

# Late Night with the Devil

Late Night with the Devil is a 2023 supernatural horror film written, directed, and edited by Colin and Cameron Cairnes. It stars David Dastmalchian, Laura Gordon, Ian Bliss, Fayssal Bazzi, Ingrid Torelli, Rhys Auteri, Georgina Haig, and Josh Quong Tart. Incorporating elements of documentary filmmaking and found footage, the film follows the events of a late-night talk show episode aired on the night of Halloween 1977, during which the host attempts to boost ratings by inviting an allegedly possessed girl onto the show.

An international co-production of Australia, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates, [3] Late Night with the Devil had its world premiere at the South by Southwest Film Festival (SXSW) on 10 March 2023. It received positive reviews from critics, [4][5] garnering praise for its performances, production design, and technical aspects, though the revelation that it utilized AI-generated art in three briefly featured still images received criticism. It was released theatrically in the United States on 22 March 2024 by IFC Films and in Australia on 11 April, grossing \$11 million. [6] The film became available for streaming on Shudder on 19 April. [7]

## Plot

The film's prologue is framed as a documentary investigating an unexplained event that occurred on the night of <u>Halloween</u> 1977, during the live broadcast of a sixth season episode of the successful <u>variety late-night talk show</u> *Night Owls with Jack Delroy*, which competes for ratings with <u>The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson</u>.

Through his celebrity connections, *Night Owls* host Jack Delroy makes regular visits to "The Grove", an elite California camp for rich and powerful men. Some time later, his wife Madeleine dies of cancer, and her death has a major effect on Jack as *Night Owls* halts its production. Jack ultimately returns and, in order to boost the show's ratings, decides to do a special <u>occult</u>-themed episode on Halloween. Special guests for the show's episode include self-proclaimed psychic and <u>medium</u> Christou, skeptic and former magician Carmichael Haig, <u>parapsychologist</u> author June Ross-Mitchell, and June's latest subject Lilly D'Abo.

#### Late Night with the Devil



Theatrical release poster	
Directed by	Colin Cairnes Cameron Cairnes
Written by	Colin Cairnes Cameron Cairnes
Produced by	Mat Govoni  Adam White  John Molloy  Roy Lee  Steven  Schneider  Derek Dauchy
Starring	David Dastmalchian Laura Gordon lan Bliss Fayssal Bazzi Ingrid Torelli

Rhys Auteri

During the broadcast, Christou experiences a premonition about someone named "Minnie", which Jack reveals was his private nickname for Madeleine. Christou later becomes sick, projectile vomits a black liquid, and is rushed to the hospital during a commercial break. In the subsequent segment, June introduces Lilly, the sole survivor of a mass suicide committed by a Satanic church that worshipped Abraxas. Despite June's warnings about the possible consequences of doing so, Jack convinces her to conjure the demon, whom Lilly dubs "Mr. Wriggles". During another commercial break, the crew informs Jack that Christou has died from hemorrhaging in the ambulance taking him to Mount Sinai Hospital.

During June's conjuring, Lilly becomes possessed by Mr. Wriggles, levitates in her chair, and causes the electricity to go haywire. In her possessed state, she makes a vague reference to having previously met Jack "under the tall trees". Carmichael challenges June by subjecting Jack's sidekick Gus McConnell to a hypnotism demonstration, which causes everyone in the studio to see worms coming out of Gus and ravaging him. When the production team rewinds the footage, it proves that the demonstration was merely a hallucination experienced by everyone in the studio; however, the supernatural phenomena that occurred during June's conjuring appears unaltered in the recorded playback. Jack is horrified when he notices Madeleine's ghost standing behind him in the footage, but Carmichael accuses Jack of orchestrating the events as an elaborate hoax. Lilly becomes possessed again and a bolt of lighting from the ceiling connects to her left hand, while a bolt from a nearby television monitor connects to her right. Her head splits open and begins to glow with a bright light. Using her telekinetic powers, she throws Jack into a wall, and kills Gus, June, and Carmichael.

