

SOCIETY (1986)

Director: Brian Yuzna

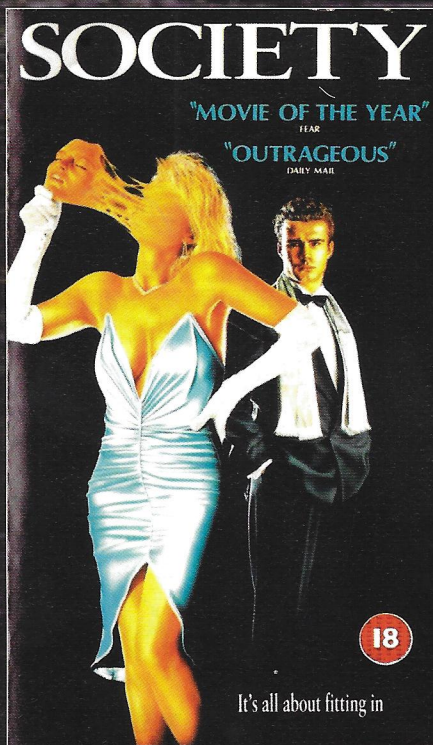
Writer: Woody Keith, Rick Fry

Starring: Billy Warlock, Devin DeVasquez, Evan Richards, Ben Meyerson

Society is one of those horror movies that, when it comes up in conversation amongst genre film lovers, that often elicits a sharp exhalation of breath or one of those 'wheeww' whistles. This is often followed by an exclamation of "What the Hell was that about?"

Yeah. This is the good stuff. If you watched it as a double bill with Jacob's Ladder, for example, you'd probably fear for your sanity for a while afterwards. Society is messed up. It's also an absolute delight. A film like this wouldn't get made in the current genre climate. It just wouldn't. Society was a risk, but it's a brilliantly sick risk that really paid off.

Brian Yuzna's direction gleefully relishes the bizarre and often very messy visuals (helped along by some awesome effects from Screaming Mad George). You haven't lived until you've seen a man's face emerge from his own arse and start chatting, or a mutant tongue flap around,



a character with a giant hand for a head, a man turned completely inside out, or limbs rearrange themselves into truly strange contortions during an infamous shower scene. Improbable physical mutations abound throughout its running time, its

atmosphere is that of a nightmare where you're not sure what's real and what's a product of the mind of Billy (played Billy Warlock, who would go on to flaunt his abs in Baywatch).

Following his increasingly frightening descent into madness while trying to figure out if his family are mutants and murderers, Billy's journey through the film is often harrowing, bleakly comic at some points and just downright weird at others. This isn't an average horror flick with a dude in a mask hacking people up. This is a seriously messed-up piece of quality genre cinema that I would liken to the more unsettling films of David Cronenberg rather than output like Yuzna's own Re-Animator and its ilk.

With striking cover art depicting a stylishly-attired lady pulling her own face off, you just knew Society was going to be a weird ride well before it found its way into the player.

NIGHTMARE MAKER (1982)

Director: William Asher

Writers: Stephen Breimer, Boon Collins, Alan Jay Glueckman

Starring: Jimmy McNichol, Susan Tyrrell, Bo Svenson, Marcia Lewis

SHOCK 'EM DEAD (1990)

Director: Mark Freed

Writers: Andrew Cross, Mark Freed

Starring: Traci Lords, Stephen Quadros, Troy Donahue, Michael Angelo Batio

Shock 'Em Dead doesn't really have much working in its favour to the average film lover. A low budget, a somewhat ham-fisted script, even more ham-fisted acting, somewhat patchy direction and Traci Lords in a prominent role. However, sick and twisted individuals such as you and me aren't average film lovers. We're freaks. Well, I am. You seem perfectly normal. Honest. I love this film in all of its awful glory.

A hard rock horror comedy, Shock 'Em Dead sees geeky main character Angel Martin (Stephen Quadros) make a deal with the devil (played by shred guitar wizard Michael Angelo Batio, accompanied by his famous double-neck guitar and a couple of writhing Hell-maidens). Angel wants to be the ultimate rock star, and his pact may see that come true, while costing him his soul. Traci Lords plays a rock band's manager, Lindsay, who gets caught up in some demonic mayhem after the newly

rocked-up Angel joins the band.

The jokes largely fall flat, the 'scares' are non-existent, the effects are woeful and the whole thing looks like an abandoned Twisted Sister video, but it has plenty of charm despite its shortcomings. Angel is played for laughs, while Lords' performance as the put-upon band manager is played pretty straight. It's never quite sure what it wants to be and as such feels a bit of a mess, but like the best of us, it's a loveable mess.

While Traci is used prominently in the US version of the tape's cover, the UK version pictured here doesn't show her at all, possibly due to lingering memories of her adult film past, or possibly due to the fact that she has a supporting role and isn't in it as much as the US cover would suggest. Angel's 'rock' look comes across as a Halloween costume version of Nikki Sixx or Blackie Lawless, and his comedy 'demon' effects are limited to some green foam and a nicely tacky glowing eye effect, but that just adds to its entertainment value to me.

One thing that does raise a laugh is the choice of cover 'quotes' on the tape, which aren't attributed to anyone. They're just... there. 'Tears of laughter

and screams of terror... superb', 'lashings of gore - lots of fun' and 'horror with a sense of humour'. All three of these are complete nonsense. Shock 'Em Dead is far from a great film, but it has Michael Angelo Batio in it being a guitar demon, so how could I possibly not love it? Man, I really do have bad taste. Hurray for bad taste!

