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Four beddings & a funeral — Italian style



Valerio Foglia Manzillo in the creepy thriller "The Embalmer."

By V.A. MUSETTO

It would be hard to find another couple as odd as Peppino and Valerio, the main characters in the creepy Italian thriller "The Embalmer."

Peppino (Ernesto Mahieux) is a fiftyish, pint-sized (think Danny DeVito) taxidermist with bad teeth, terrible taste in clothes and feet that don't touch the ground when he sits. He speaks with his hands and refers to himself in the third person.

To pick up extra cash, Peppino helps a Mafia don smuggle drugs inside human corpses.

Valerio, on the other hand, is a clean-living young hunk who is, in Peppino's words, "handsome as a god." (He's played by model Valerio Foglia Manzillo).

They meet at the Naples zoo, and Peppino gives Valerio a hefty sum to leave his restaurant job and work with him. Peppino doesn't need help — but he has the hots for Valerio.

They pal around together and Peppino arranges foursomes with hookers from Rome.

Shorty, however, is more interested in the hunk than in the women and this is the only way for him to get into bed with Valerio.

Complications arise when Valerio meets the exotic Deborah (Elisabetta Rocchetti), gets her pregnant and moves in with her parents.

MOVIE REVIEW

THE EMBALMER ★★★

Two guys and a girl.

In Italian, with English subtitles. Running time: 104 minutes. Not rated (nudity, sex, violence, dead animals). At the Quad, 13th Street, between Fifth and Sixth avenues.

When Peppino suggests that Deborah be part of a bedroom foursome, Valerio refuses.

Pushed to the sidelines, Peppino isn't happy — and a battle for Valerio's affections breaks out.

Director and co-writer Matteo Garrone infuses "The Embalmer" with a spooky eroticism.

The film is dark, both in theme and visual composition. Cinematographer Marco Onorato loves fog, misty streets and the wintry landscape.

A melancholy jazz score highlights the sense that something sinister is about to happen.

The cast is believable, especially Mahieux as the evil Peppino. You keep wondering why Valerio can't see the little twerp for what he really is — a creep driven by repressed homosexuality.

The finale leaves plenty of room for "The Embalmer 2." But this is Italy, not Hollywood.