



DRACULA:

Pages from a Virgin's Diary

2002 75m *prod* Dracula Productions, *p* Vonnie Von Helmolt, *d* Guy Maddin, *sc* Guy Maddin, Mark Godden, *novel* Bram Stoker, *ph* Paul Suderman, *deco* dawson, *ed* deco dawson, *choreography* Mark Godden, *pd* Deanne Rohde, *ad/c* Paul Daigle, *mus* Gustav Mahler; *with* Johnny W. Chang, Tara Birtwhistle, David Moroni, CindyMarie Small, Johnny Wright and members of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet.

Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary is Guy Maddin's first feature-length work since *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* was released in 1997. It's not that Winnipeg's resident cinematic genius has been inactive, it's just that with the commercial failure of *Ice Nymphs*, he has restricted himself to the short form. His brilliant five-minute Marxist/Christian allegory, *The Heart of the World*, from the *Preludes* collection in 2000, attested to the fact that he has lost none of his verve and unwillingness to compromise his rather eccentric vision.

Originally produced for the CBC's performing arts series *Opening Night* and shown on the national network in February 2002, *Dracula: Pages*



Pages from a Virgin's Diary

from a Virgin's Diary has—as they say in the business—legs and is now in theatrical release in a limited run after receiving an International Emmy for Best Arts Programming and Gemini Awards for Best Arts Program and Best Direction in a Performing Arts Program. Maddin's film, directed and edited with the assistance of his protégé, deco dawson, is based on an original 1998, 140-minute production by the Royal Winnipeg Ballet. They shot it in Super 16, 16 mm and Super 8 black and white, then posted it on digital Beta, adding splashes of colour throughout.

bring vampire hunter Von Helsing (David Moroni) to the scene, but his blood transfusions prove useless. Lucy is lost and returns as the undead, murderous "Bloofer Lady." In the last half of the ballet, Dracula's attention turns to Lucy's convent-bound friend Mina (CindyMarie Small). The film's sexual subtext comes to the fore in a dance in which Mina makes overt advances on her fiancé, the prudish Jonathan Harker (Johnny Wright). The sexually vital count lures Mina to his cavernous lair where he and Von Helsing wage a final battle over Mina's body.

Inspired by the Bram Stoker novel and F.W. Murnau's 1922 expressionistic classic *Nosferatu the Vampire*, Maddin and dawson use silent movie conventions—irises, soft focus, overlapping dissolves—to film the ballet troupe as it dances through the tale. Title cards warn of "immigrants from the East!" in 1897 England. An Asian Dracula (Johnny Chang) appears and claims his first victim, the wealthy Lucy (Tara Birtwhistle). Her mysterious fainting spells

Although filmed in black and white, the film is gorgeously rich in texture with tones of greens, purples, blues and, appropriately enough, bright stabs of crimson. And while essentially a silent drama, beneath the swirling Gustav Mahler soundtrack there's the gentle sound of fangs piercing a virgin's neck and the sickening thwack of a wooden stake being driven through Dracula's heart. Maddin has not so much made a record of a stage production; rather, he has re-imagined Stoker's *Dracula* as it might have looked before the likes of Bela Lugosi and Francis Ford Coppola got a hold of it.

As *The Heart of the World* proved, Maddin is—as one review in *The New York Times* described him—the “finest black-and-white silent director in all of Canada.” *Dracula: Pages from a Virgin's Diary* is another feather in his cap and this reviewer eagerly anticipates his next foray into feature filmmaking, *The Saddest Music in the World* (based on an original screenplay by Kazuo Ishigura), a Rhombus Media production that will be unleashed on the world in the fall.



MINA AND DRACULA

Pretenders beware, Maddin is prepared once again to claim his rightful place as Canada's most original and daring auteur.

By Paul Townend

Paul Townend is a Toronto-based freelance film critic and editor.

The LAST ROUND

2003 100m prod NFB, exp Sylvia Sweeney, Louise Lore, p Silva Basmajian, d Joseph Blasioli, sc Stephen Brunt, pb Michael Ellis, ed Craig Bateman, s John Martin, mus Allan Kane, narr Colin Linden; with Muhammad Ali, George Chuvalo, Milt Dunnell, Angelo Dundee, Robert Lipsyte, Rachman Ali, Irv Ungerman, Jimmy Breslin, Bert Sugar, Ernie Terrell.

The fiction is that George Chuvalo, a no-name club fighter from Toronto, by the luck of the boxing gods, went toe-to-toe for 15 rounds in March 1966 with Muhammad “I am the greatest!” Ali and left the ring bloodied, but still standing; a real-life Rocky



The Last Round

Images courtesy of the NFB.