

QLH-S02E07: Suspiria (1977)

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SPEAKERS

Jessi Chartier, Jen Myers



Jessi Chartier 00:04

Welcome to Quiet Little Horrors. Here we talk about the films that creep under your skin and take up residence in the dark.



Jen Myers 00:17

Before we get started, as a reminder, when we talk about movies, we need to talk about everything in the movie. So there will be spoilers involved. If you haven't seen the movie or want to refresh your memory before you listen, you can stop now and do that before coming back. Let's talk about 1977's *Suspiria*. A young woman arrives to study at a prestigious German dance school but soon begins to question the connection between her dance instructors and a handful of bloody deaths. She seeks to learn what is happening behind the doors with the secretive group of women.



Jessi Chartier 00:52

I have so much I want to talk about with this film. And yet I feel like I can't explain it at all. Like this film is just so ephemeral.



Jen Myers 01:06

Yeah, I think that makes perfect sense. I'm in the same place where there is I really liked this film. And there's a lot that I like about it, and a lot that's in it. But it's really hard to put it into words, but in the best way. You know, like all of that, like I use terms like ephemeral and like it's a wisp of a movie. But that's not exactly true. Like it's just hard to say it there's actually a lot in the film itself. I just don't I don't know how to describe it.



J Jessi Chartier 01:36

I feel like it's I'm so glad that we did a comparison of of the 2018. And the this film because I think that if you can pair them, like actually watched the first the 2018 version, and then watch the 77, the 77 version becomes much richer. Hmm. And I think so much of that is just on how the story is told, like the the 2018. One is so heavy handed and so overt and is clearly about a group of witches. And the whole plot or the purpose of the protagonist is to expose them or like you're rooting for the protagonist to somehow defeat them. But then in this movie, it's much more of a mystery. Like there are these deaths that are going on in odd happenings. But it's not clear where or why it's occurring. And so you start to question, well, who's behind it all? And of course, the protagonist thinks that there's something going on with these women at the school, but you don't really know what it is like, it's it's so much more mysterious than the 2018 version.

J Jen Myers 03:01

Yeah, I think I mean, this is a little bit of an oversimplification. But it feels like the remake of *Suspria* took all these themes that were under the surface and the original, like, like witchcraft, like the interactions between women and the, the whole kind of structure of this group of women and things like that, and took them out of the shadows and made them text rather than subtext. Which is a completely bewildering choice to me. Because I feel like the whole power of these themes is having them under the surface, like, like that's, that's such an important aspect of them, and the way they work in this film. And so I feel like when you start pulling out all these themes and saying in capital letters, these are the themes of our movie, not as interesting of a movie. I mean, at least that's been my experience. And the original *Suspria* I think has a lot of rich themes, but it's all under the surface. And I think that that is a great thing. I think that's what gives these themes, a lot of power and kind of almost like mythic significance. And or at the very least, like you said, it creates this mystery around our work, if nothing else is at least just a little bit more interesting of a movie to watch.

J Jessi Chartier 04:25

Yeah, I agree. It's much more interesting, like *Suspria*. I'd watch again, the 77 version. But the 2018 I wouldn't watch it again. Yeah, I have no desire to watch it again. But I think that that speaks volumes to the storytelling and the cinematic storytelling specifically of the 77 version with Dario Argento. Do you want to talk? I'd love to hear your thoughts on him because you've got you've done some you've looked into like the style of filmmaking, right? A little bit.

J Jen Myers 04:57

Yeah, in the sense that I've been like, what for the last couple years trying to fill in a lot of my horror film knowledge gaps, honestly, and this was a big gap I had never seen *Suspria* until a year or two ago, I think. And yeah, it was definitely like this is a very well known horror movie. And it's specifically well known as the work of director Dario Argento. And it's well known as the example of the giallo sub genre, which is a sub genre of Italian horror movies that came out around this time. And this is really a good representative of that sub genre. You know, a lot a lot of giallo films are a lot about the the images and in some respects, the sounds and the music and the atmosphere. And the there are definite like themes like that. But they tend to be

