

## "SALON KITTY" (Blu-Ray Review)

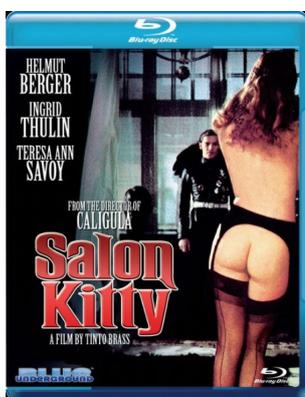
Written by Chris Alexander

Monday, 15 November 2010 14:15

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Weeding out what is and what isn't a "horror" film is tough, but by this writer's definition, horror is about exposing the dark side of the human condition, either by graphically confronting it with realism or cloaking it in fantasy. Horror is dread, confusion, the breakdown of things we trust, the bending of taboos, the invading of our social and psychological comfort zones. And although Italian maverick Tinto Brass' (CALIGULA) 1976 Nazi-sploitation film SALON KITTY may not be viewed by the world at large as a horror film, I argue that it is. Hence the review that you are currently reading...



The picture, re-arriving on the home video market November 23 from Blue Underground in a gloriously transferred, fully uncut (the U.S. version, titled MADAM KITTY, is considerably tamer) Blu-ray edition, was made in the wake of Liliani Cavani's still-controversial THE NIGHT PORTER, a benchmark in mixing perversions of the Third Reich with sadomasochistic sexuality and sick love, and Pier Paolo Passolini's utterly revolting, political, anti-fascist allegory SALO. It also followed one of the more notorious exploitation titles of the 1970's, Don Edmonds' ILSA, SHE WOLF OF THE SS. But while mining the same sensationalism of dark history with cruel, semi-explicit sex and violence, Brass' work is considerably different. A comic-book pulp fiction with a kinetic Russ Meyer-esque energy, quasi-documentary realism and an abstract Jodorowsky-esque absurdity, SALON KITTY is a genuine work of upsetting, over-the-top, surreal and wildly eccentric art. And like most films of its ilk, it is most assuredly not for all tastes.

Eurotrash legend Helmut Berger (Visconti's THE DAMNED and Harry Alan Towers' DORIAN GRAY) stars as a broadly essayed SS commander who comes up with the ingenious idea to start a high-class brothel, staffed only with the finest Reich stock, catering to the sick fantasies of superior-ranking SS officers. He then films them engaged in their antics in order to blackmail them. Things go sleazily awry very quickly, but not before a cavalcade of shocks, both pleasurable and revolting, ensue.

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By all accounts, this kinky, voyeuristic and epic drama really did unfold in some form during the last dark days of the Nazi reign in Germany. The sick pleasures of watching SALON KITTY do not lie in the facts themselves, however, but in the deliriously cinematic treatment they receive under the direction of the genuinely crazy Brass. From the opening hermaphrodite-cabaret camp to the depressing and disturbing sequence where male and female German abattoir workers chum around while dismembering real pigs (cutting their throats, opening their bloody bellies, poking out their eyeballs and sticking knives into their ears), to the bizarre scenes where Berger "auditions" his stable of potential whores (an unruly, funny, upsetting piece of art in itself that includes balletic orgies, hunchbacked dwarves mounting women, muscled gypsies and sodomy), SALON KITTY offers endless depravity and cinematic bravado. Even at 133 minutes, this is prime art-house-meets-grindhouse real estate and it never, ever bores.

The Blu-ray features a few carry-over supplements from the previous Blue Underground DVD, including an interview with Brass and production designer Ken Adam and assorted trailers. All serve to add context to a film that often feels like it was beamed in from another dimension.

Underneath all its gloriously sick and twisted, gorgeously art-directed pleasures, however, lies an undercurrent of sad truth: the truth about the psychology of the rise of the Reich and the mass hypnosis that followed. It's a peek into a world where insanity was steering the boat, where degradation and suffering and demented racism were the order of the day, all kinked up in black leather and a repellent megalomaniacal manifesto. If that's not horror, I'm unsure what is.

MOVIE: 🍷🍷🍷🍷

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