

Jeff Kirkendall's Thoughts For The Month Column

Thoughts, Opinions, Reviews, Commentary & More!

Hello and Welcome! My name is Jeff Kirkendall and I'm an independent filmmaker and actor from the Upstate New York area. This is the section of the Very Scary Productions website where I write about topics related to independent filmmaking, digital video production, acting, movies in general, horror movies in particular, my own indie movies, as well as anything and everything related or in between.

I decided to create this commentary page because I find that I often come across things that either interest me, excite me, intrigue me, or maybe just bug me. Any topic related to movies and cinema is fair game, from the most mainstream to the most controversial. For example I'll often read about movie projects that I have a strong interest in or opinion on, for one reason or another. This page gives me a forum to discuss these things. It's all about discussion and furthering understanding of our pop culture. Anyone who has feedback concerning what I have to say here, feel free to contact me (see the contact link at <http://www.veryscaryproductions.com/>).

I'd also like to point out that the following is just my opinion, and everyone is free to agree or disagree with what I have to say. Enjoy, and to all the Indies out there: Keep on Filming!

SUBJECT: A look at the evolution of Underground Digital Cinema - A discussion of some of my experiences, insights and perspectives - Part 4 - February 2008
(Note: See the October 2007 TFTM for Part 1 of this continuing column series, the November 2007 TFTM for Part 2, and the December 2007 TFTM for Part 3).

In part 3 of my continuing column on underground digital cinema I talked about the category of exploitation film known as the adult drama or, sometimes known, as the erotic thriller. As mentioned, this category of B-movie cinema generally focuses on overly dramatic and sensationalistic plotlines held together by nude scenes and/or simulated sex scenes. Some examples discussed were the enduring '*Emmanuelle*' film series, and popular 1990's erotic thriller franchises like *Night Eyes* and *Body Chemistry*, featuring actresses such as Shannon Tweed and Tanya Roberts, among others. As a reminder, the discussion of these types of movies is meant to provide a point of reference, because they are predecessors to movies being produced by underground digital cinema production companies of today specializing in B-movie and exploitation cinema, which I plan to discuss in more detail in later additions to this continuing column series. And fear not, I also plan to swing the discussion squarely back into the horror film output of these companies, because, after all, it's horror films which are my main area of interest and expertise nowadays. But for now back to more discussion of B-movies past...

One characteristic most adult dramas have in common is they are usually played straight, with a soap-opera feel often punctuating the stories. In contrast, the raunchy B-movie comedy is played for laughs using many of the same types of exploitative elements (such as nudity, drinking, partying, and all kinds of crazy behavior). Today the raunchy comedy is as popular as ever, with movies such as the teen franchise *American Pie* films doing big business at multiplexes and on DVD alike. Flashing back to the glorious 1980's again it's easy to identify many predecessors to movies like *American Pie*, such as the infamous *Porky's* film series (*Porky's*, *Porky's II: The Next Day* and *Porky's Revenge*) just to name one prominent example. * Of course these films, like the first three *American Pie* movies, are what might be

called higher-end B-movies, with bigger budgets, theatrical releases, and often (in the case of the **American Pie** films at least) bigger name teen actors. Going down the prestige and budgetary scale we move back into the realm of direct to video, "after dark" comedy films which to this day continue to populate pay cable channels as well as DVD.

Back in the day, just like with the adult dramas, raunchy comedies were advertised relentlessly with promos on pay cable channels. I remember them being particularly prominent on Cinemax, a pay cable channel we subscribed to, which of course during my teen years was one of the best unspoken things about that channel. Today many of these movies look quaint and tame in comparison to some of the more cutting-edge exploitation cinema being produced both on film and through the use of digital video. Indeed nowadays the World Wide Web is also no doubt filled with more extreme material. What follows is a discussion of some memorable, perhaps even nostalgic, low-budget and B-movie comedy titles from yesteryear which were strictly the realm of pay cable and home video (VHS) during the 1980's.

Even before the aforementioned **Porky's** in 1982, the raunchy teen comedy was a popular 1980's B-movie staple. The 1979 film **H.O.T.S.** is a perfect example of the genre for the times. (It's the type of voyeuristic thrill movie I remember - from back in my teen years - fighting to stay awake to see on a Friday night because it always seemed to be on at between 1:00 and 3:00 AM in the morning!) It was a campy, college-themed film that kind of fell into **Revenge of the Nerds** and **Animal House** territory. I say this because, like those higher-profile movies, the plot centers on one college group with power, prestige and/or authority on their side pitted against another without it. Here the **H.O.T.S.** sorority, made up of a group of liberated, fun-loving college girls, is being heavily scrutinized on campus by another much more (supposedly) conservative, prominent sorority as well as by the college administration. The **H.O.T.S.** sorority creed is a humorously long, cheerleading-style anthem about winning every guy on campus away from the rival Pi sorority; basically the **H.O.T.S.** girls just want to have fun and party with all the guys on campus, and the Pi's are doing everything they can to get the **H.O.T.S.** thrown out of school. Obviously all this is not too serious business, and the premise of the movie is basically a threadbare plotline used as an excuse for lots of nudity, bare breasts, and various states of coed undress. Most of the movie consists of wild college hijinks, pranks, parties and antics such as a wet t-shirt contest. **H.O.T.S.** also features bumbling burglars easily thwarted by the women, a robot maid, antics involving a seal as a college mascot, and an appearance by Partridge Family alumnus Danny Bondaduce to boot. And the film's heavily-promoted climax is a game of strip football between the two feuding sororities, with the whole team having to remove a piece of clothing each time the opposing team scores a touch down! All this adds up to a light, naughty comedy romp that apparently struck a chord with viewers, considering it has now been released in a sharp new widescreen version by horror film champion Anchor Bay Entertainment. Put simply, **H.O.T.S.** is a nostalgic little slice of comedic exploitation cinema from years past that has the simple aim of being a good time.

