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## 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.

SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2011

### DVD Review: Stripperland

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Images from the Internet



#### Stripperland

Directed by Sean Skelding

Independent Media Distribution, 2011

103 minutes, USD \$19.95

Imdplc.com

MVDvisual.com

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#### About Me

[Robert Barry Francos](#)

Currently living in Saskatoon (email at RBF55@msn.com for address). From 1977-88, I used to publish a print version of a music



*"When there's no more room on the pole, strippers will walk the earth!"*

*"First they dance, then they kill!"*

The basic premise to this comedy is that a virus turns young-to-middle aged women into zombies who like to dance on poles, dress in heels, spandex and lingerie, and dine on men's body parts. Four people join forces on their way across the country to Portland, Oregon, where two of the passengers' Grambo lives. It's a mixture of a road movie, a buddy film, a love story, and, of course, the walking half-naked dancing dead.

Despite the title, an obvious play on 2009's *Zombieland* (more on that later), this film is a lot less salacious than one may imagine. If that is a good thing or a bad one, guess that's up to the viewer. While there is very little nudity, there are plenty of body parts, both attached and detached, mostly in something tight fitting.

Unlike some broad stroked comedies, such as *Vampire's Suck* was to *Twilight*, or even the milder *Scary Movie* was to *Scream*, this is more of a comedic *homage* to a large number of zombie flicks, including all of the *...of the Dead* series (including the remakes), *Return of the Living Dead*, *28 Days/Weeks Later*, Peter Jackson's *Dead Alive*, anything from *Tromaville*, *Shaun of the Dead*, *Evil Dead*,, even *Star Wars* (yes, I know there are no zombies in *SW*), and so many others. [Okay, another quick digression: do you realize that flesh eating zombies did not exist prior to 1968? Before that, zombies were mostly related to voodoo culture.]

But it's definitely *Zombieland* that is the basic paradigm, sometimes accurately, such as relying on lists (in this case, typically "strippers are all about the money"; "never eat in a strip club") and characters being named for states, for example, but usually twisting it a bit, having one look for baked goods rather than Twinkies (do I need a trademark stamp after that?), and Portland as the goal rather than an amusement park. But the two sisters are there (though a bit older than the *ZL* version for obvious reasons), the tough as nails Hummer driver with the shotgun and straw cowboy hat, and the nerdy (read: annoying) guy.

The director here, Sean Skelding, only has a couple of films under his

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). Now I write this blog, and have a column at [jerseybeat \(dot\) com](http://jerseybeat.com) (slash) [quietcorner \(dot\) html](http://quietcorner.com). And the beat goes on.

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belt (such as the same level of spoof, *I Am Virgin*), but he has been a set designer for some very A-level films and TV programs, such as *Maverick*, *Party of Five*, and yes, *Twilight*. This has led him to know quite a few recognizable B-level actors that are willing to appear in his films for the fun of it, usually outshining the four main characters, who I will get to after this.... [Well, after this brief side-step, once again. The AD, Tyler Benjamin, directed the zombie documentary *Walking Dead Girls*, reviewed in this column earlier. He created the word "zimbie," or bimbo zombie, which the rapper character Double D uses at some point as a throwaway line here. Okay, now back to our show...]

The main character, Idaho (Ben Sheppard) - who does not come from that state - is based on Jesse Eisenberg's Columbus. Ben plays Idaho like a manic depressive stuck on "up" mode. He chatters and smiles and is goofy, reminding me of a chipmunk, and is obsessed with strippers from before the infection. He's so into looking at them on the Internet, he has no idea of what is actually going on in the world, even to his step-mom, until she bursts into the room with black electric tape over her nipples *a la* Wendy O. Williams.

At this point, the first guest star of the film shows up, none other than Troma chief and Toxic Avenger creator himself, Lloyd Kaufman. Ever notice how Kaufman's personality is similar to Mel Brooks, with a quick mind for ad libs? Come to think of it, they even look a bit alike. Anyway, Kaufman hams his way joyously through his lines before his demise, the way in which reminds me of the fate of the Joe Silver character in Cronenberg's *Rabid*. Not sure if that was intentional or not.

Idaho is joined, after a rescue in a supermarket, by Frisco (Jamison Challeen), the only character named after a city rather than state here, who is based on Woody Harrelson's Tallahassee. He's rough, he's quiet, he's good with a shotgun (and chain saw, apparently), and just pinning for his lost love, who was a great baker, it seems. Challeen plays it a bit over the top at times, but definitely has the character down pat, being fun to watch as his slow-burn bursts of anger surface.

One of the two sisters (I'm not sure which is supposed to be ZL's "Wichita" or "Little Rock" because they had to up the ages due to the content, as I stated above, and rightfully so) is "Virginia" (Maren McGuire, who has a Karen Allen/Genevieve Bujold appeal). She is mostly quiet until she has a reason to put herself on the line. Her character has the most range of the four leads, going from quiet and shy to, well, lets just say bombastic. While the others stay in their niche, McGuire gets the opportunity to stretch, and handles it well.

