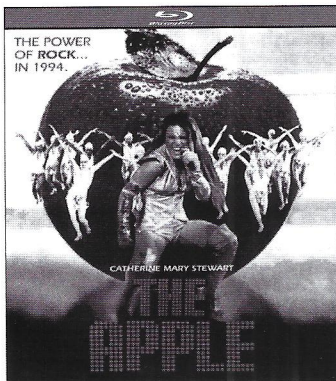


THE APPLE

Directed by Menachem Golan
(1980) Scorpion Releasing Blu-ray



In the futuristic far-flung world of 1994, the world is under the thrall of the Bim, a disco-based form of music disseminated by satanic cultural minister Mr. Boogalow (Vladek Sheybal, star of Ken Russell's *Women in Love*, 1969). When country-music duo Bibi (Catherine Mary Stewart, star of *Night of the Comet*, 1985) and Alphie (George Gilmour, star of . . . nothing else) disrupt an internationally televised music competition with their sweet natured ditty "Love, the Universal Melody," Boogalow is quick to drown out their number with feedback—but is eminently aware of the star potential in

Bibi. Inviting the pair to sign up for a quick ride to musical superstardom, the insufferable Alphie has a terrifying vision that this artistic compromise will lead to damnation. In a wild musical number, Alphie envisions the Boogalow-led musical couple Pandie (Grace Kennedy) and Dandie (Alan Love) kitted out in glitter—and little else, exhorting them to sign away their souls against a hellish backdrop full of demonic figures which include an actual, actual, actual (deep breath) VAMPIRE. You'll have to watch the film, friends, to get that last bit.

Alphie splits the scene, if not his painted on blue jeans, and Bibi becomes a bedazzler-encrusted songstress backed up by hordes of leather-clad chorus boys. Things just get wilder and wilder from there on in—musical numbers with extras sporting plastic garbage bags and spandex leggings, God (Joss Ackland) portrayed as a dope-smoking hippie driving a gold-plated Cadillac, dancers in lingerie humping in unison, shrill ethnic and sexual stereotypes, more, more, MORE. Out on Blu-ray from the fine folks at Scorpion Releasing, your excuses for *not* watching the delirious *The Apple* have officially run out.

How much does this writer loves this terrible thing? Let me count the ways. One, the songs are catchy as all get out and very enjoyable. A virulently anti-disco film that offers one disco song after the other in quick succession, *The Apple's* soundtrack in undeniably awesome. It's hard to believe that the preview audiences reportedly hurled their souvenir soundtracks at the screen in disgust. Had I been there, I would have snatched them all up, kept them to sell for exorbitant sums on eBay, save the one that would seldom leave my turntable. "I'm Coming for You" and "Do the Bim," among countless others are all instant earworms that never fail to bring a smile to the face. Stack this up against the Hollywood flop *Xanadu* (also 1980), which features a stupendous array of hits but fails as a film for its ugly, banal imagery. (Mount Olympus represented by flashing orange and red fluorescent lights? Come on!)

Two, *The Apple* rockets by at breakneck speed. That certainly can't be said for the other cult bad musical *Can't Stop the Music* (1982). One went into *Music* expecting lots of wink-wink nudge-nudge hijinks on account of the Village People, but was confronted by the romantic non-chemistry between Bruce Jenner and Valerie Perrine against an empty, hollow backdrop. We won't state the obvious about Jenner in hindsight. *The Apple* may indeed be rank, with sets and costumes pulled together on the spot, but its brisk 90-minute runtime and nonstop enthusiasm pummels the audience and doesn't leave time for analysis.

Third, and most importantly—*The Apple* has a very big heart. Love it because it's stupid, love it because *you're* stupid, there is no denying that the film is heartfelt and sincere. This is anchored in the lead performances of Stewart—a gorgeous actress setting off on a successful, if too brief career, and Sheybal in perhaps the most charming depiction of Satan in Cinema. Sheybal broadly winks at the camera at the climax of "Life is Noting But Show Business" number before being carried away by circus performers. One would like to believe that this bit was unscripted and snuck in by the actor himself, who appears to be saying, "This is all but delightful play, to brighten an otherwise forgetful day." The actor gives the film his all, hoping against hope that the audience will snatch something enjoyable from its shabby wares.

Part Biblical allegory, with the aforementioned Ackland as God, *The Apple* also offers a unique take on Christian dispensation. When God arrives to lead the true believers off to the commune, everyone, including the former bad guys, all have the opportunity to peel off the "Mark of the Beast" – in the form of a triangular piece of Mylar paper glued to the face to join the great conga line in the sky. This probably wouldn't sit well with some fundamentalists who see the Mark as a one-way ticket to the eternal weenie roast, but this didn't appear to deter the Jewish Menachen Golan—who likewise threw in an "insensitive" portrayal of a Jewish landlord as played by Miriam Margoyles later on into the film's mix.

