



One of the most interesting things that can be said to drum up interest in a horror film is that it is based on a true story. THE EXORCIST and, more recently THE EXORCISM OF EMILY ROSE both benefited from the supposed truth behind their horrific premises. THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT became a juggernaut success just by fictionalizing a backstory and spreading rumours of its validity. THE AMITYVILLE HORROR story has spawned not one, but 4 or 5 films, plus a recent remake. I was unable to completely verify that the film was filmed there, but the filming locations listed would put it in the exact vicinity of the Keyes farm. All very cool things to ponder that add realism and depth to a supernatural story like this one.

In this particular case, the Keyes family moved into the Wachusett Mountain area of Massachusetts in 1751. On April 14, 1755, the Keyes 4 year-old daughter Lucy, playing with her sisters in the woods on their property, disappeared, never to return. Her mother, Martha, searched for her until her death, 31 years later. The mystery was eventually solved, but reports from the town of Princeton, Massachusetts still describe the ghosts of Lucy and Martha Keyes frantically seeking each other in the dark of the woods near Keyes farm, which is now owned by the films director, John Stimpson. I was unable to completely verify that the film was filmed there, but the filming locations listed would put it in the exact vicinity of the Keyes farm. All very cool things to ponder that add realism and depth to a supernatural story like this one

Fortunately, unlike most of the films listed above, this is a tightly crafted, good old-fashioned ghost story, the likes of which are not often seen anymore. Backstory, character personalities, allegiances and motives are trickled out drop by drop as the film moves along. Nothing is obvious and plot points are guarded until necessary. Some may find it slow but I enjoyed the fact that the twists and turns were not telegraphed in the first 20 minutes of the film. I didn't know who the villains were, whether the ghost story was real, who is after what. The ghost legend itself isn't explained until the 40-minute mark. The small coincidences and twists of fate – local families and their lineages, two mothers losing daughters, the two girls having the same name – all lends the film a mythic, ominous quality that adds greatly to the overt sense of dread that is fostered throughout.

Stimpson, former president of the Harvard University Hasty Pudding Theatrical group, has been very careful about building the story from the ground up and keeping it well-structured throughout. The direction is equally accomplished, with a polished, yet low-budget, feel to the cinematography and pacing. A big plus to some, (and a huge drawback to others) this film, despite its R rating, has very little to no coarse language, no nudity, almost no violence until the final moments and, aside from some gruesome pig parts, no gore or sleaze. This is one that could be viewed by the whole family, provided your kids are old enough to not be freaked out by the ghostly elements of the film.

The lead roles are all very well cast, with Delpy and Theroux quite ably carrying a nuanced script based almost entirely on dialogue and innuendo. Julie Delpy plays Jeanne Cooley as a fragile, damaged woman, unsure of herself and reluctant to take action, until her own child is in peril, then she comes alive like a female Beowulf, ready to slay all comers. Justin Theroux eschews his usual offbeat and comedic character actor status to play a straight arrow leading man part. He does a very good job playing a man torn between his work and his family, trying to reconcile with an emotionally distant wife and, eventually, an entirely unnatural haunting problem. Brooke Adams, best remembered from 70's and 80's cult classics like SHOCK WAVES, THE DEAD ZONE and the 1978 remake of INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS does a great job as the wild card character Samantha Porter, who may or may not be the central catalyst for everything going on in this film. Mark Boone Jr., a tremendously gifted character actor, plays Porters troubled cousin, who also happens to be the Cooley's next door neighbour. Boone has appeared in everything from NEW YORK STORIES and DIE HARD 2 to SE7EN, MEMENTO and, most recently, as a crooked cop in BATMAN BEGINS. Here he steals the show as a demented New England pig farmer haunted by the ghost of Lucy Keyes and obsessed with 'clam bellies'.

All in all this was an entertaining, well executed and very surprising ghost story that is well worth a viewing for anyone looking for a good Saturday night at home with the whole family.

Crave Factor – 8

Well made, well acted and definitely worth the watch.

Menu

I was supplied with a screening copy with no menu selections

Crave Factor – N/A

Extras

According to the Press release, the DVD will feature Biographies, Filmographies, subtitles and trailers.

Crave Factor – N/A

Video

Anamorphic Widescreen.

As I mentioned in the Movie Review section, the camera work is professional grade, but obviously on lower quality equipment than the Hollywood standard. There is a lot of grain, some blur and a lot lost in the dark, which, in a ghost story, is not always a bad thing. There are a lot of close and medium shots, with only a few panoramic shots of the Princeton countryside during the opening sequences. The visual FX were fairly well done without being a focal point of the film.

Crave Factor – 7

Low-Fi, but well executed

Audio

No audio specs, my machine displayed it as Stereo.

The dialogue audio is well rendered, with no losses or crossover. The score is of the slightly overdramatic, Lifetime Movie variety. Several times I found the score distracting and that it minimized the tension of certain scenes.

Crave Factor – 6

Good audio quality, a little corny on the score.

Conclusions & Final Thoughts

This is a very small, tightly wound, well-written and deftly handled thriller. By virtue of its lack of sex, violence and harsh language, this is a film that can be enjoyed by most of the family. Some of the ghost scenes are frightening and there are some gory bits of bacon, but for older kids, this may be a great "horror" without the usual T&A and hackslash predominant in the genre. I found it engrossing and the performances top notch.

For more info on the film, or on the true legend of Lucy Keyes go to: www.lucykeyes.com or visit their Myspace page at www.myspace.com/legendoflucykeyes

+ A fairly clean ghost story with some thrills and chills

- Some cheesy background music and little in the way of enhancement or extras