subtext rather than than text, that sort of thing. And then this is *Suspiria* to a tee. So I actually think that I don't think *Suspiria* was the first Argento film I saw because I started just diving into them. And a lot of his other films, I think are a little bit easier to find. But I had to like make a concerted effort to find *Suspiria* but I think I saw *Opera* and *Deep Red* before I came to *Suspiria*. So but I was really impressed that I mean, it's funny that *Suspiria* I think is like one of the first examples of well, Argento's kind of you know, filmmaking style and giallo, but it's like so well formed. So like this is really an honestly, it's not beyond its classic status, like it deserves that status. You know, this is a good place to start with this director and this sub genre film, because it's such a, it's got everything there. And it does it in a really nice complete package in terms of you know what this stuff is all about?

J

Jessi Chartier 06:41

Yeah, I think that that's a great way to describe it, because there's the things that stood out to me the were more feelings with this film, like this feeling really was right. evocative and not in a sexualized way. But just like this. There was it was almost like a dreamscape. So the use of color was brilliant. I mean, so much red, so much red, and greens and yellows, just contrasting each other that it created this beautiful sense of distortion, I guess. Like it was it was kind of like, almost euphoric, like, I tend to think of me. So I don't dance, but I am a runner. And I know that as a runner, there's usually a point in time where you hit like the runner's high, where you just feel like, super amazing. And I, from what I understand some dance that can happen also in dance. And so it made me feel that throughout the film, and sometimes it was fun, like, good. And sometimes it was not, sometimes it was bad, right? So, but I love that play on things. And I, I think about it in comparison to the 2018 version, where it's just so like, you just said it beautifully. They took what was the subtext and just made it the text. And so it left, it just stole all the mystery out of it.

J

Jen Myers 08:21

You know, I'm with you, though, on terms of like, how I reacted to this film, where, yeah, it's, for me, it's very much the emotions, and in some case, images, but I feel like it's the emotions that the images inspire. And I think that, you know, a criticism that I hear of this film a lot is, I think some people find it superficial, because it seems and in some respects to just be about the image or just be about a vibe I you know, I people are, you know, people come to films for different things, different reasons. And I could cut and get how people would see that maybe it's not their thing, I get it. But at the same time, I would disagree a little bit because I think that even the elements that are elements of style in this film, I think they're all trained on getting an emotion and not just like a scare or a jumper or something like that. It's It's all designed to build up this atmosphere. And all everything in that atmosphere points to what you talked about with this, this mystery and everything underneath. And I think that what is going on in *Suspiria* in the original one is that you kind of get what's underneath by the end of the film. Like there is a story going on there. But it's not as important as what you're feeling about the journey getting there. And I think that that makes some people uncomfortable, because that's not how movies tend to work these days. So I think that that's an interesting thing to point out too is is like what you're feeling from from going through this and the fact that maybe there is no like that's going to change and you're gonna have this emotion and that emotion

and you might not have like plots to plot elements to hang those emotions on all the time. Like really like that's the nature of this film and why it's, again, so interesting and compelling because those those elements are about it's all about getting you to feel a certain way.

J Jessi Chartier 10:18

Yeah. And how did you feel speaking of feelings? How did you feel about how the relationship between the women was in this film versus the 2018?

J Jen Myers 10:28

Yeah, that's a good question. I felt it was much more complex. And I mean, complex in the way that it rang a lot truer to me, I think a really interesting aspect of the original *Suspiria* is that it starts kind of innocuously, this woman comes to the school in the schools fairly normal. It's, you know, kind of intense in the way that a prestigious dance school is supposed to be. And I think also, it reminded me of situations I've been in before, when you go into groups of women, it's not all women at the school, but it is majority women, when the main character interacts with a lot of especially like staying in the dorms and all of that type of thing. It's not an actual dorm, but you know, there's probably some fancy name for it that I don't know cuz I don't go to fancy German dance schools. But that, you know, there's there's, the interaction between the women are a little unsettling, because sometimes you don't always know what's going on. Women are tend to social are socialized to kind of keep things underneath the surface. And so there's some interesting elements to the way that women interact, especially in the beginning that rang true to me, and like, Oh, this is how real women behave. I recognize this, I get this so and that I think, actually, as it continues on, that is a good place to start from, because it heightens what you feel when things start going really weird afterwards. Whereas if you had walked into a really weird situation, and then things kept being weird, you wouldn't have that same transformation. But yeah, I think it all starts for me with this place of, Oh, I get this. These are like real people interacting, in a way.

