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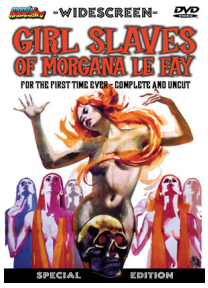
A few weeks ago, I was meandering through a vintage store when I happened upon a videocassette of the movie GIRL SLAVES OF MORGANA LE FAY. With its cover stating that the film is “a classic of erotic horror,” I couldn’t pass up this potential Eurosleaze gem.

Directed by Bruno Gatillion, GIRL SLAVES OF MORGANA LE FAY (1971) opens with two girls journeying to a weekend getaway. After a very long driving sequence (not a far cry from MANOS: THE HANDS OF FATE), they become lost. So they do the most logical thing to do when you’re lost in the French countryside: break into a barn and have hot lesbian sex. And so, within the movie’s first eight minutes, the “erotic” portion occurs, accented with sound FX of demonically loud frogs and crickets.



The next morning, the “horror” comes in the form of a dwarf in wizard robes, wearing way to much guy-liner and mascara. He leads one of the girls to a nearby castle, where she meets the Mistress Morgana and her harem of female slaves. The slaves, who are all decked out in different-colored evening robes that make them look like a satanic Polyphonic Spree, are apprehensive about the new girls’ presence, as it could cause Mistress Morgana to lose focus on them. Add to this tension the medieval dwarf guy, who likes watching the girls “be erotic” but is also in love with Morgana, and you have yourself a weird, surreal little plot.

Eventually, the new arrivals are given the option of joining Morgana’s she-harem and staying young forever, or having the Mistress drain their youth and joining a collection of old grandma crones she keeps in the basement. Hmmmmm—90 years old and trapped in a basement…or young forever and getting to wear nightgowns and have orgies all day for eternity. I’m surprised it takes the girls most of the two-hour movie to make a decision.

The French-made GIRL SLAVES OF MORGANA LE FAY could be lumped into a category of European horror from the late ’60s/early ’70s I’ve often heard called “Sappho films.” These films are usually about some cult, coven or other collection of evil women who do evil stuff but mostly have lots of sex; Jess Franco’s VAMPYROS LESBOS is perhaps one of the best examples. Many of these flicks are very cheaply done and the plots (much like porn) are just vehicles to carry the viewer from one lesbian tryst to the next. GIRL SLAVES OF MORGANA LE FAY may be part of the subgenre, but stands far above most of its counterparts. The film is really quite beautiful! The French countryside is given an almost dreamy quality, and the castle interiors are very well-lit, framed and set-dressed. Even the frequent lesbian scenes are presented in a much less exploitive manner than in most of this subgenre. Yes, the sex is still saucy and filled with the softcore-style nowhere-near-the-mark grinding one would expect, but they have a sensual quality and are carefully woven into the plot.

The film isn’t exactly full of terror, though. There are a few suspenseful moments, but mostly the horror is just situational and much more atmospheric. Still, the dwarf guy is pretty creepy… This film is also a product of the time. The European “art movement” swings this movie as the final orgy celebration, which includes a long-winded poetry recitation and even longer interpretive dance. Think THE WICKER MAN but even weirder, more drawn-out and more naked.

It’s clear GIRL SLAVES’ creators actually cared about this project, and that they took just as much time designing the visuals as they did convincing a bunch of 20-plus women to take off their clothes. I have heard this film compared to French horror pioneer Jean Rollin quite a bit in the sense that while the material may be a bit sleazy, the filmmaking is really quite brilliant; the cast also features a handful of Rollin’s regular actresses. I also must give much love to the soundtrack, which accents certain moments with an almost quirky French guitar instrumental. Seriously, it reminded me a bit of THE THIRD MAN, and that’s one of the greatest film scores ever!

Though not really scary, GIRL SLAVES OF MORGANA LE FAY has something special about it that I would recommend to horror fans, exploitation fans and those who are just into sweet, sweet lesbian witch love. To find your own copy, you don’t have to start trolling vintage video stores; the film was released on DVD in 2005 by Mondo Macabro, and my genre cohorts tell me the print and audio are terrific; the disc is available on Netflix. Enjoy!

{jcomments on}