

The best in blood and breast movies

When Ritz O'Brien's "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" debuted in 1975, it was a critical and commercial failure. And in 1981, "Mommie Dearest," based on Christina Crawford's sour-grapes memoir of her mother Joan, sustained equal failure.

Today, thanks to underground adulation, these have become trendy fare that induce laughs the mainstream never knew existed. Such is the essence of cult films, drive-in exploitation slasher/soft-core porn sagas that usu-

Scott Harrah



ally aren't appreciated for years. The sentiment seems to be that if it's old, bad and predicated on sensationalism, it's bound to find a cult audience eventually.

The reasons we are drawn to cult films are still arbitrary. But one major figure who can be credited with their current rise is drive-in movie critic Joe Bob Briggs, who writes about redneck films with the literary voice of a good ole boy who wants to see some blood and breasts in his movies. Briggs' influence has brought lowbrow to the attention of highbrows, which is why literate publications like American Film are running his reviews of titles like "Lucifer's Pussycat Love Bimbo" along with essays about Godard.

Camp is the basic underpinning of any cult item. In the retroactive 1980s, our thirst for nostalgia from the 1950s and 1960s is littered with camp. But we seem to have drained much from those days, so now we're turning to that decade we once thought we'd rather forget: the 1970s, the golden age of drive-in dreck.

Camp is terribly misunderstood in our culture, mainly because we view exaggeration and absurdity as threats to intellectual morality and reality. What many don't realize is that camp itself a form of social criticism, a blasting of staid mores that satirizes gender, sexuality, crime and our past.

As Susan Sontag noted in her famous essay, "Notes On Camp:

"To talk about camp is therefore to betray it. If the betrayal can be defended, it will be for the edification it provides, or for the conflict it resolves."

Pornography can be viewed as camp if it's not viewed with lust or political disdain, which is why most cult films use sex as a comic tool. Whether they exploit women, create new ways to brutally murder or affront what's viewed as acceptable is not important. What we must realize is that cult films fill a void in society, the vicarious line between mere voyeurism and veritable crime, and the ability to see depravity as a reaction to current values.

The following is a listing of cult films available at Lincoln video stores. These are the ones you won't see on Showtime's "After Hours":

"Jubilee" (1978, Britain): Undeniably the first "punk" film, directed by Derek Jarman, who has

been called "The British Fassbinder." This slow-paced, surreal foray into the world of London low-life has been hailed as "the cult film that never was," a poor man's "Rocky Horror" minus the theatrical dance numbers. Starring Siouxsie and the Banshees, Adam Ant before he was famous, and transvestite punker Wayne/Jayne County, Jarman uses shockers like ballerinas dancing around flaming baby carriages and London's bleakest venues to create an apocalyptic antiutopia. Motorcycle gang girls dominate the arena, while all the men in the film are portrayed as passive sex toys.

Nell Campbell is the ultimate lay, the men think, but they feel otherwise when she lures them to her flat, wraps them up in Saran Wrap, suffocates them and then casually dumps their corpses in the nearest alley. Wayne County as Lounge Lizard, the "last punk rocker," cuts a song called "Paranoid Paradise" in Moscow. It sells 50 million copies, and then he is murdered by the femme-commandos. Sound a bit incoherent? It is.

The major problem with "Jubilee" is that it's too whimsically talky and thematically uneven to be effective, but some moments make it worthwhile, like one punk girl's infamous line: "America is dead; it's never been alive." (Available at Audio Visual).

"Double Agent 73" (1974, Denmark):

Chesty Morgan, a drugged-out woman with a 73-inch bustline, is hired by a detective agency. Doctors implant a secret spy camera in her left breast. She rushes all over Copenhagen taking



Courtesy of Harper and Row Publishers

The famous bathtub scene from George Romero's "Martin."

photos of the thugs she murders with a simple lift of her disgustingly huge, deformed breast. And how does she kill them? One bad guy gets whopped in the face with her endowments, another licks poison off her nipples, and yet another is stabbed in the jugular vein with her hoop earring.

Even more obnoxious about Chesty is her wardrobe — a nauseating display of mismatched plaid polyester pantsuits, gold lame go-go lounge wear, polka-dot clown blouses with ruffles, and seven-inch platform heels. Chesty's grotesquely made-up face retains

a constant expression of pain, and it's obvious that she was on too many ludes when she made this bomb.

But the Pink Pantheresque soundtrack and lines like "Gee, flowers are pretty" make up for Morgan's moribund acting. By the end of the film, you'll be so annoyed by monstrous mammaries that you'll fear every "full-figured gal" for the next two weeks. (Available at Audio Visual).

"Female Trouble" (1974, U.S.):

This is trash genius John Waters' best film, featuring one of the most hilarious soap-opera plots.

Three-hundred-pound transvestite actor Divine plays Dawn Davenport, from her days as a juvenile delinquent to her death in the electric chair. Teen-age Dawn begs her parents for a pair of "cha-cha heels" for Christmas, and when she receives a less fashionable pair of shoes, she runs away and hitches her way to a life of trauma. She is picked up by a blue-collar sleazeball (played by Divine out of drag), who rapes her. While the camera focuses on her rapists' stained undies, Dawn steals his wallet. She gets pregnant, delivers her baby, Taffy, by biting off the umbilical cord with her teeth, then supports herself and the little rug rat by working as a waitress, a go-go dancer and a hooker. She steals TV sets on the side with bouffant-wigged pals Chiclet and Conchetta, who later persuade her to "audition" to be a customer at the exclusive Lipstick Beauty Salon. There she meets her fiance, Gator, a long-haired greaseball hairdresser. She marries him in a see-through wedding gown, much to the disgust of Gator's Aunt Ida (Edith Massey). Ida is a gap-toothed, retarded blimp who sports dominatrix get-ups and begs her son to become gay because "the world of the heterosexual is a sick and boring life."

Her daughter Taffy grows up to be a brat and spends her days staging mock car accidents in which she douses herself with ketchup as blood. Meanwhile, Dawn gets fed up with the domestic life and divorces Gator, and the owners of the salon persuade her to become a model. Gator, sad about the divorce, moves to Detroit, and Ida blames Dawn. In a fit of rage, Ida splashes battery acid on Dawn's face, and the salon owners tell Dawn that her newly disfigured face has turned her into a "ravishing beauty." They kidnap Ida and place her in a birdcage, and Dawn chops off the old bat's arm with an ax. Next, the owners start injecting Dawn with fixes of liquid eyeliner, tell her she's even more beautiful and trick her into staging a mass murder in public to make her "even more ravishing." She shoots up most of an audience at her first nightclub act, is convicted and finally fries in the electric chair. End of movie. (Available at Applause Video and Audio Visual.)

"Faces of Death" (1978, U.S.):

This is a boring, overrated, much-maligned exploitation documentary purporting to show real people and real animals being murdered. A water moccasin is eaten alive by piranhas in a zoo pool; diners at a Moroccan restaurant bash open a live monkey's head with hammers and eat his fresh brains as an hors d'oeuvre; a bear mauls a tourist;

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