J Jessi Chartier 12:07

Yes. And that comes through in so many different interactions, like the name main character's name is escaping me at the moment. But Susie says she has a good friend Susie,

J Jen Myers 12:18

I had forgotten to I just looked it up. I just want to be honest there.

J Jessi Chartier 12:23

So Susie, in both versions have a bee friend, very closely, another woman, another dancer, who's relatively new. And I believe in the 77. One, she's British, doesn't matter. But they share a share kind of like a hallway between the room it's like a, they share a doorway between their rooms. And so they become close. But the 77, like depiction of that friendship is so much more.

I don't want to use the word real. But it's again, it's just not so heavy handed. It's just like she pops in occasionally and is like, Hey, have you been noticing this stuff? Let me show you this journal or this diary. I've been keeping to talk about some things, right? They're just friends. And I don't want to say that it's like, oh, they're in the friendzone. But it's just like, they're they're much more natural. There we go. It's just much more natural. But in the in the 2018 version, like my God, there's, there's just a direct line where Suzy, for example, says I'm just not used to sleeping alone without my sister. And her friend says, Well, we're sisters now. So I'll come I'll come make you feel comfortable. And it's like, Oh, my God, like, yeah, take a two by four to my head and to like, remind me that they're friends, and that they're close friends. It's like, oh, god bless it,

J Jen Myers 13:53

and that we're dealing with sisterhood. And it's like women, again, kind of an all capital letters. Like, this is what the movie is about. Yeah, like, I mean, and I have very strong close female friendships. I don't think I have ever directly told another woman especially one that I just met, that we are sisters now. I don't know. And, you know, I even feel like Yeah, but like, no one's ever told me that too. And I don't know, maybe I'm working. I'm not hanging with the right women. It's like, that's, that's not a thing. It's not a thing.

J Jessi Chartier 14:26

It's not a thing. And when you I mean, like you say, okay, so you writers take note. You only ever say that direct statement to someone, when they're when you're either in the middle of life or death. We're like, We're sisters. Now we're going to get through this, which even then is a little trite. Or you say it in passing. You say it flippantly like, you're like I feel like you're my sister by choice. Or when you introduce someone to someone else like this is my sister by choice. Like you don't ever say something like, You're my sister now it's like, Oh, God. It's just so heavy handed.

J Jen Myers 15:08

Yeah, I think that's a really good point, though, that it's a good example of what you're you don't find in this film where it's yeah, you know, we come back to like everything in this film is about subtlety and nuance and understatement. And again, you know, you that is the nature of this, it's it's not a it's not just oh, this is the way it it's expressed in this movie, it's like, no, this is the nature of the film itself is all about that. And you can't take that away without completely missing the point of this movie, in my opinion.

J Jessi Chartier 15:47

Oh, totally 100% 100%. And, you know, the 77 version was actually men that were treated as equals in the 77 film. There were clear, I mean, like, the 2018 was like, Man hating, like, it was like, there was not a male character in the 2018 film, where they were not abused, manipulated, or hurt by this group of women. But in the 77 version, the dance studio had male

students. They had men coming in and out all the time, no big deal. Like it wasn't. So by an airy, it just wasn't so black and white. It as it as the 2018 was, and that really bothered me in the 2018, where it was like clear lines of good and evil. It's like what? No,

