

Psychological, Religious Edge to ‘The Possession of Michael King’

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on August 22, 2014 - 5:52pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – The problem with most horror films is that they don’t understand what really scares us, and substitute bloody messes or the jack-in-the-box “boo!” in place of what really gets under our skin. “The Possession of Michael King” is a rare and special exception, taking demonic possession to broad depths of psychological and religious symbolism.

The story of a non-believer who seeks to make a film about proof of demonic possession has a full laundry list for that genre – the odd movements, the voices, the killings, the Church, the “found” video footage and the weird zealots aiding the possessed along the way. What it does differently with the material is in the context circumstance of extreme emotional distress, to the point that it all could be psychosomatic – fiercely so, but possible in the way its presented. Writer/director David Jung creates an environment of dread, one that marries to a tragedy that is almost unspeakable in its sadness.

Michael King (Shane Johnson) is a successful filmmaker with a bright future and a brilliant family. Wife Beth (Julie McNiven) is liquid sunshine in his life, and she gives him a daughter Ellie (Ella Anderson) and a reason to thank God, even though Michael doesn’t believe in him. Tragedy comes to the family in the form of an avoidable automobile accident, and Beth dies as a result.



Captive: Shane Johnson as the Title Character in ‘The Possession of Michael King’

Photo credit: Anchor Bay Films

Three months later, a battered Michael is contemplating his next move. As a filmmaker, he lands upon a subject that explores whether the Devil, Satan or demons exist. He collects the data, and starts to film rituals he invites onto his own person, in trying to get himself possessed. Crazily, it starts to work, and Michael is visited with voices in his head, bizarre skin eruptions and insane actions that no medical or religious source can explain.

I may be insane, but to me this can all be viewed as symbolic. The extreme tragedy of a man obsessed with both filming himself and watching those films can easily generate an extreme psychosis, and losing a wife on the flip of a coin (literally, Michael is shown manipulating the coin through the entire story) is the basis for pursuing these activities and making the film, as if he has nothing to live for besides this objective.

Johnson as Michael King sells it as if he owns it, and given the mental and physical gymnastics he had to endure, why not own it? He interprets Jung's unique take on possession by disappearing into it, leaving the character of Michael and inventing something otherworldly. It's possible that these demon days are merely neurons and synapses misfiring on all cylinders, and since no one can ever turn that off, Johnson keeps the about-to-crack pressure on the Michael persona as if he's trapped in a collapsing building.

Religion is explored as either under-serving or crippled, depending on the viewpoint. But what is evil but a tragedy that affects a life forever, a possession of sorts? The Catholic Church gets their due once again, as a metaphorically-dying priest (Tobias Jelinek) insists to Michael that these demons are real, and exorcisms have existed, which is later denied to him. Do the sins of the Church itself lie in what it won't do in combination with what it can't do? The film seems to think so, and it fosters that reality in just two very powerful scenes.



The Reflection of Madness in 'The Possession of Michael King'

Photo credit: Anchor Bay Films

We are the sum of our experiences, and what happens to Michael King is an answer he didn't necessarily expect. Whether this is brought upon by an outside force or his own brand of collapse can be figured out in many ways within the film. His "possession" has all the earmarks of what these movie possessions have shown for years, but by collecting it all in one person – and in the context in which it is realized – it becomes a one-of-a-kind interpretation and ultimately a wild freaking ride.

What has "The Exorcist" wrought? But "The Possession of Michael King" belongs in its own category, a happening based on the demons of Michael's unyielding reality, with the assertion that somehow religion or his fellow travelers can give him aid and comfort, when he can't even help himself.

"The Possession of Michael King" has a limited release, including Chicago, on August 22nd. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Shane Johnson, Ella Anderson, Luke Barnes, Cullen Douglas, Tobias Jelinek and Julie McNiven. Co-written and directed by David Jung. Rated "R"



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