Freaks Encyclopedia Article

Freaks

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Freaks

Perhaps the most unsettling horror film to follow in the wake of *Frankenstein*'s enormous financial success in 1931, *Freaks* (1932) tells the story of seemingly childlike carnival "freaks" who wreak unspeakable revenge on two able-bodied swindlers. Adapted from the Tod Robbins short story "Spurs" and directed by Tod Browning, this untidy little film shocked audiences with its use of actual disabled performers: midgets, an armless woman, a "living torso" (a man whose body ended slightly below his ribcage), and many others. Receiving mostly negative reviews and faring poorly at the boxoffice, *Freaks* ran afoul of censorship boards across the United States and was banned in Great Britain for three decades. After playing the exploitation-film circuit for years, it received acclaim at the 1962 Venice Film Festival and enjoyed some popularity among counterculture "freaks" during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The Library of Congress honored *Freaks* by adding it to the National Film Registry in 1994.

Further Reading:

Norden, Martin F. *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies.* New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1994.

Skal, David J., and Elias Savada. *Dark Carnival: The Secret World of Tod Browning.* New York, Anchor Books, 1995.