

On DVD, meanwhile, director Domiziano Cristopharo answers the question of what an Italian mash-up of retreaded homage to Tod Browning and David Lynch would look like, in the form of “The Museum of Wonders.” A slice of theater of the bizarre that bills itself as “somewhere between reality and a dream,” this movie charts the machinations of a beautiful dancer, Salome, who marries dwarf circus owner Marcel in an effort to steal his inherited fortune and run off with her lover, strongman Sansone. Achingly artistic and pretentious as hell, it’s also deadly dull, and without the benefit of any particular elevating slickness of execution. More fun is “Planet of [Vampire Women](#),” a gory, hybridized genre spoof in which a notorious female space pirate and her gang of interplanetary outlaws find themselves stranded in a world of unrelenting terror. The budget is righteously low, but there’s a certain DIY charm that courses through this schlocky flick. If titular misspelling in your horror movie is your thing, finally, there’s “Claustrofobia,” [sic] a movie in which twentysomething Eva (Carolien [sic] Spoor) ignores the creepy landlord and peeping tom neighbor in moving into her new apartment. Whoops, wrong decision. After a night out drinking with her friends, she’s taken hostage by a hooded figure and has her blood drawn for a purpose that she will soon find out. Again, technical limitations somewhat ding this low-budget effort, but for those looking for off-the-beaten-path indie horror fare, there are far worse options.

Each of the aforementioned three titles come in regular plastic Amaray cases, in 1.85:1 aspect ratios. “Claustrofobia” comes with the benefit of an English language Dolby digital 5.1 surround sound audio track, but “The Museum of Wonders” has the most robust slate of supplemental extras, consisting of nine minutes of deleted scenes, 18 minutes of bloopers (a droopy curtain and various missed cues set off laughter and nervous dancing), and a six-minute featurette spotlighting the sword-swallowing expertise of a gentleman named Murrugun.

Much more sobering than any of the above is Icarus Films’ recent DVD release of Belgium-born documentarian Chantal Akerman’s “From the Other Side,” in large part since it also includes a second disc with her film “South,” examining the 1998 death-by-dragging/hate crime murder of James Byrd, Jr. in Jasper, Texas. “From the Other Side” tackles the great American immigration debate, mixing evocative landscapes with interviews from those on both sides of the fence (pun embraced, if not intended). Sensitive, nonjudgmental portraiture is of course Akerman’s specialty, so those expecting either social justice advocacy or hard-hitting investigative journalism will be in for a rude awakening. Still, there’s a tenderness to this simple testimony and its straightforward capture, which is even more humanistic and illuminating for those removed from the regional frontlines of this hot-button issue.

“South” was born as a much broader meditation on the American region, but took a dramatic turn when the aforementioned Byrd, a 49-year-old African-American, was severely beaten by three twentysomething white racists, then hitched to their truck and dragged three miles through the county. Akerman again blends long stretches of pastoral, almost idyllic nature silence with sit-down interviews from Jasper residents — including the town’s sheriff, who labels many of his burgh’s problems economically based. Even at only 70 minutes the movie drags at times; one can sense the seams of thematic pivot, and wishes there were a bit more discipline and elbow grease applied to a honing of its focus and inquiry. Still, there’s a quiet compassion that hangs over “South,” like a dense San Francisco fog, making this sociopolitical offering and its main-feature predecessor the perfect weekend movie for the NPR set.



Housed in a regular plastic Amaray case with a snap-in tray, “From the Other Side” and “South” are both presented in 16×9 aspect ratio (the former anamorphic), on DVDs with static menu screens and chapter stops. There is no additional bonus content, apart from information screens on Icarus Films, but the two-for-the-price-of-one value of the films themselves certainly mitigates this fact.

Narrated by Woody Harrelson and buoyed by interviews with some of contemporary social psychology’s leading thinkers, “Ethos: A Time For Change” lifts the lid on a Pandora’s box of systemic issues impacting modern life, from the environment and unregulated corporate power to personal liberty and the shadowy influence of the Fed. Its passions are a bit scattershot, to be sure, but the documentary slowly builds a compelling case for big media’s joint unswerving subservience to power and mighty influence on public opinion. A lot of the usual suspects (Michael Moore, Howard Zinn and Noam Chomsky) crop up, but of particular note are Bill Hogan and Charles Lewis, of the Center for Public Integrity, who talk about both how modern-day politics are basically an auction (in essence, how we define how serious a candidate is by how much money they raise) and how the Carlyle Group and more than 70 private companies have rung up massive benefit and profits from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Still in the shadow of Memorial Day weekend, it’s unsettling food for independent-minded thought. Apart from trailers for other Cinema Libre titles, there are no bonus features here, but director Pete McGrain’s film does come with a motion menu screen, and divvied up into 10 chapters. For more information, visit [www.EthosTheMovie.com](http://www.EthosTheMovie.com).

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