Filmed in West Germany as part and parcel of the worldwide rush to capitalize on the success of *Grease* (1977), *The Apple*—as wonderfully inept as it would be appreciated later on, landed on a movie-going public with a thunderous thud. Critically reviled and ignored upon release, even the ebullient Catherine Mary Stewart—who provides a commentary as well as an extensive on-camera interview as the chief extras for this release, can't get away from the fact that the film was a "bomb." An early notch in the belt for director-producer powerhouse Golan, *The Apple* stood out as an anomaly for the Israeli mogul, best known for his action films with Chuck Norris and Charles Bronson. It was only after it was screened on cable TV that this gloriously demented feature began to attain its cult. There *must* have been a positive response to the film along the way as when *The Apple* was first released on DVD in the early 00's, this reviewer was amazed to see a cardboard fixture solely dedicated to the disc at his local chain supermarket. Marketers apparently knew that shoppers would need some nutty goodness to go along with their pork chops and carrots.

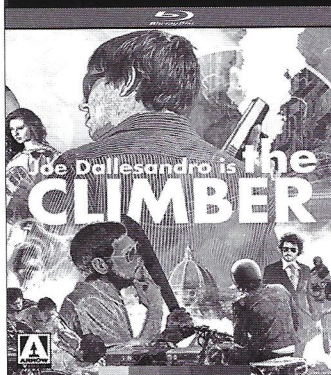
As mentioned previously, the commentary and interview with Stewart goes over the making of the film and how she was drafted by director Golan as a wet-behind-the-ears dance student as the lead of a major motion picture. She waxes poetically about her costars and has nothing but positive things to say, as it gave her the opportunity to learn from top-level professionals. Stewart has plenty of amazing tidbits to share about this film as well as her other features, and one wishes she was more active today.

In conclusion—as the backup singers declare in the previously mentioned Hellzapoppin'-styled dance number—take a bite!

Greg Goodsell

THE CLIMBER

Directed by Pasquale Squitieri
(1975) Arrow Video Blu-ray/DVD combo



Joe Dallesandro was the break-out star of the Warhol Factory films, appearing in *Four Stars*, *Flesh*, *Lonesome Cowboys*, *Trash*, *Heat*, and *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein* and *Andy Warhol's Dracula*. After completing the two horror films with Paul Morrissey, Dallesandro opted to stay in Europe. *The Climber* was one of his first starring films in Italy, and has been hard to come by on video.

In *The Climber*, Dallesandro is Aldo, a low-level operative in a smuggling operation who decides to line his own pockets by overcharging the customers of his slimy gangster boss, Don Enrico (Raymond Pellegrin). When his skimming is discovered, he's beaten and left on the side of the road where he's picked up by foxy driver Luciana (Stefania Casini).

She takes him to Rome, where he convinces his cousin Carlo (Ferdinando Murolo) to help him establish his own operation. After being hired to snatch a shipment of contraband for a local fence/pimp, Aldo discovers that he's actually stolen a briefcase full of drugs that belongs to Don Enrico. Carlo is tossed out a window for his trouble, but Aldo convinces the Don to let him murder the double-crossing fence himself in exchange for returning the drugs.

After killing the fence/pimp, Aldo takes his IOUs and gathers a gang of strongmen and motorcyclists to shake down his former clients and finally build his own criminal empire. He takes over Don Enrico's network of restaurants and clubs by force, before finally toppling the Don himself.

The Climber is a pretty typical Italian crime film, and doesn't skimp on the funky guitar music and slow-motion bullet hits as it details the rise and fall of Dallesandro's ambitious gangster. Casini, who dated Dallesandro during this period, also appeared in Dario Argento's *Suspiria* and Andy Warhol's *Bad* (both 1977).

While the plot is pretty pedestrian, director Pasquale Squitieri keeps things moving along with lots of fish fights and scenes of Dallesandro's gang tossing people through windows and running amok in nightclubs on their dirt bikes. Dallesandro (one of the most photogenic actors of the era) also looks incredibly cool wearing a wide array of Continental fashions.

Arrow's new Blu-ray is a 4K restoration from the original camera negative. A lot of the exterior scenes are murky, but that appears to be the way Squitieri filmed them. Otherwise, the image is sharp and the colors look good. You can watch the film in Italian or English, although the dialogue differs somewhat between the two versions.

The only extra is a nearly 30-minute interview with Dallesandro. He discusses the Paul Morrissey films, his decision to work in Europe, and the drinking problem he developed afterward.

Brian Albright