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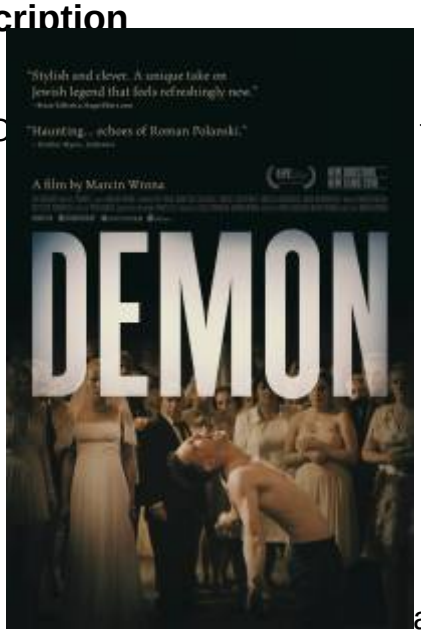
Demon scheduled for openings in US

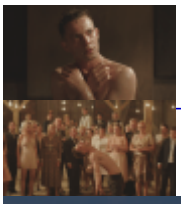
Description

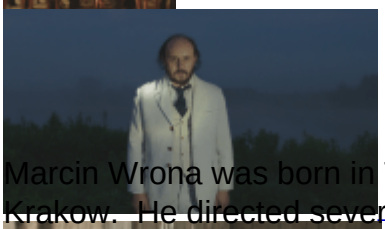
The C 

the US release of DEMON, Polish director Marcin Wronaâ??s eerie, richly atmospheric and clever take on the Jewish legend of the dybbuk.

Acclaimed at several festivals including New Directors/New Films, the Toronto Film Festival, and Austin Fantastic Fest where it won the Award for Best Horror Feature, **DEMON is scheduled to open in New York and Los Angeles on Friday, September 9th followed by a national release.**

Newly arrived from England to marry his fiancÃ©e Zaneta (Agnieszk Zulewska, Chemo), Peter (Israeli actor Itay Tiran, Lebanon) has been given a gift of her familyâ??s ramshackle country house in rural Poland. Itâ??s a total fixer-upper, and while inspecting the premises on the eve of the wedding, he falls into a pile of human remains. The ceremony proceeds, but strange things begin to happenâ?¦During the wild reception, Peter begins to come undone, and a dybbuk, the iconic ancient figure from Jewish folklore, takes a toehold in this present-day celebration-for a very particular reason, as it turns out. Based on noted Polish writer Piotr Rowickiâ??s play Adherence, DEMON is the final work by Marcin Wrona, who died just as DEMON was set to premiere in Poland, is part absurdist comedy, part love story-that scares, amuses, and charms in equal measure.





Marcin Wrona was born in Tarnow, Poland in 1973 and studied film at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow. He directed several features for television, as well as the theatrical features *My Flesh, My Blood* and *The Christening,* which were selected for the Toronto and San Sebastian Film Festivals.

Critics Reactions

â??Demonâ?• enthralls as an atmospheric ghost story with a cheeky undercurrent of absurdist humor.â?• â?? Joe Leydon, Variety

â??..a unique take on the Jewish legend of the Dybbuk that feels both deeply rooted in cultural nightmares and refreshingly newâ?¦â??Demonâ?• is stylish and clever from its concept..but itâ??s the execution that really matters. Thereâ??s a great energy to the piece, from the framing of the visual compositions, to the eerie atmosphere created by the lights hanging from the ceiling of what looks like a barn. Thereâ??s fantastic costume design as well as a lead performance that engages on every level.â?• â?? Brian Tallerico, Rogerebert.com

â??A darkly humorous reworking of â??The Dybbuk,â?• with a deftly realized switch that turns that familiar tale of love from beyond the grave into a parable of Polish anti-Semitism in the post-war eraâ?¦. a black comedy in the vein of â??The Exterminating Angel.â?• â?? George Robinson, The Jewish Week

A CONVERSATION WITH DEMON PRODUCER OLGA SZYMANSKA
How does DEMON fit into Marcinâ??s body of work? Are there similar themes or motifs that run through his three features?
Marcinâ??s idea was to make a trilogy, and DEMON is the final installment of this trilogy, with MY FLESH, MY BLOOD (2009) and THE CHRISTENING (2010) being the first and second. All of his movies contain similar themes and motifs, including growing up, the nature of evil and the fate or destiny each protagonist must cope with in each story. None of Marcinâ??s films contained a happy ending. MY FLESH, MY BLOODâ??s protagonist is a boxer who discovers he will die soon following a savage blow to his head. He wants to leave something in the world, which is a child. THE

CHRISTENING is the story of a gangster whoâ??s been sentenced to death by the Mafia. Heâ??s coping with his feelings for his family during his seven remaining days alive, during which time he asks his best friend to take care of his family when heâ??s gone. The theme of family and destiny â?? the idea that you canâ??t cheat death â?? rings strongest in these two works. DEMONâ??s protagonist, Piotr, is fated to reveal the truth about the filmâ??s mysterious setting after becoming possessed by a ghostly figure, and it also features a fatal ending. All three works feature rituals of some sort, from christenings to weddings.