J Jen Myers 16:45

yeah, we talked about that a little bit in the mini, but that is definitely something that it's something we're talking about in context of the original film. Because yeah, this is not. I mean, we could probably even, you know, make upon about this is not black and white. It's very colorful, but you know, like, we could use it as a metaphor. It works. There's a whole range of things going on here. And it's, it's, again, it's not these people are good than the others are bad. It's like everything is complex and complicated. And maybe we don't actually need to say, this is exactly it. I mean, I'll be honest, too, is we're talking about all of these elements of the film and the way the film works. The first time I watched it, I was a little confused about what was going on. I mean, I will totally admit that like, because this isn't a film that emphasizes plot, I had to think about it a little bit. It's like, oh, wait, okay, that is happening and everything. But the thing is, is like I don't, I didn't really care. I wasn't kind of like, I don't I don't get this. It was, it was more I feel like you have to give yourself up to go from emotion to emotion. And be okay with the fact that we're not necessarily going to draw these lines of this is good. This is bad. This is you know, what happens here. And this is that and here's the themes and everything. It's, it's all going to be this, this bundle of things under the surface to mix my metaphors horribly there. And you kind of have to give yourself up to it. And you're not you're not going to find those those clear lines and easy answers.

J Jessi Chartier 18:19

No, and I said it in the mini and I'll say it here too, like if you are if you like the current model of storytelling, that is a little bit more commercialized, then you're going to like the 2018. If you are willing to kind of go on a journey, and just kind of float with the story. And you enjoy something that's a little bit more artistic for artistic sake, then you're going to like the 777 one. I personally liked 7071 better, but that's also because that's where I sit. You know, that's where I like to see people play with Nuance. I like people I love when filmmakers play with the medium. I really, really enjoy that. And this film for me totally does that. Especially. I got we talked about this for a minute, especially with the music. I got the music. The music is just such a such an important character here. There's the opening scene, and it confused me for a while, which it should have, because that's what it was meant to be doing. But the scene where Susie gets into Berlin, and she's coming down the escalators and the doors to the outside. Well first off, it took me a while to realize this is what was happening. Randomly music very strange and like appealing music would randomly start playing and it took me a while to realize that it was only playing when the automatic doors to the outside were opening. Mm hmm. And it's like she became curious about like, what is this music that's coming from outside? And I felt it as an audience member to like, what is this? And but I immediately was enraptured, the music is phenomenal in this film. Phenomenal. And who was it was by Goblins? I believe right Goblin which

J Jen Myers 20:15

is Dario Arqento's ban? Of course course. Right. Right. Yeah. So, yeah. And that's, I think that

was one of the thing. Other things too, that I really like about this film is I mean, it kind of talks on talked about it was like these these elements that I think we sometimes think are superficial, or I think a lot of times, especially talking about film, people will talk about style as if it's lesser than substance. And I think that what the what's you know, and that could be, you know, that's that's a whole other conversation, right? But just kind of thinking about this film, I feel like it takes these stylistic elements and demands that you pay attention to them as substance, they're like, No, the music is not just this background soundtrack, that you're supposed to be listening, when you're watching a nice story or something's like no, this is something that is telling you an important message about what we're doing here. I hesitate to even say about the story, because it's not No, no, even certainly, there's like, we are here in this space in this time, and we are doing things and we want you to pay attention to this. And so when you see the the colors, you know, it's like this is just not a frame that we captured with the camera. This is something we aren't directed. And because we want you to see this thing and pay attention to this thing, like pay attention to these things we put, you know, and I like that I like that it's kind of taking all these elements that maybe people might not think about or think are as important as other ones. And it just like sheer force of will and artistry makes them substance makes them have substance and makes them something that you are centering your intention on. And I like that I think it's it's something that again, it kind of releases you from having to think about straight narrative or expecting things to go the way they do in other movies, it brings you into this this new place where you can start thinking about different possibilities.

J Jessi Chartier 22:11

Yeah, I Yes, absolutely. And if you haven't, so, Goblins' Suspiria soundtrack is out there on a lot of different streaming services. So I highly recommend you just go listen to the music for a hot moment. Because it will help. It may help set the tone of kind of like what we're talking about. It's beautifully, both enchanting and creepy. And it really lends it rounds out a lot of the film itself. And it really does create a much more outdoors style to this film than I think it does in other places. And, you know, I want to be very clear to like there is a time in place for varieties of films, like there's a time in place where you want to hire someone like John Williams to come in and create character based music, or to have someone like Hans Zimmer come in and create something that is memorable, right. And so, but there's also a place for these types of films. And so seeing this whole, real subtle, and very purposeful filmmaking was just such a refreshing thing for me to be able to see. I mean, even the term Suspiria, which doesn't really have a true translation, but in Latin, it means to breathe under one's breath. So like the closest translation is to psi, like a psi or a whisper, but it's really more towards the psi. It's not really about talking it even that lends itself to the whole making of the film.

