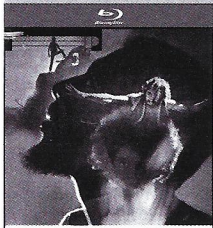


## CATCH MY SOUL

Directed by Patrick McGoochan  
(1974) Vinegar Syndrome Blu-ray / DVD combo



Catch My Soul

You could be forgiven for not knowing there was such a thing as a rock opera version of *Othello* directed by the guy from *The Prisoner*. Despite *Catch My Soul's* mix of Shakespeare, religious iconography, and *Hair*-style rock musical stylings, it failed to generate the same level of interest as its contemporary competitors *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell* (both released in 1973) and received only limited distribution. It was retitled *Santa Fe Satan*, marketed as an exploitation item, and then vanished for decades before Vinegar Syndrome resurrected it via its Etiquette label.

The film was based on a London-based stage play written by Jack Good, a British TV producer who years earlier created the U.S. rock show *Shindig!*, a hipper, West Coast answer to *American Bandstand*. At the time the film was made, Good had become a devout Roman Catholic, which explains the prevalence of religious iconography in what is otherwise a fairly straightforward retelling of *Othello*.

The various stage versions of the play (like the film) featured musicians in key roles. The UK version included P.P. Arnold, P.J. Proby, and the band Gass, while the original U.S. production cast Jerry Lee Lewis as Iago.

Rather than being a lost classic, *Catch My Soul* is an interesting curio with an excellent soundtrack, but it's likely to disappoint both fans of Shakespeare and rock musicals.

The film keeps the basic story of Shakespeare's original, but wisely strips out a number of subplots and supporting characters. In this version, Othello (played by folk singer Richie Havens) is the leader of a hippie commune in the desert. When he promotes his friend Cassio (Tony Joe White) to deacon, it spurs jealous follower Iago (Lance LeGault, best known for his role as Col. Decker on *The A-Team*) to plot against him. Iago and his wife Emilia (Susan Tyrrell) first trick Cassio into getting drunk during a wild party so that he falls out of Othello's favor. Then they slowly manipulate Othello into believing his wife Desdemona (Season Hubley) is cheating on him with Cassio. This being Shakespeare, all of this scheming leads to a lot of stabbing and crying.

Non-actors Havens and White hold their own here, but the best parts of the film belong to the wild-haired Tyrrell and LeGault (who was also in the London production), who plays Iago as a simmering devil incarnate.

*Catch My Soul* contains plenty of weirdness (Iago travels around in a driverless, black school bus), but it drags at times. And unless you are particularly fond of Shakespeare, the dialogue can be a little dense. The wide variety of acting styles on display doesn't exactly help. Havens spends most of the last part of the film screaming at the top of his lungs, while the Bard's dialogue is nearly indecipherable at times when it's filtered through White's mushy Louisiana accent.

Thankfully, the film has a great soundtrack that mixes Good's original stage songs with new numbers from Havens, White, and Delaney and Bonnie (who appear briefly during the party sequence).

The film is presented here at 1.78:1, and the transfer (which bears the *Santa Fe Satan* title) is crisp. Oscar-winning cinematographer Conrad Hall took a muted approach to most of the daytime scenes. The deep blacks in the night scenes look great. The film is visually arresting even when the action on screen isn't all that interesting, with Hall taking maximum advantage of the wide desert vistas littered with blow-out, crumbling churches and rusty cars.

The disc includes a number of extras that provide some insight into the movie's difficult production history. There's a 20-minute making-of featurette ("Drink the Wine, Eat the Bread") that includes interviews with executive producer Charles Fries and producer Huw Davies, as well as a 12-minute interview with Tony Joe White, and a featurette about Conrad Hall that includes an interview with his daughter, Naia.

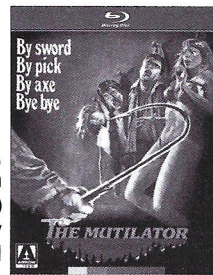
According to the participants, there was a significant amount of tension between director McGoochan (a heavy drinker who later asked for his name to be removed from the film) and Jack Good. Delaney and Bonnie were also difficult to work with. The film was heavily restructured during the editing process, and ultimately failed to generate any audience interest (or ticket sales) during its initial release.

Other extras include the trailer, a TV spot, and a stills gallery, along with a 28-page booklet. A DVD version of the disc is also included.

Brian Alright

## THE MUTILATOR

Directed by Buddy Cooper & John Douglass  
(1983) Arrow Video Blu-ray / DVD combo



Not having had the foresight to plan ahead for their Fall Break, university friends Ed (Matt Mitler), Pam (Ruth Martinez), Ralph (Bill Hitchcock), Sue (Connie Rogers), Linda (Frances Raines) and Mike (Morey Lampley) face the prospect of little but an empty calendar for their semester break. Out of the blue Ed's estranged father, Ed Sr., (Jack Chatham), phones him with a request to close up his beachfront bungalow for the winter. With what appears the ideal weekend getaway handed to them on a plate, the friends head off to Atlantic Beach for what they anticipate will be three days of alcohol-fuelled escapades and hilarity.