Jack is suddenly transported to a nightmarish version of the show. He relives moments in the show's past before it is revealed that he has a connection to the demon possessing Lilly, having encountered it during a ceremony at The Grove. It is also revealed that Jack was indirectly responsible for Madeleine's cancer in exchange for the sudden success of *Night Owls*. Madeleine's spirit confronts Jack and begs him to put her out of her misery, as the cancer is causing too much pain. Using the ritual dagger from Lilly's former cult, he stabs Madeleine to death; the scene suddenly

	Georgina Haig Josh Quong Tart
Cinematography	Matthew Temple
Edited by	Colin Cairnes Cameron Cairnes
Music by	Glenn Richards Roscoe James Irwin
Production companies	Image Nation Abu Dhabi VicScreen AGC Studios Good Fiend Films Future Pictures Spooky Pictures
Distributed by	IFC Films Shudder (United States) Umbrella Entertainment Maslow Entertainment Ahi Films (Australia)[1]
Release dates	10 March 2023 (SXSW) 22 March 2024 (United States) 11 April 2024 (Australia)
Running time	93 minutes <sup>[2]</sup>
Countries	Australia United Arab Emirates United States

shifts to the now-empty studio, where a horrified Jack realizes he has stabbed Lilly. He stands over the bodies of his dead guests as police sirens slowly get louder in the distance.

Language	English
Box office	\$11.9 million

#### Cast

- David Dastmalchian as Jack Delroy, the host of Night Owls with Jack Delroy [4]
- Laura Gordon as June Ross-Mitchell, a parapsychologist and author [4]
- <u>Ian Bliss</u> as Carmichael Haig, a former magician turned <u>skeptic</u>. The character resembles the magician-turned-skeptic <u>James Randi</u>; Randi was involved in a similar altercation with Australian late night host Don Lane on *The Don Lane Show*. [8][9]
- Fayssal Bazzi as Christou, a psychic<sup>[4]</sup>
- Ingrid Torelli as Lilly D'Abo, the survivor of a mass suicide [4]
- Rhys Auteri as Gus McConnell, Jack's sidekick<sup>[4]</sup>
- Georgina Haig as Madeleine Piper, Jack's deceased wife<sup>[4]</sup>
- Josh Quong Tart as Leo Fiske, the producer of Night Owls<sup>[4]</sup>
- Steve Mouzakis as Szandor D'Abo, modelled after Anton Szandor LaVey
- Paula Arundell as Diane
- Christopher Kirby as Phil
- John O'May as Walker Bedford
- Michael Ironside as the narrator

### **Production**

### **Development and casting**

Production on *Late Night with the Devil* was announced on 13 February 2022, with the Emirati studio Image Nation and the American genre label Spooky Pictures attached. Describing their decision to base *Late Night with the Devil* around a late-night talk show, writer-director duo Cameron and Colin Cairnes stated: "In the '70s and '80s, there was something slightly dangerous about late-night TV. Talk shows in particular were a window into some strange adult world. We thought combining that charged, live-to-air atmosphere with the supernatural could make for a uniquely frightening film experience." [11]

The Cairnes brothers offered the role of Jack Delroy to <u>David Dastmalchian</u> after reading an article Dastmalchian wrote for the magazine <u>Fangoria</u> about regional TV <u>horror hosts</u>. Dastmalchian accepted the part after being sent a <u>lookbook</u> designed to resemble a 1970s <u>TV Guide</u>, along with the film's script. Dastmalchian's casting was announced on 24 June 2022. [13]

# Filming

*Late Night with the Devil* was shot in <u>Melbourne</u>, Australia. The film utilizes practical special effects, including puppetry, along with digital visual effects. The film also utilizes <u>AI art</u>, although the directors later said that only "three images" were AI-generated. [15]

