

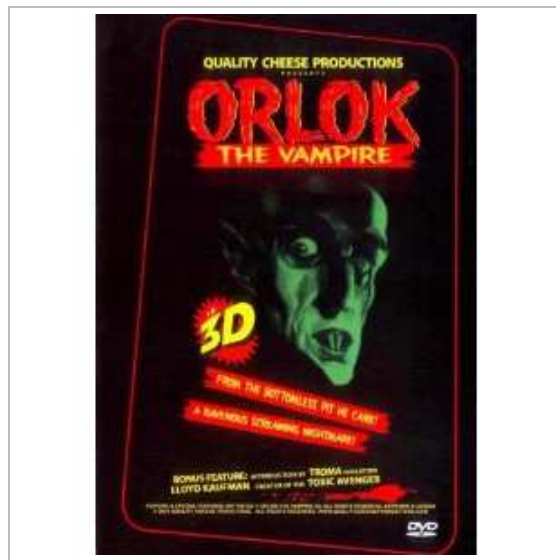
FFanzeen: Rock'n'Roll Attitude With Integrity

Through the writings and photography of Robert Barry Francos, a view of the arts and culture, including everyday life.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2010

DVD Review: "Orlok, the Vampire" in 3D, dir FW Murnau

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Images from the Internet



Orlok, the Vampire

Directed by F.W. Murnau

Quality Cheese, 2009

Appx 90 minutes, USD \$12.95

Qualitycheese productions.com

MVDvisual.com

It was a mix of cultures and styles, German Expressionist Cinema and British manners, and a legal battle that would be among the first in the burgeoning film business of Europe that resounded worldwide.

Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens, directed by F.W. Murnau in 1922, was more than loosely based on Bram Stoker's gothic novel *Dracula*, nine years before Bela Lugosi would portray the villainous vampire on film, and decades before the throat-biters would narrowly be seen meekly as sensitive heartthrobs and adversaries for werewolves (and other, less brooding bloodsuckers).

Blog Archive

▼ 2010 (116)

▼ September (15)

[DVD Review: "The Rolling Stones, 1969-1974: The Mi...](#)

[Rock'n'Roll Heroes, by Carolyn Lee Boyd](#)

[DVD Review: "Eric Clapton: The 1960s Review"](#)

[DVD Review: "Orlok, the Vampire" in 3D, dir FW Mur...](#)

[Book Review: "A Dead Boy's Tale" by Cheetah Chrome...](#)

[Oh, How They Danced...](#)

[DVD Review: "I Need That Record!"](#)

[DVD Review: "Night of the Living Dead: Reanimated"...](#)

[Road Trip to Yellowknife, Day 9: Lac La Biche to S...](#)

[Road Trip to Yellowknife, Day 8: Peace River to La...](#)

[DVD Review: "Leonard Cohen's Lonesome Heroes"](#)

[Road Trip to Yellowknife, Day 7: Louise Falls, NWT...](#)

[DVD Review: "F.A.R.T.: The Movie"](#)

[DVD Review: "The Monster and the Ape"](#)

[Road Trip to Yellowknife, Day 6: Yellowknife to Lo...](#)

▶ August (14)

▶ July (3)

▶ June (9)

▶ May (16)

Stoker's family sued over the copyright, and won. All known copies were ordered destroyed, and it joined Edison's *Frankenstein* as one of the great "lost" early film prints. But as with cinematic dinosaurs, nature finds a way, and prints started turning up over the years. As an ironic note, it was no longer under copyright during the advent of the VCR, so copies of it were everywhere, usually on cheap brands at low rez speed (ELP). I had an 8mm Blackhawk Films 200'-reel (20 minutes) version, and one of the bad VHS dubs.

Thus we come to this new release, retitled *Orlok, the Vampire...* in 3D, yet! Being an old black & white film, it makes total sense this could use the older technology of green and red separation. Two paper glasses are included, I should add.

All copies I've seen of this film over the years are a bit scratchy, and it seems each have a different set of title cards; the character names vary among the original book and the film. For example, the real estate agent in *Dracula* was Jonathan Harker, and in *Nosferatu* it was Thomas Hutter, but in this new release, it is Jonathan Hutter, a mixture of both.

It is easy to identify who is who from book to film, and Stoker was right to sue (in subsequent copies, Stoker is listed as writer). There is a bit of a stir-up here, though (as Akira Kurosawa also did with Shakespeare's plays), such as Hutter's boss, Knock, turning into a "Renfield," bug-eating character.

There is no denying that this is a groundbreaking and thoroughly effective, creepy film. Max Schreck, as Graf [Count] Orlok, is even more tall, stiff, hunched, and lanky than *Phantasm*'s "Tall Man" (Angus Scrimm). Schreck presents a precedent-setting evil figure. Many elements of Murnau version have become iconic, such as Orlok's raising out of his grave from horizontal to vertical while stiff as a board, used in *Coppola's Dracula* and the 1979 remake by Werner Herzog; it's been copied more than *Potemkin*'s baby carriage step-bounce (just imagine all the scenes that Brian De Palma could have - er - honored if he had made a remake).

- ▶ April (10)
- ▶ March (21)
- ▶ February (15)
- ▶ January (13)
- ▶ 2009 (78)
- ▶ 2008 (70)
- ▶ 2007 (22)

About Me

Robert Barry Francos
c/o 62 Timber Ridge Rd,
Commack, NY 11725. From 1977-88, I used to publish a music magazine in New York called FFanzeen, which dealt with the wide-ranging independent music scene. I also photographed many bands from the period (and since). And the beat goes on.

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There are so many other moments of brilliance in Mureau's version, such as Orlok face sticking through his busted wooden coffin lid, when he stalks Ellen (Mina) from the window across the courtyard, or when the shadow of Orlok's hand "grabs" Ellen's heart. Without the exaggeration common in German Expressionism such as *Metropolis* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Cagliari*, this film still retains much of its eerie flavor nearly 90 years later.

The print here is decent, though I do dream of a "restored" version (but as far as I know one does not exist). As for the 3D effects, added by Chris Heuer, it should be pointed out that not all of it is in that format, reserved mainly for scenes with the vampire, the title cards, and the occasional bat used for separating acts (though it goes by so fast, it's hard to tell if it actually is in 3D with the glasses). The new soundtrack is a bit too fluffy and not sinister enough though, and the grunts and noises the characters make are a bit distracting, so I recommend watching it with the sound off, or turned way down.

This film is a classic. It's still a joy to watch for me, even after a number of viewings over the years. The camera work and editing is revolutionary, and the actors are still sharp (though they do the typical *hands-flinging-about* emoting that was common in silent films, a throwback from the non-amplified theater stages. *Orlok* - even in 3D - is worth a see, and re-viewing.

There are limited extras here, and in fact, there are strangely *no* chapter breaks, so if you stop and start again, you have to zoom to your last spot. However, there are two different versions on the DVD, one with the 3D and one in normal 2D. Also, there is a bizarre introduction by Troma master Lloyd Kaufman, who does what I'm pretty sure is an off-the-cuff spiel that is so ludicrous - and hysterically funny - that he even refers to this 1922 film as a remake

of *Schindler's List*! Can a 3D Toxie be far behind?



Posted by Robert Barry Francos at [12:01 AM](#)

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