Once they arrive at the waterfront retreat the group find themselves a little perplexed at what they find. Unlocked and deserted, the home looks to have been abandoned in the middle of a night's drinking stories. Ed Sr. himself appears long-gone, the island closed off access to the mainland and only a security guard (Ben Moore) shuffling past beach-front properties periodically in the night. What no-one is aware is that "Big Ed" has ferreted himself away in a hidden alcove, his mind finally shattered by a long pent-up rage, awaiting the perfect moment to exact brutal revenge on his offspring for the accidental death of his wife years before.

Having had a decent financial windfall and afforded the opportunity of either investing in a vineyard or sinking the money into financing a feature film, Buddy Cooper elected to run with the latter as an avenue to capitalise on the early eighties horror boom and his own love of cinema. In hindsight most would probably have called Cooper crazy as the market for fine wines has grown exponentially since *The Mutilator's* (1983) debut, whereas the demand for so-called "slasher films" declined almost immediately after the sub-genre peaked in the mid-eighties. Whilst neither the springboard to greater things that *Terror Train* (1979) was for Roger Spottiswoode (*Tomorrow Never Dies*, 1997), nor the one off cult hit Joe Giannone won in *Madman* (1981), Cooper's film remains a fairly polished second-tier slasher in deference to many of its peers that have since fallen into obscurity.

Admittedly, under the guiding hand of Cooper and co-director John Douglass *The Mutilator* still succumbs to a number of faults inherent of the sub-genre, most notably an abundance of poorly-written, clunky dialogue paired with an embarrassing show of some terribly wooden acting (Morey Lampley really excels here, leading to a sigh of relief once he's killed off). Chiselled lead Matt Mitler (*Basket Case 2*, 1990) manages to escape with his dignity intact come the finale, even though Cooper's screenwriting threatens to sink him at every turn, whilst only co-stars Ruth Martinez and Jack Chatham similarly escape with only minor bruises to their credibility (the latter undoubtedly due solely to the fact that his character's has no dialogue). While slasher films have never been lauded for their award-winning performances the differences between some level of believability and the feeling of perusing the timber aisle in your local hardware store has been known to sink even the best of intentions (as Ulli Lommel's *The Boogey Man* will attest).

Akin to many of its peers of the day, *The Mutilator* takes its time to warm up and get going, as Cooper and Douglass spend more than ample time establishing their characters, but once it kicks off and Mark Shostrom's (*Evil Dead II*, 1987) jarringly gory effects come into play it actually manages to hold up with the best of them. Mind you, those makeup effects were so effective in their day that when the film saw its belated direct-to-video release in Australia in 1987 all of them (excepting Lampley's grisly death scene) were ordered removed, or significantly reduced, for the film to be released with an 18+ rating! After what had been a pretty flat start, *The Mutilator* moves into high gear in its second-half with the help of Shostrom, some atmospherically impressive cinematography by documentary specialist Peter Schnall (see below), and seemingly tighter direction by Cooper and Douglass in conjunction with the efforts of editor Stephen Mack (*Angelo My Love*, 1983). Michael Minard's (*A Return to Salem's Lot*, 1987) eerie electronic score goes a long way too.

There's very little doubt, at least in my mind, that *The Mutilator* will ever be afforded the kind of reverence that other more iconic entries in the slasher sub-genre, such as *Halloween* (1978) or *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980) have long since been feted within the genre community. Nor should it be as, after all, it's only a slasher film and falls within a somewhat derided sub-genre of the horror mainstream at that. However, as already stated, once it gets rolling Cooper and Douglass' little horror opus more than rises to the occasion and competes well above the standards set by the majority of its (then) contemporaries. In retrospect, quite a decent effort, all flaws forgiven, albeit one with a couple of jaw-dropping shocks best left as surprises for newcomers and fans alike.

Arrow's Blu-ray/DVD combo bears out as the definitive presentation of *The Mutilator* for genre fans. It sports a brand new 2k restoration of the unrated version of the film (with a small caveat: although "director approved" there's a couple of passages where day-for-night filters have somehow been removed from the final product, leaving a couple of night scenes to play out in low or bright light). Also included are commentaries by a) Cooper, Douglass, Mitler and effects artist Ed Ferrell and b) Cooper and Martinez. A feature-length documentary covers everything else you could ever want to know about the film's production. There's also additional interviews with Shostrom and composer Minard, a behind the scene reel, screen tests, alternate titles, multiple trailers and TV spots, storyboards, stills gallery and screenplay as BD-ROM content.

Michael Thomason