J Jen Myers 23:51

Yeah, it's, it's so rich, there's there's so much here,

J Jessi Chartier 23:56

you know, something else that I really liked about the the 77 one. I mean, we talked a little bit about this earlier, but the women are just so much more nuanced in their representation, that the 2018 one almost feels like a head horror. And this one doesn't. At all

the 2018 one almost feels like a head horror. And this one doesn't. At all.

J Jen Myers 24:18
Yeah.

J Jessi Chartier 24:19
I mean, what are your thoughts about that?

J Jen Myers 24:21
But so no, it's a really interesting point. And yeah, we did talk a little bit about just kind of depictions of women. But you know, this film was also specifically about women in power, and how that looks and how that works. Well, and again, in this one, it's it's all subtle, it's all it's all understated, but it's definitely there. And I think that some of the things we talked about earlier in terms of the the nuances and the subtleties of this film, make it so that the power is also subtle, but it also means that it's less kind of this massive evil thing. And more, I have so much more of a sense in the original *Suspiria* that these women are just doing what they are doing to survive. And I don't mean that that's okay. Because they are definitely also murdering people. And I understand that I get that, but you give i At least I got more of a sense because I think that they do explain the whole backstory of their Was it their, their original mother or whatever died, or they're or they're trying to you know, keep keep them alive and things like that. So I don't know, you, I get the sense that it was a little bit more of we're in this this weird situation and and all we know how to do is this stuff. And so we're just gonna keep doing this stuff and holding together our, our little corner of the world here. And again, not that they have to be good. The good guys have the story. And they're they're not in a lot of sense. But I don't know, there's just something refreshing to be where because it isn't this black and white representation like we described, it is a little bit more of a Oh, okay, this is not necessarily the fact that women are doing this and having this power and wielding this witchcraft. It's kind of just what, what these women are doing. And it's not necessarily something that we need to pull out as we must destroy them all. Again, it's really hard to describe, but I do have more of a sense of that this is more has again, I don't even want to say like better or something. I like it better than the 2018 version of it. And there's something about just the fact that it's a little more complex, I guess makes it a little bit more interesting to me. I don't know, what do you think?

J Jessi Chartier 26:46
I 100% agree. And here's an example for our listeners to kind of help maybe contextualize this a little bit. The 2018 version, the timing takes place during after World War One. When the wall has gone, so it's after World War Two, right where the wall has grown up. Yeah. And the film specifically places, the struggles of the women in the war time, where it's like it like it's clear that they are fighting for control or not control the power and control because it's postwar. That's nice and heavy handed. Everybody's like, Yep, totally got it. The 1977 version takes place in 77. And women in the United States, for example, remember this was this was an English speaking film, right? Hmm. Yeah.

J Jen Myers 27:48

I can't actually don't remember. I think

J Jessi Chartier 27:51

But even in 1977, America, women could not open their own bank account, without a man until 1970. So the constant lifestyle of women starting to fight for their own corner in their life, not in the world. I'm not talking like because that's what the 2018 version does. It's like, women are reacting to wartime, which was very overt. But being able to open your own bank account, is a much more subtle, and surgical form of empowerment and freedom. And that's what the 77 version feels like. Where it's much more if you were not aware of how difficult it was, and still kind of is to function in a society that doesn't really naturally support you. It is Suspiria may not, you may not understand it, it may it may just kind of fly over your head a little bit. But like the fact that these women ran a school meant they were the ones keeping the books, they were the ones making the business decisions. They were the ones making sure that the school stayed open, that people were fed, like theirs, that they were in charge of marketing, like there's just so much more subtlety to their empowerment versus the 2018 where these women are almost angry in 20, the 2018 version. And in 77 version, it's almost like they're just trying to leverage the empowerment that has been given to them.

