

# Ed Wood: Angora and Old Lace

An OITM Review by Rev. Miki Thomas

Twenty-odd years ago, Edward D. Wood, Jr. was a grade-Z '50's director known only to a few film cultists who would stay up to watch his films on the late, late show. With the publication of "The Golden Turkey Awards" in 1980, where the Medved Brothers cheerfully gave Ed

Wood an award for "Worst Director" and Wood's film *Plan 9 From Outer Space* an award for "Worst Movie Of All Time", the story of a cross-dressing film director became the cause of much public fascination. Film festivals featuring Wood's films sprung up around the world. A biography, *Nightmare of Ecstasy* by Rudolph Gray, was published and a biographical video, *Look Back In Angora*, was released earlier this year by Rhino. Now the ultimate compliment has been bestowed upon Wood: a major motion picture based on his life.

As directed by Tim Burton, no slouch as a director, the film is not a serious study of filmmaking along Hollywood's "Poverty Row" nor does it take into account Wood's sad fall into alcoholism and poverty when he was reduced to writing and producing pornographic films. Rather, it is almost a reverent retelling of Wood's career in the '50's, when he produced three of the arguably worst films ever made: *Glen or Glenda*, *Bride of the Monster*, and *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, films for which Wood had to sweet talk potential investors into financing.

Ed Wood is not a "gay film" per se but it does have a gay sensibility. It is almost campy as it recounts Wood's efforts at producing his films. Despite his need to

make that "Big Statement", be it about cross-dressing or atomic war, he simply did not have the talent to pull it off. Wood was also a cross-dresser with a fetish for angora sweaters and who, according to legend, landed at Iwo Jimo wearing women's underwear underneath his uniform. His stock company included what those in Hollywood referred to as "fringees", "oddballs" and "freaks" that never quite made the big time.

As Ed Wood, Johnny Depp brings an enthusiasm and vigor to his performance. Certainly, it is worth the price of admission just to see him donning a blonde wig and an angora sweater. The rest of the cast is equally good, from Bill Murray as the would-be transsexual Bunny Breckinridge to Sarah Jessica Parker as Dolores Fuller, an actress that never gave Katharine Hepburn any sleepless nights. But the performance that overshadows them all is Martin Landau's as Bela Lagosi. Landau captures the nuances of a man attempting to retain his dignity despite his has-been status and drug and alcohol addiction.

Ed Wood is perhaps one of the best films made about Hollywood, certainly one about a part of Hollywood history that unfortunately does not get much scrutiny, that of low budget filmmaking. ▼



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