Another memorable "after dark" comedy film from back in the 1980's featuring a bevy of lovely young ladies, bare flesh and lots of crazy antics was the 1982 film **The Beach Girls**. Like **H.O.T.S.**, this movie was the type of flick worth staying up late for if one happened to be a male adolescent during that time period. **The Beach Girls** was also in the raunchy/goofy B-movie comedy genre, and the story here featured the common theme of wild, crazy girls and their more uptight, moral teen counterparts. ** Here two post-adolescent party girls named Ginger and Ducky (Val Kline & Playboy Playmate Jeana Tomasina) don their string bikinis and head to a beach resort owned by the rich uncle (Adam Roarke) of their virginal, straight-laced friend Sarah (Debra Blee) for a summer of fun. They also aim to help their reserved friend put an end to her shyness along the way. When neighbors complain about the noise Uncle Carl comes

over to put a stop to the proceedings, but quickly reconsiders after being charmed by his niece's two flirtatious friends. On top of all this, Ginger and Ducky find a cargo of marijuana which was accidentally dumped into the water by a clumsy ship's captain and the party really amps up into high gear. Will the fun-filled, free party atmosphere at the beach house be enough to bring Sarah out of her shell (and bikini top) and help her impress a guy she likes? Will Uncle Carl wind up falling for one of Sarah's beautiful friends? Will the clunky subplot about the missing cargo be resolved? Like with **H.O.T.S.**, it's really not overly important, because this party movie is mostly about sexy women stripping down every chance they get and the comedic situations that go along with all the nudity. Once again, a bit of naughty nostalgia from years past that aims for nothing but a good time. *** It's also worth noting that this movie is now available on a "Grindhouse" double-bill DVD along with another 80's exploitation film called **Coach** (about a female basketball coach taking over a struggling high school basketball team).

Finally we move back in time a bit more to discuss the 1974 comedy **Confessions of a Window Cleaner**. **** This British import was the first in a series of films concerning a young lad named Timothy Lea (Robin Askwith) who goes to work as... you guessed it... a window cleaner in his brother-in-law Sidney Noggett's (Anthony Booth) business. He soon finds himself the object of desire of several oversexed female clients and the crazy, slapstick comedy antics begin. These shenanigans basically boil down to one outrageous situation after another involving various beautiful women in various states of undress chasing the irresistible young man around while he "works", and Benny-Hill-style simulated sex scenes. Throughout all the mischief Timothy struggles to concentrate on his work, appease his increasingly befuddled brother, and stay committed to his girlfriend Liz. As with the previous two films discussed, none of this is meant to be serious business, but rather lighthearted fun. I remember the movie and its sequels being "after dark" Cinemax staples during the 1980's. It's reported that this film was a huge Box Office success in Britain upon its release, and was the type of movie youngsters in that country wanted to sneak in to see. No doubt the four "Confessions" films represent a specific comedic style defining a specific bygone time period.

Stay tuned for part 5 of this continuing column series...

* It's worth noting that after the first three **American Pie** films - **American Pie** (1999), **American Pie 2** (2001), and **American Wedding** (2003), the producers decided to continue the franchise by going the direct-to-DVD route. 2005 brought **American Pie Presents Band Camp**, followed by **American Pie Presents: The Naked Mile** in 2006 and **American Pie Presents: Beta House** in 2007. These latter three movies continue on with the same themes while sporting less recognizable teen casts (presumably produced on lower budgets).

** Actress Debra Blee would go on to appear in the 1986 film **Hamburger... The Motion Picture**, a movie representing the short-lived 80's B-movie trend of "food-in-the-title" films. This film was about a young slacker who attends a Burger University to get an education, while the equally outrageously-titled **Hot Dog... The Movie** (from 1984) was about comic hijinks on a ski slope and starred David Naughton and aforementioned Playboy Playmate Shannon Tweed. Additionally, Blee's co-star Jeana Tomasina appeared in the 1984 B-movie college comedy **Up the Creek**, a film about a group of college slackers bribed into representing their school in an intercollegiate raft race. And also in the 1980's she appeared as one of the three beautiful "fantasy girls" in the ZZ Top music videos Legs, Sharp Dressed Man, Gimme All Your Lovin', and Sleeping Bag (a video which also featured horror movie starlet Heather Langenkamp of **A Nightmare on Elm Street** fame - now how's that for a bit of Six Degrees of Separation-style trivia).

*** Grindhouses were rundown theaters that played various B-movie and low-budget exploitation movies, often on a double-bill. They were prominent until the advent of home video and pay-cable channels like Cinemax made them obsolete. The home video and pay-cable markets became primary forms of distribution for these types of films in the early 1980's as their audiences grew dramatically. As mentioned, ***The Beach Girls*** is a good example of the type of exploitation film that became increasingly popular in these new markets.

**** The other movies in the British "Confessions" series are: ***Confessions of a Pop Performer*** (1975), ***Confessions of a Driving Instructor*** (1976), and ***Confessions from a Holiday Camp*** (1977). These featured the continuing comedic sexual misadventures of Timothy Lea as he hopped, along with his brother-in-law Sidney, from one get-rich-quick scheme/occupation to the next. The four "Confessions" films are available in a boxed set from Amazon UK.