# Release

Late Night with the Devil had its world premiere at the South by Southwest Film Festival (SXSW) on 10 March 2023 in Austin, Texas, where it played as part of the festival's "Midnighters" section. [4][14][16] That same month, horror author Stephen King was provided with an advance screener of the film and tweeted, "It's absolutely brilliant. I couldn't take my eyes off it. Your results may vary, as they say, but I urge you to watch it when you can. "[17][18] The film screened at the Sydney Film Festival from June 9-15 of 2023. [18]

In October 2023, <u>IFC Films</u> and <u>Shudder</u> acquired the distribution rights for North America, United Kingdom and Ireland. [19]

# Reception

### **Box office**

The film opened on 22 March 2024 in 1,034 theaters in the United States and Canada, and earned \$2.8 million in its first three days, the best opening weekend for an <u>IFC Films</u> release; additionally, media outlets noted that the total included an estimated \$666,666 gross on its third day. [20][21] Expanding to 1,442 theaters the following weekend, the film made \$2.2 million, finishing in seventh.

### **Critical response**

On the <u>review aggregator</u> website <u>Rotten Tomatoes</u>, 97% of 203 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 7.9/10. The website's consensus reads: "Delightfully dark, *Late Night with the Devil* proves possession horror isn't played out – and serves as an outstanding showcase for David Dastmalchian." Metacritic, which uses a <u>weighted average</u>, assigned the film a score of 72 out of 100, based on 22 critics, indicating "generally favorable" reviews. [24]

<u>Variety</u>'s Dennis Harvey commended the film's production design and technical aspects, as well as the of the cast, and wrote that the film's "mix of vintage <u>Me Decade</u> showbiz cheese and <u>Exorcist</u>-y demonic doings is distinctive, not to mention deftly handled by the [Cairnes] brothers as both writers and directors."

[4] Brian Tallerico of <u>RogerEbert.com</u> praised the film as inventive and its use of the found footage format as clever, and highlighted Dastmalchian's "phenomenally committed performance [...] really holding the film together as he finds the right tone between smarmy and likable that dominated so much '70s culture."

Meagan Navarro of <u>Bloody Disgusting</u> gave the film a score of three-and-a-half out of five, criticizing the film's pacing as rapid but writing that "the ingenuity, the painstaking period recreation, a riveting performance by Dastmalchian, and a showstopper of a finale make for one Halloween event you won't want to miss." <u>[26]</u> Trace Sauveur of <u>The Austin Chronicle</u> also praised Dastmalchian's performance and called the film "totally gimmicky, but the sincere commitment to the conceit is what really makes this work." Sauveur adds that, despite finding the film's conclusion lacking, "*Late Night with the Devil* is able to mine plenty of effective and fun ideas out of its premise, and it works as a potent examination of the price of success."

<u>Mark Kermode</u> of *Kermode and Mayo's Take* called it "really enjoyable", adding that he thought it was influenced by the 1992 British mockumentary supernatural horror TV film *Ghostwatch*. [28]

Wendy Ide of <u>The Observer</u> gave the film a score of four out of five stars, praising its satire and comedic elements, calling it "[s]mart, cynical and at times devilishly funny, the film delivers a crackle of disruptive static to the demonic possession genre." [29]

### Use of artificial intelligence

In the week leading up to the film's release, some reviewers pointed out the use of AI-generated art in a montage, which was not present in the version screened at SXSW, and called for a boycott of the film. In response to the controversy, directors Cameron and Colin Cairnes said: "In conjunction with our amazing graphics and production design team, all of whom worked tirelessly to give this film the 70s aesthetic we had always imagined, we experimented with AI for three still images which we edited further and ultimately appear as very brief interstitials in the film." Star David Dastmalchian said: "So I think [Cameron and Colin] said it really well, and I stand by what they said and I completely stand by this movie as a thoroughly original piece of work that so many many hours went into this incredible artistic craftsmanship to be set in this world. So it's a good conversation to have. It's an important conversation. We've got to have it." [30][31]

### See also

• *Ghostwatch*, a 1992 British mockumentary horror television film with a similar theme.

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## **External links**

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