Her sister is "West" (short for "West Virginia," embodied by Ileana Herrin), who is a match for Frisco's fire. Rather than a shotgun, her specialty is two machetes and a very short haircut. While Herrin's acting is the stiffest of the four, the viewer is having fun, so it is just part of the show. [Note that three of the four main actors have mostly

no other IMDB credits listed; only McGuire has had a career, with around 15 credits, including some still in production].

As fun as the set-up is, the heart of the film is the set pieces with the guest stars. The next one we meet is Daniel Baldwin, who plays the rapper (you heard me) Double D, which stands for the double-decker bus he rides around in while on tour, rather than what may be obvious for this film. His song "Club Life" is, well, horrendous (unintentionally so, I assume, from the way it's used as the chapter head music on the DVD). Our stalwart foursome run across him rapping in the middle of the road beside his bus, with huge bodyguards by his side, arms folded of course. There are a bunch of zombies dancing in front of him; apparently, as long as he's rapping, they're dancing rather than attacking. He speaks the "yo yo yo" kind of talk that always sounds either stupid or exploitive when middle-aged whites do it (seems a common enough device on sit-coms, yaknowwhatahmsayin'?). Baldwin looks like he's having fun, though, and that's conveyed onto the audience, despite the - err - music.

When they get to a mall (Jantzen Beach, in Portland), as you know they must if you follow the *...of the Dead* films, they run into a gay pimp with fur and reflections of Alex DeLarge of *A Clockwork Orange* via Bowler and eyeliner on one eye. He is played by Moose Jaw (Saskatchewan) native Boyd Banks, who has made a reputation by being in a number of George Romero's later zombie films (not to mention *Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* and *Kids in the Hall*). The commentary track has some fine info about the development of his character.

Thom Bray plays an insane doctor living in a casino that's trying to train the zombies into doing housework, or what he called "retro wifery." Yep, not only is he based on the insane, always blood-soaked doctor from *Day of the Dead*, but he's even named Dr. Logan. Bray is another one who is obviously having fun at this day's work, even (re) writing his own shtick (such as a mother fixation, among other things). He's a blast to watch at work.

The guest-star-that-wasn't is Gilbert Gottfried, who was supposed to mirror the Bill Murray character from *ZL*, but as he couldn't make it due to a another (I'm reading that as "paying"; I say that respectfully, not as a dig) commitment, the much lesser known Hank Cartwright fills in as Guy Gibson (they had already shot the scene with the "GG" on the gate), and he actually steals the scene, all the while being macho aging action star and dressed in drag.

Present scream queen Luna Moon has a bit part as a chained zombie in Dr. Logan's laboratory. She's into the role; you can tell by the gusto she presents. She's occasionally seen in the background of the shots, and she is always pacing and strongly into character. She's obviously not just a horror hostess.

And playing her first granny role (Jeez!) is '80s supreme scream queen

Linnea Quigley (wasn't she just a teen in *Savage Streets* and *Return of the Living Dead?*), dressed in a girl scout uniform. She gets a fine chance to chew a cigar (and some scenery), which she does in all her glory. I met her once in the early '90s, and she was as nice as can be.

There are two full-length commentaries, something more extensive than a viewer may associate with an indie horror film, but unlike most independents, they are worth watching, especially the one with the director, writer and producer. Their narrative is full of inside stories of particular days, how things got done, actors' personalities, and everything that is interesting about a commentary (as opposed to the Farrelly Brothers' lazy style of "Oh, there's our neighbor; oh, there's our mailman" or Kevin Smith's insulting-each-other drunken/drugged out mess). This is really what a commentary should be. You'll have to watch it if you want to find out the meaning of the "G.A.S." signs that are placed all over Portland.



There is a second track that I've listen to most of, and which I will finish, by the person in charge of the physical (make-up and applications) FX, and the one who did the digital ones. It's also interesting to hear how they finagled things the last minute, though they occasionally focus on their own particular work, stepping on each other (not often though), and being cordial about it. Speaking of effects, there are literally hundreds of digital SFX through green screen, erasing, placing, blood, and the like, some of it a bit fakey (such as the Kaufman demise), but impressive nonetheless. As I've always enjoyed the prosthetics effects, make-up, and like (John Carpenter's *The Thing* is still the one to beat), I was impressed by how much they were able to do with such a small budget. Overall both kinds of effects were remarkable for a film this size.

Other extras include three documentaries (averaging about 8 minutes each) on SFX, the guest stars, and interviews with some of the women who play the stripper zombies; some of them *are* dancers (one sounds so mercenary, I found her scarier than her character), or adult actors. There are also two music videos (including the dreadful Double D's "City Life"), some company trailers (such as for Skelding's *I Am Virgin*), and a few older refreshment theater ads that are on many of the Cheezy Flicks releases.

Sometimes the comedy falls flat in the film, and it certainly helps to be conscious of the zombie culture that has existed since someone stated, "They're coming to get you, Bar-ba-ra" (yes, there is a character here with that name in honor, but no one says the line, and I don't remember if anyone wore racing gloves). In the commentary, they make the suggestion that you use the recognition as a drinking game (know the source, take a drink). It's the association of references that especially makes the film a fun voyage, more than the jokes, more than the dress code, and more than the gore. You really need to be a zombie fan (which I am) to derive the true flavor of the film, and if you are, it's especially worth it.



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

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