



Color, 1999, 87 mins. 35 secs.  
Directed by Dante Tomaselli  
Starring Irma St. Paule, Christie Sanford, Danny Lopes  
**Code Red** (Blu-ray) (US R0 HD) / WS (1.85:1) (16:9), Image Entertainment (DVD) (US R1 NTSC) / WS (1.85:1)



The New Jersey-shot horror film *Desecration* appropriately opens with a prominent thank you to director Alfred Sole, whose *Alice, Sweet Alice* offers a similar horrific study of Catholic iconography. In this case, however, first-time helmer Dante Tomaselli (Sole's cousin) offers an overtly supernatural fever dream consisting of one delirious set piece after another with only the vaguest shred of a



narrative. That same formula continued to hold more or less for Tomaselli's three subsequent films -- *Horror*, *Satan's Playground*, and *Torture Chamber*-- though this one remains his most potent distillation of a childhood nightmare on film.

Haunted by the mysterious death of his mother years earlier and his rigid education at a Catholic school, young Bobby (Tomaselli regular Lopes) already leads a decidedly abnormal existence. One day he accidentally kills one of the nuns by flying a model plane straight into her head, an event that unleashes all kinds of weird, demonic forces around him. A fellow student plunges into a sylvan hole that promptly vanishes, nuns' faces contort into hideous deformed visions of evil, and mom herself pops up to invite poor Bobby straight to Hell.



Filled with an obvious love of avant garde film ranging from David Lynch (an *Eraserhead*-inspired dream sequence) to Maya Deren (*Meshes of the Afternoon*), Tomaselli's pet project began life as a short film and blossomed into a catalog of traumas from his own life and his cinema upbringing. Many of his horrific interludes pack a powerful surrealist punch, such as the nightmarish, Rollin-inspired images of nuns screaming and morphing behind a wrought iron gate. The pace lags somewhat during protracted dialogue scenes with Bobby's elderly guardian (Irma St. Paule), but the film also wrings chills from



unexpected sources, such as a seemingly kindly priest flashing a terrifying, malefic smile while standing behind Bobby's back.

Though filmed on a low budget and sporting flat, cleanly lit visuals without too much flash or depth, *Desecration* was given an admirable presentation very early in the DVD format's infancy from **Image Entertainment in 2000** and offers a generally satisfying viewing experience. The 1.85:1 transfer is flattering for its time but only presented flat with no 16x9 enhancement. The straight Dolby Surround track contributes a great deal to the film's creepy, often subliminal directorial tricks (integrated into the Tomaselli-composed score), so multi-channel viewing is highly advised to savor the strange ambient noises flooding through even the most perfunctory scenes. The sole extra is an "excerpt" from his earlier 1996 short (3m30s) of the same title, which was retooled into part of the main feature.



After many years of unavailability, the film came back into circulation as a Blu-ray release from Code Red. Unfortunately the original Super 16 film elements have apparently fallen by the wayside, so an older standard definition Digibeta was utilized here and upconverted (with slight windowboxing). The end result is a definite case of "It is what it is;" if you've seen some of the film-lensed titles released by SRS Cinema that were bumped up from SD sources, you'll have an idea of what to expect here. At least advances in encoding and compression allow it to fare better than the DVD by a very



slim margin (and it's a bit brighter so the dark scenes are more legible), and only the opening and closing titles look really rough. The DTS-HD MA 2.0 English track retains the surround mix heard on the prior release. Tomaselli contributes a new audio commentary charting the film's creation and his personal life that impacted it, from a painting class to the role played by his mother, the consideration of Mildred Clinton for a key role, and echoes of films ranging from *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* to *Burnt Offerings*. Be warned there's a loud (but fleeting) audio glitch at the 9-minute mark, so watch your volume; as with many commentaries, he runs out of gas around the one-hour mark with some silent stretches, but it's still a solid and sometimes very confessional listen. The film can also be played with the full 13-track audio of *Witches*, one of Tomaselli's fun, Halloween-friendly ambient horror music albums. If you're a fan of John Carpenter, it's definitely worth a listen in addition to **tracking down his other releases**. Also included are a trailer (basically a scene from the movie), the earlier 1996 short film (3m26s) that inspired a sequence in the feature itself, and an HD still gallery (2m56s). The autobiographical "Building the Torture Chamber" (11m47s) is only partially about his film *Torture Chamber* but is also a collage of home movies, stills, and other ephemera to show how his love for horror sprang out of an uneasy childhood. Finally, "Elmsta 3000 Horror Fest in Sweden Promo" (2m34s) features Tomaselli in his recording studio pitching two films in progress, *The Doll* and a fresh spin on *Alice, Sweet Alice*.

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