre. The atmosphere is so claustrophobic that the Gothic suspense generated by tight angles and red gauze becomes real. The camera provides the building with haunting effectiveness. However, Furey loses faith in the visual aspects of film and tries to explain the mysterious death.

A contrived chase follows with Jessica's boyfriend Paul (James Kee) who suspects she is sleeping with Crest. Meanwhile, Jessica revives Liliane's past via flashbacks with Karnov, Liliane's ex-lover, who tries to save Jessica/ Liliane from being murdered a second time. There is no real payoff as the dance goes off without a hitch and Edmund's sister is implicated in the original death, but the reason is never made very clear. The spirit is set free and Jessica is reunited with Paul.

Furey has allowed the Phantom of the Opera aspects of the story to get in the way of the dance, and consequently the film suffers from being neither a good murder mystery nor a great dance film. Shadow Dancing works best when Furey purposefully creates a mood of confusion and uncertainty, with Plummer, in a harum but likable performance, shuffling menacingly back and forth amongst the von Steinberg-style décor. Director of Photography Rene Ohashi has seldom done better work and he has already been given an award from the Canadian Society of Cinematographers for best cinematography in a feature. There's a lot of good filmmaking in Shadow Dancing. It's too bad Furey felt the need to explain things. He should have left it to the dancing and Osborne's graceful camera work. Paul Townsend ●

Jean-Claude Lord's Eddie and the Cruisers II: Eddie Lives!

Eddie and the Cruisers had only limited theatrical success in 1984, but did very well on pay TV, and the record album sold over three million copies. The music was more popular than the film and the remake, Eddie and the Cruisers II: Eddie Lives!, is more like an extended rock video for John Cafferty and the Beaver Brown Band, who once again provide the sound track album.

Eddie Wilson, now known as Joe West and working in Montreal, was thought to have died in a car accident in 1984. He was an enigma of rock superstardom, but decided he had had enough with the business, and the accident was a way of...
disappearing from the public eye. Twenty years later his record company discovers some 50 make-up with Aurora Film Anthony promotes them under the slogan Eddie Lives', to hears about the scheme and sets out to form a new band under his new name. The band has success, despite Eddie's reluctance to appear in public, and eventually he is (re)discovered by the record company. Eddie returns to the stage triumphantly with his own music in a concert taped at a real Bon Jovi show in Las Vegas.

Michael Parei (Streets of Fire) returns to his role as Eddie, and Canadian actress Marina Orsini (He Shorts, He Scores) plays his artist girlfriend. Fate is more or less glorious throughout, reflecting on the past. He only wants to play "real music." Orsini is little more than a pretty aide. However, the band is good, with Platinum Blonde's lead singer and song writer Mark Holmes on bass and Bernie Coulson (The Accusation) as an ambitious and talented lead guitarist. He gives the film its only upbeat performance and the concerts are the best part of the film. John Cafferty, a Bruce Springsteen sound-alike, sings for Fate, who gives the songs a creditable emotional reading. The music reflects the hard-driving Jersey best, but when are film producers going to understand that music from the sixties sound a whole lot different than today's high-tech studio product? The film loses all credibility when it tries to sell Wilson's earlier material as sounding no different than the "real music" he is supposed to be playing today.

The script is flat and dichel-ridden, and Quebec veteran Jean-Claude Lord's (The Tadpole and The Whale, He Shorts, He Scores) direction never rises above the workmanlike. It is evident he is only in it for the money and the chance to direct again for the American market. However, he does manage to work in many Montreal locations, including a Canadianis hockey game at the Forum, and even a side trip to the snow-covered Laurentians. The film is a Les Productions Alliance production in association with Scott Bros. of New Jersey. Scott holds the rights to the film and the music, which might explain why, as a sequel, Eddie Lives! is more of a cynical exercise in cross-over marketing techniques than an entertaining rock 'n' roll movie.

Paul Townsend

Eddiethe Cruisers II: Eddie Lives


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