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DVD Review: Faces of Schlock

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Images from the Internet



Faces of Schlock

Various directors

Independent Entertainment, 2009

~90 minutes, USD \$14.95

Alternativecinema.com

Freakproductions.net

MVDvisual.com

Grossly speaking (pun unintended), independent cinema is usually represented in three genres: first is the documentary, and these are usually high class and low cost (e.g., Michael Moore's stuff, and so many others worth watching); second is comedy, and those are usually *Porky's* level fart jokes and mostly a waste of time; and lastly is horror, which runs from astoundingly good (e.g., *The Evil Dead* series, *Re-Animator*) to just plain unwatchable (too many to mention).

However, I would rather watch the horror indies more often than the majors, because the larger studios have so much to lose and tend to take themselves *waaaaay* too seriously, whereas the

indies tend to have a clear head about who they are and what they are doing. Usually their products are done on the fly, with limited budgets and effects that are more *wha?* than *whoa!* (if I am making any sense at all).

The plurality of this release's title is reflected in the four short films that make up the bulk of the DVD, organized by Henrique Couto. All the directors, producers, and other cast / staff either share each other's services, or are friends.

First up is "Blood Witch" (written and directed by Andrew Shearer), which I believe is the most nuanced of the four pieces, as far as characters are concerned. Essentially a witch is murdered centuries ago in Spain, and now she has been called back by a goth Satanist-wannabe / sadist-lite who doesn't truly know what she is doing. The moral question of who of many of the characters are actually evil (including a telemarketer) is a key element here. Countess Samela (referred in the bonus material as "Sam"; this is her only credit on IMDB) plays the wannabe with a churlish grin, even as she is bathing. Monica Puller, as the title character Isabella (other credits include *Satan's House of Yoga*, *Cannibal Sisters*, and *Psycho Vixens*), plays her role with just the right touch of pathos. The gore effects are effective and not overdone, and the writing is in *Twilight Zone* morality story mode. A quick shout out to a great *nom de acting*, Priscilla Lee Press-On; yes, that is her name, not the character.

The second short is "Mike Wuz Here" (produced, edited and directed by Justin Channell), about a not-too-bright ghost named Mike (T.J. Rogers, whose credits include *Die and Let Live* - that is not a typo) who is haunting the cinema where he was fired, and then hanged himself. The slacker staff know him both when he was a person, and now as a ghost. A new manager is hired (after Mike's spirit did away with the old one), who is put in charge of this bunch of losers. He decides that he wants Mike out because he is scaring off patrons, hence the theater is losing money. When he tries to "fire" Mike, the spirit enters his body and he starts to do away with the other staff members who agreed he - as a ghost - should be let go. A bit gruesome, of course, but more funny (intentionally) than anything else, such as one usher being tortured by being forced to watch *Step Up 3* (his comments are hilarious). This short definitely has its fine moments.

The third was my least favorite of the four, "One Foot in the Grave" (directed by Chris LaMartina), about a dancer played by Sara Cole (other credits are *Dead Hunt* and *Almost Invisible*), who loses her foot due to a doctor's negligence. She seeks revenge via the local witchy woman, Virginia Frank (credits include *Grave Mistake*), who is actually in cahoots with the slimy doctor (no secret there), portrayed by George Stover (whose awesome credits include a number of early John Water's films, as well as the likes of *Attack of the '60 Centerfolds*, *Sleepy Hollow High* and *Ninjas vs. Vampires*). To show you the level of writing here, the foot doctor's name is - wait for it - Dr. Sholes. Yep, it's that desperate.

The main tale is saved for last, which is "Slay Ride" (produced and directed by Henrique Couto, who put the whole collection together). The central character, as a spoiled goth girl, is DVD covergirl Ruby LaRocca (who has an impressive list of over 50 credits in 10 years, including *Satan's School for Lust*, *Spiderbabe*, *Dr. Horror's Erotic House of Idiots*, *Bikini Girls on Dinosaur Planet*, *An Erotic Werewolf in London*, *The Lord of the G-String: The Femaleship of the String*, *Batbabe: The Dark Nightie*, and, well you get the idea). She's the kind who pierces

her nipples without anesthetic (we get to see that, even though it's an effect), while her parents are walking out the door for the weekend. Seems, of course, there's a killer on the loose, ready to strike her and/or her hyper schoolmate, Debbie (Sandy Behre; only credit). Could it be the guy with the chainsaw next door (a fine turn by the director)? Santa? Who knows, though I figured it out somewhere along the way. Nice effects here, and as with just about the entire film, done with appliances rather than CGI.

And then there is the wraparounds, presented with glee by the hostess with the fangs, Slutpira, a really nice turn by Izzie Harlow, who jumps in and out of character *a la* Uncle Floyd, to make comments like, "Oh great, another title that's a pun." Despite the lengthy fangs they give her, she manages to talk normally, and has a really fine sense of timing. I looked forward to her bits of intro and outro of the short films. Kudos.

There are a lot of bonus features, some good, some whatever. The commentary track is cool, because each segment has its own director, writer, actor, whomever, including the wrap-arounds, so we hear from the – err – minds of each creator on their own pieces. Nice touch. The outtakes and bloopers were mostly fun, though some went on too long, and the music video was, well, tiring. The two clips that seemed way too long were of the premiere night (including *lots* of footage of "the gang" hanging out and getting drunk before, and hanging around in the lobby of the theater (the one from "Mike Wuz Here") before and after the showing. There is also a loooooong bit revolving around a horror convention that seemed to never end and have no point other than for them to have yet another reason to get drunk.

So skipping most of the extras, I would say this meets the indie needs of a low budget, DIY horror comp, and I actually look forward to seeing more of their work.