J Jen Myers 29:48

Yeah, I think that's a beautiful way to put it. And I think that I agree with you. I think that that is what you see in the 2018 version is people who think that power comes from subjugating other people, like that's the only way to have power. That's what power means. Whereas I think the original spirit understands that that's not always what it needs to be, you can have power over yourself. And for somebody who has not always had that, for people who have not always had that, you know, you're not always looking to lead a revolution and establish a new status quo. Sometimes you're just trying to get by for yourself and the people, you know, directly around you. And yeah, I think that that is kind of what's what's coming out and Suspiria I think that's one of the reasons that a lot of women who are fans feel so connected to this movie, it's it's not this overt message of feminism or women empowerment. But I think that there is subtle, a subtle message underneath. I don't think it's deliberate. I really don't think it's deliberate. I think it's something that's kind of just organically came up from the nature of the story and the nature of the film, but I think it's there. And I think that a lot of women can recognize it, and and appreciate it.

J Jessi Chartier 31:07

Yes, there's some other stuff out there, too. So if you liked this film, let's give you a couple options of what else you can take a peek at, Jen, what are some of your ideas?

J Jen Myers 31:18

Well, I think the most obvious place to go next is the follow up to *Suspria*, which is called *Inferno*. And Dario Argento made a couple other films that are kind of in this this trilogy, that deal kind of the same mythology and *Inferno* is the next one. And I really, really like *Inferno*, maybe even a little more than *Suspria*. So if you dug this, then I would definitely recommend jumping into *Inferno*. And then you know if again, if you really into this, you probably want to watch a lot of other Argento films. So I think I mentioned earlier, but I really like deep red offers interesting. Not one of his strongest ones. But you know, he's got some other ones in there. So I would say just do a Argento tour.

J Jessi Chartier 32:01

Yeah, for sure. You know, I have a couple that kind of go outside, I think of the traditional, what you might think of like my first thing I thought it was *Black Narcissus*, which is just a lovely kind of thriller mystery, but just also rich in color and about women in the Himalayans. That are, it's just really great. I also would recommend *The Red Shoes*, because that's also a slow burn thriller that has a lot to do with dance and control and empowerment at the same time. And then the last one I would recommend is for something a little bit if you're interested in the whole, like, women empowerment thing, I would recommend *The Women* which is 1939. And just a really interesting take on a woman's role in 1939. It was just really a great film. That one is not a thriller. That's romantic comedy fair warning.

J Jen Myers 33:01

Yeah, it's very different. It's very good. All of those are great. I actually think *Black Narcissus* and *The Red Shoes* are really great suggestions off of this film. I'd also throw in just kind of touch on the giallo theme. There's a kind of modern JLo called *Knife Plus Heart* that so it's a modern film came out in 2018. But it's set in the late 70s and has a lot of the same style and vibe of the late 70s giallo films. And it kind of has a lot of the same story elements that kind of twist some of the perspectives and characters gender and just some ways that I thought it was a really clever updating on the giallo kind of format. So if you do go deep into giallo and are watching some of that stuff and wants a slightly different perspective on it, *Knife Plus Heart* might do it.

J Jessi Chartier 33:49

Awesome. Well, we've got lots of interest to hear what you think about this particular film and maybe other suggestions to pair with it. So if people wanted to reach out to us or find us for future podcasts, Jen, where can they find us?

J Jen Myers 34:04

Oh, we are all over the place. So we have a website at quietlittlehorror.com and you can find us if you're not already subscribed, you can probably find us on all the podcast services that you use. So look for us there. If you want to follow us on Twitter, we're at [quiethorror](https://twitter.com/quiethorror) and on Instagram were [quietlittlehorror](https://www.instagram.com/quietlittlehorror). And if you want to reach out and talk to us, you can email us at hello@quietlittlehorror.com.



Jessi Chartier 34:30

Thanks for everyone for joining us. We will see you on our next episode. Bye