What are the roots of DEMON and what drew Marcin towards this specific story?

Itâ??s based on a play called The Clinging, but the only thing that remains from that story is the names of the characters and the phenomenon of the dybbuk (from Jewish folklore). Itâ??s a very theatrical piece so it took some time to transform the story elements to movie language in the screenplay. Marcin and the co-writer Pawel Maslona rewrote almost everything and made the story their own.

What was Marcinâ??s specific interest in the traditional ghost story of the dybbuk?

Itâ??s a story that has almost been forgotten in Poland. The Dybbuk was a play written by Shimon Ansky in 1914 and then made into a film by Michal Waszynski in 1937 right before he tried to launch a career in Hollywood. It was the first Yiddish-Hasidic movie made in Poland and itâ??s considered the Hasidic Romeo & Juliet. The protagonist in the play â?? who is possessed by the dybbuk (a malicious colonizing spirit) â?? wants to reveal an uncomfortable truth about the past, and Marcin found that concept exciting. We had seen the play together and both of us thought it would make a good movie. At that point, we had decided to launch a production company together. Our first thought was that it would be easy to translate into film because it was set in a single location. But we wound up doing a lot of research into the history of the story, not to mention Jewish-Polish history in general. If you read the studies on the dybbuk, those who became possessed by the spirit find themselves unable to speak. It originated in a very orthodox society of Jews, so it was the idea of this voice that could never have been heard which was longing to be heard. We thought it would be interesting to take the character of Piotr in our story and tell something specific through the demon that possessed him.

This is a unique co-production with Israel â?? how did this affect the story in any way?

Marcinâ??s previous movie, THE CHRISTENING, was screened at the Haifa Film Festival, where we met our future co-producer Marek Rosenbaum. We had seen (lead actor) Itay Tiran in a few movies and thought he could play characters from anywhere, because he has a universal look about him â?? like he could hail from Israel or Poland or elsewhere. Heâ??s a great actor with a big theatrical background, but heâ??s been in movies like LEBANON, AFTERTHOUGHT and THE DEBT as well.

Heâ??s required to give a very physical performance in this movie. Can you describe how Marcin worked with Itay Tiran to obtain such a raw, affective performance?

Marcin didnâ??t want to use any special effects in the movie â?? he wanted to rely solely on actors. All the rehearsals for the wedding dance scene, where the dybbuk takes possession of Piotr, took a long time, even before the actual shooting took place. Two choreographers rehearsed it with the actors, then another choreographer came in, who worked for the Jewish Theater in Warsaw as well as a pantomime group. The third choreographer worked with Itay directly, instructing him how to breathe and how to use the muscles and tension in his body to make the possession look more effective. Physical demands aside, Itay was already very well prepared for DEMON. For our first meeting in Warsaw a few years ago, he arrived with photographs from a version of The Dybbuk play, which had been produced in Tel Aviv in the â??50s. So he was already fascinated with the dance at the heart of that performance.

The movie is constructed around a Polish wedding. Can you explain why weddings are so prominent in his work?

In his first feature, MY FLESH, MY BLOOD, there is a wedding in the final scene, so he was no stranger to having weddings in his movies. He was very interested in rituals in general â?? which are important to Polish people in general because we are a predominantly Catholic country and so much of daily life revolves around ritual here. Marcin was not Catholic, but the idea with the wedding in DEMON is to show a glimpse of Polish society, showing different people in different roles, and how those roles change over the course over the wedding.

