



REVIEW of *The Dark Dance* directed by Mauro John Capece

I've always loved a strong and commanding female lead. No doubt, Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel can kick ass with the best of them, but I've always been drawn to those darker characters, the ones who've been knocked around and left broken and bruised... the damaged goods. Their stories are the most intriguing. They're never what they appear and are always underestimated. My favorites are in films like *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, *Kill Bill* or *Anna, the Russian Spy*. Each one is pushed beyond their limit and ready to fight back.

Meet Manola, a dark and edgy Italian dancer with a grumpy disposition. We imagine most dancers as being delicate, tuna and yogurt eaters that are in bed by 8:30. This one lives in leather, drinks and smokes like a chimney, and according to her hot girlfriend, never sleeps! This is the hero of a new film by Mauro John Capece.

*The Dark Dance* is as edgy as it gets. Bleak and gritty, at times it's difficult to watch. Manola's life has never been easy, but after being cheated by her employer, her world begins to unravel. Reaching the breaking point, she decides to unleash her anger on the one she believes responsible. For a good portion of the film we're left scratching our heads, until her past is revealed through flashbacks and we begin to connect the dots. Manola has lived behind a mask, her tough exterior and confidence is nothing more than a thin veneer. The young girl from the flashbacks, deprived of the love of her father, now feels

*The Dark Dance* is a well crafted film with a complex and compelling story. The pacing is smooth and quick for a film that focuses so heavily on character development. Not an easy thing to do. What really makes this film work and come to life though, is the clever direction from veteran, Mauro John Capece and the incredible acting chops of Corinna Coroneo. There is a chemistry between the two that goes beyond just director and star. In fact, the script was written by both of them.

Technically, *The Dark Dance* is a good looking, slick film with great camera work, sound and lighting. The on screen chemistry between Coroneo, who plays Manola, and her lover, Soriana (played by Michela Bruni) is natural and believable. The passion is real and the pain, intense and frustrating, as Manola slips deeper into her despair and madness. Both Coroneo and Bruni are excellent. Flavio Sciolé, does a wonderful job as the sleazy, forked tongued politician and recipient of Manola's rage. It was a pleasant surprise to see veteran actor, Franco Nero, in the role of James Butterfly, the theater director who robs Manola of half her salary. I'm a huge Nero fan from back in his Spaghetti western days in *Django*, and seeing him put a big smile on my face. Another noteworthy performance was Giorgia Trasselli as Beatrice, Soriana's mother. She did a nice job as the clueless but supportive mother, unaware of the nature of her daughter's relationship with Manola. An excellent job all around in the acting department.

As mentioned, *The Dark Dance* has a very slick 'Hollywood' flavor. Though the grit and subject matter is very Euro, the caliber is big budget Hollywood. It's smooth. Everything looks and sounds just right. There are no corners cut. Giulio Bastioni creates that old school 'film' warmth with his lighting. Manola's



dance sequence in the opening scenes is sexy and moody. The stark, cold house where she imprisons the Mayor adds to the tension of the moment. The sound is clean and as it should be. Even Hollywood tends to bury messy audio behind a score. Not here. Guillaume Cambron and Boris Petrowski did a great job.

One of the highlights for me is the score by Vronsky Belizaire, Gianluigi Antonelli and Mauro John Capece, truly giving the film a heartbeat and soul. The mood is carried throughout the film and adds to the pain and turmoil. Beautifully done.

This is a good looking and well shot film. Capece also had his hands in the cinematography, working with Alessandro La Fauci, and giving the story its look. I loved the up close intimate moments where we can see the pain in Coroneo's eyes as Manola is slipping away into her madness.

*The Dark Dance* is a wonderful film, though there were moments that left me frustrated and wanting. The flashbacks, necessary to tell Manola's story, just didn't do enough. I admit, I watched the film with closed caption subtitles, which always leaves the viewer filling in the blanks. But I wanted more of an impact that just didn't come from any of the flashbacks. I never 'got' the full story behind the Mayor, Manola and her mother. The other area that left me wanting more, was the torture sequence. Manola is a badass! I wanted to see her kick the shit out of the Mayor. She pushed him to the ground and gave him a couple shoves with her boot. I was expecting a good old fashioned ass kicking that never came. Other than forcing him to drink his own urine, (which turned my stomach!!!) the torture scenes just didn't convince me.

But overall, this is an awesome film that I plan to watch more than once. It's sexy on many levels and hits the mark. Excellent performances by both cast and crew.

Brian Lutes  
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