DEMON features a unique island-like setting. Where exactly did you film?
Marcin knew exactly how he wanted the house and the location to look. Our production designer, Anna Wunderlich, would go out on scouting missions and return with pictures, but nothing was right. We were so disappointed with what we saw that we decided to build our own sets. Two or three weeks before a final decision was supposed to be made on locations, she came back from the Malopolska region near Krakow with this terrific location near a town called Bochnia featuring an abandoned house from the early 20th century. It sat on a river with an old shed next to it, and no neighboring structures in its vicinity. The only structure the art department fabricated was the shed used in the wedding sequence â?? the existing house was how they found it, and how it appeared in the movie. All the mist and fog you see in the movie is also natural because our set was so close to the river.
Digging is a recurring motif in the story. The story plays out near a construction site, and human remains are discovered early in the story. What is the significance of so much digging in DEMON?
Itâ??s a reflection of the past â?? the notion of unearthing the past or digging in the dirt and finding something unknown or scary, but the digging is more metaphoric than anything else.
What do you think were some of Marcinâ??s most potent gifts as a filmmaker?
He was very good with actors. He discovered some of the biggest Polish actors of his generation and many of them appear in DEMON, including Tomasz Schuchardt The actor who plays the brother in law won Best Actor at the Polish Film Festival for his work in Marcinâ??s previous film, THE CHRISTENING. And Agnieska Zulewska, our lead actress, appears in her first major starring role in this film. He rehearsed with actors a lot before going on set and he always gave them freedom â?? he trusted them immensely, so there was always a strong element of collaboration on his sets. On the visual side, he had a long relationship with his cinematographer, Pawel Flis, who shot all three of his features. Each of them is different from one another visually.
Why do you think Marcin and Pawel worked together so well as Director and Cinematographer?
They were very good friends in school, for one thing. They made Marcinâ??s first short together, â??Magnet Man,â?• which screened at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2002. They shared a cinematic language and worked together very well together, which precluded them from having to talk much about what they wanted to do. They just did it and it worked.
What would you say is the overall visual style of DEMON?
Marcin and Pawel wanted it to look like old photographs from the early 20th century, and the costumes in the movie also look like they came from eras past. Although the movie is set in the 21st century, you get the sense from watching DEMON that it could be set during any time. They wanted it to look universal, as though it existed both in and out of time.
What were some of your own duties on this production â?? and what were some of the biggest challenges for you as a producer on DEMON?

I was involved with the project from the beginning â?? Marcin and I had seen The Dybbuk play together and we wanted to turn it into a movie. I read each version of the script he wrote, and helped organize the budget. I also helped with pre-production. During the shoot itself, the production manager took over and I came back to the game when shooting wrapped. Marcin and I were a couple, so I didnâ??t want to interfere during the 22-day shoot, which was a challenge in itself because we were mainly shooting at night during early October, amid heavy rains and low temperatures.

Why do you think ghost stories are so powerful cinematically? And what did this particular ghost story have for you that made it stand out from a crowded pack?

I think people like to be scared, but DEMON cuts much deeper than a conventional scary movie â?? the ghost story in this case is used as a way to soften heavy subject matter for the viewer. Itâ??s a movie about erasing the past, forgetting about who we are and where we come from, who we lived with, and how we are all essentially strangers to one another. Piotr is an outsider or â??otherâ?• â?? and in this case the movie tracks how much we are separated by our differences, or remain intolerant in the face of otherness. Marcin wanted to play with different genres in this movie, incorporating elements of horror, comedy, thriller, melodrama, while at the same time expressing something thematically important about the past in general.

An interesting part of this story is the collision of science, religion, family and industry (in the form of the patriarch) â?? it contributes to the tension of the story in an interesting wayâ?¦

Marcin and the screenwriter wanted to bring out this element in the story â?? itâ??s something they brought to the existing Dybbuk legend. They wanted to show a wide section of society, including d ifferent people from all walks of life. None of the characters stay the same over the course of DEMON â?? the doctor comes to believe in ghosts, the priest becomes more atheistic, etc. They change roles, their viewpoints shift.

What for you was the most compelling aspect of making DEMON?

The idea of making this movie so different from Marcinâ??s other works was very exciting to me â?? to blend so many genres in one movie made the form intriguing and challenging. We also havenâ??t seen The Dybbuk story on screen in many years in Poland, so that was another compelling factor. The story itself is an important reminder that the Jewish and Polish cultures co-existed for hundreds of years together â?? but in this era we remember very little about the two cultures co-mingling. Polish Romanticism was one of the most important periods in our national literature, and a lot of writers during that period were interested in Jewish mysticism. The fusion of Romanticism and mysticism appealed to me in particular.

What do you think DEMON is trying to say, thematically?

Itâ??s very much a story about the past, but itâ??s also about how we are living today â?? how itâ??s difficult for an outsider to come in and infiltrate a very small section of society, Polish or otherwise. People are not very open in Poland in terms of not wanting immigrants or â??the otherâ?• living in their neighborhoods, so the story very much reflects contemporary values and mores.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Visual Style

Pawel Flis / Director of Photography

â??The visual idea for this film was that we shoot it like old photographs, we wanted the shots to look like stills and tell the story using wide lenses and make the shots look wide. We didnâ??t want the camera to move a lot.

I like to keep a very small distance between the actor and the camera, but at the same time the camera is an observer, it doesnâ??t interfere. We used one Alexa camera only, itâ??s my first film on this digital camera and I was so amazed at how it works with the picture, I loved it! You can take out so much from

it in post â??production too and as Marcin said, the scenes look like they were shot for a Western.â??

The Location

Zuza Hencz / Post Production Mgr.

â??I wanted the time and place of the film to be universal. Twentieth century, somewhere in Poland, without being preciseâ?? said Marcin Wrona. â??The film was meant to draw us back to classic cinema. I wanted to make it look traditional in composition and not to have any special effects or super modern technologies used. A lot of photographic style, as if someone with great taste had been taking photos (static takes) from the wedding.

Finding the perfect location, where 90% of the shooting was supposed to take place was extremely hard. Together with Anna Wunderlich â?? our production designer- we drove through three different regions of Poland for three months, based on our own knowledge and also photo albums with old monuments. Unfortunately most of the buildings we found were either in a sorry state or renovated in a very kitschy way. What was equally hard was finding the space of the house that was needed for us to fit a whole wedding.

After about two and a half months we stopped looking for a house and we found a great place where we could build it instead. And then totally out of the blue we found the perfect place â?? a house from 1890 with a huge barn from back then. Renovating the entire thing cost us a lot of money and work but gave the film a unique character and made the entire team feel special working for months in the mud and rain.

The Look of the Film

In March of 2015 the filmmakers consulted with Justine Wright, renowned editor and recipient of the European Film Award for Best Editor on the film â??Locke.â?? DEMON was one of a very few projects invited to take part in editing workshops, organized by the European Film Academy and the Polish Film Academy. The event consisted of a lecture by Ms. Wright and then individual consultations with authors of selected projects, which gave Marcin Wrona and Piotr Kmiecik, the editor, a rare opportunity to enhance the film. Justineâ??s remarks were included in the final cut.

â??The editing of â??Demonâ?• began two weeks after we finished shooting and with small breaks it took five months,â?? Marcin Wrona said. â??The whole process of working on the picture and the sound began right after we had the first version of the film edited. In sound it gave the creators wider possibilities of thinking through the concept of how they wanted to use it in the film.

We edited within the frame and shot with wide lenses to make the scenes look wide in picture. The camera was not supposed to move a lot. As we shot the film and saw how beautiful the production set was and the great costumes the actors had and the choreography they used we knew that it was impossible to keep the camera still. So we changed our original idea so that the film would become better.

I like when the camera is very close to the actor but at the same time it must be just an observer from aside. We shot the film on one camera only â?? on Alexa, itâ??s my first film on digital and I am fascinated by this equipment. The picture that it gives, the possibilities that it gives in post-production, the lenses make everything look soft, as if in a Western movie.â??

The Cast

â??As an actor I always look for projects that are authentic, truthful and of course interestingâ?? says Itay Tiran, (who portrays the lead character â??Pythonâ??). â??I feel that DEMON is all the above. Itâ??s an incredible opportunity for an actor to be able to play two characters in one and to be working

on such a well written screenplay. Of course itâ??s also a story that I particularly cherish because, as with many people coming from Israel, itâ??s important to me on a very personal mystical level. Itâ??s a complicated character to play, from the beginning Python is a multi-layered person. He comes to Poland because of love, but as it turns out heâ??s got a mission to complete, and becomes much more about him finding his roots, than about his bride to be. We worked very hard to express the dybbuk inside his body in a very unconventional way. We worked with choreographers and therapists to get the credible effect. Any actor would be thrilled to get a character like that to play.â?•

Official selection: New Directors/New Films (2016 Film Society of Lincoln Center and MoMA)

Official selection: Toronto International Film Festival, Vanguard Section, 2015

Winner: Austin Fantastic Fest, Best Horror Feature, 2015

Winner: Haifa Film Festival, Tobias Spencer Award, 2015

(Press materials courtesy of The Orchard)

Category

1. Uncategorized

Tags

1. all walks of life
2. Anna Wunderlich
3. Cinema
4. Comedy
5. demon
6. dybbuk
7. Film
8. Hasidic Romeo & Juliet
9. horror
10. Itay Tiran
11. Jewish legend
12. Justine Wright
13. Marcin Wrona
14. melodrama
15. Pawel Flis
16. Polish Romanticism
17. The Orchard
18. thriller
19. Zuza Hencz

Date Created
August 6, 2016
Author

hollywoodglee