

Scorpio Rising - movie review

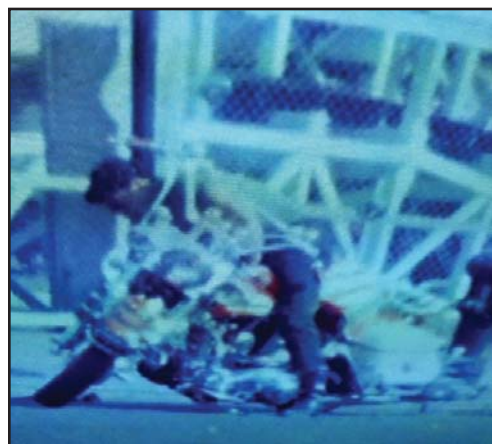
By Kenn Hartmann

Could there be a more disturbing biker flick than the 1964 release of Scorpio Rising? Come on, you say, by today's standards how could anything from the sixties be disturbing? For a film barely thirty minutes long without any dialogue, how could it be? Could it? Well, pray tell let's see. At the California premier, the Nazi party protested the film's use of their cherished Nazi flag, attracting Vice Agents to arrest the theater manager on obscenity charges. The film got confiscated, even banned, the Lutheran church sued the filmmaker for unauthorized images from their educational film Christ's Last Journey to Jerusalem, with many solid citizens upset a few biker cocks got exposed on the silver screen and to everyone's horror, in the movie the main character, Scorpio leaps onto a church altar, kicks Bibles recklessly into the dark abyss with his boots, pisses into his helmet and mouths a meth-inspired tirade, as he swings to and fro on a mighty church chandelier hoping to bring it crashing down while images of Christ with disciples and Hitler with storm troopers intermingle with the music of Little Peggy March singing "I Will Follow Him." Oh yes, and somebody actually, really physically dies on screen.

The film has no actors per se; it's a quasi-documentary about some motorcycle buffs



who gather Saturday nights beneath the Cyclone Rollercoaster at Coney Island circa early sixties - Indian Larry would have hung with them and perhaps did and definitely inherited some of their bike custom ethos. Nora Sayre (according to Wikipedia) in a 1975 New York Times movie review referred to the film's "juxtaposition of Christ and the hipsters" as being quaint in a 50's sort of way, but authentic upon closer inspection. Writer Mike Seate, in his quintessential



biker movie book "Two Wheels on Two Reels" seemed as confused as I was on first viewing. He referred to it as director Kenneth Anger's "homosexual tribute to S&M bars and a rather fetishistic view of motorcycling...one of the strangest to reach the screen." Director Martin Scorsese admits to being inspired and entranced by the film and provides some liner notes on the current DVD release. Scorsese said, "the way Kenneth Anger used music in that film, in such perfectly magical harmony, it opened my thinking about the role music could play in movies."

It's actually the music that makes this film so disturbing. It's not "biker music" like Steppenwolf or Jackyl or Tim Timebomb. Not even Kid Rock or Hank 3. It's Ricky Nelson singing "Fools Rush In" and the Angels singing "My Boyfriends Back." It's Bobby Vinton, Elvis Presley and Ray Charles. It's the Crystals "He's a Rebel." It's the Surfari's doing "Wipeout" and the Shangri-Las doing "Leader of the Pack." And as I said, there's no dialogue; it's like an old-time silent movie with 50's pop rock soundtrack. But up on the screen, Holy Shit, just what's going on? Luckily, the director, Kenneth Anger, one of the first openly gay filmmakers in Hollywood,

does a voice-over on the DVD and it's brilliant. All the controversial Nazi images are explained, the disturbing Christ serendipity is quite humorous, the fetishistic S&M scene is as the director says, "actually not as queer as it looks." The actual death that occurs on camera is explained away, it just happened that way, "it wasn't like I tripped him."

I know a lot of readers will undoubtedly say that Easy Rider introduced rock and roll sound track to movies. Not so, it was Scorpio Rising. Many readers will ask what about the Heavenly Blues (played by Peter Fonda) rap in The Wild Angels where Blues laments "To be free, to ride our machines without being hassled by the man. And, to get loaded." That pales in comparison to Scorpio, whose real name may or may not have been Bruce Byron, (his hero was James Byron Dean) who snorts from a vile of meth-amphetamine which was purloined from a factory in New Jersey, tucks a pistol into his jacket, tears up one of a hundred traffic tickets he finds on his motorcycle, heads over to the biker party and ends up swinging from the church chandeliers. This isn't scripted. Mike Seate in his book got it wrong when he said straight bikers wandering in expecting to see a righteous biker flick about "screwing on the throttle and hanging with the bros" would have been confused. This is exactly what this flick is about. Plus, about the only biker flick that predates (by about ten years) Scorpio Rising is The Wild One, and that movie happened to be playing on TV in the background while Scorpio reads the funny papers in his bedroom and snorts meth. This was the same year Elvis played a biker troubadour in Roustabout on a Honda 350 Superhawk. The machines in Scorpio Rising are way f'n cooler to this very day.

Most of these bikers worked at the Fulton Fish Market by day and put all their time and money into their bikes at night, bikes the director calls "Frankenstein Monster American mechanical folk-art." You know that Indian Larry hung out at Coney Island. It's the lineage. This is a must-see but not for the feint of heart.

Kenn Hartmann

www.chicagobikerbars.com

bikerbars@yahoo.com

RAIN OR SHINE • FAMILY EVENT • FREE ADMISSION

NON-PROFIT 501C3

Graybeard Productions Inc.

PRESENTS

THUNDER IN THE PARK



★ 8TH ANNUAL FOX VALLEY MOTORCYCLE SHOW & SWAPMEET
★ GRAYBEARD FREEDOM FIGHTERS CELEBRITY POKER RUN
★ CENTRAL WISCONSIN AUTO COLLECTORS CAR SHOW

Celebrities • Food • Beer • Soda • Bands • Vendors • Raffles
Saturday June 1st Noon-10pm & Sunday June 2nd 10am-6pm

FREE ADMISSION • South Park • Oshkosh, Wisconsin

Saturday

GRAYBEARDS FREEDOM FIGHTERS RIDE-100 MILE CELEBRITY POKER RUN
Registration 8am leaving at 11am from South Park (2 or 4 wheels)
\$15.00 per person \$25.00 per couple-cash prizes for best poker hands
CAR SHOW: All models & years - Sponsored by Central Wis. Auto Collectors
Registration 8am-11am \$5 Entry Fee - Awards at 3pm
Sizzlin' Sonny's Rockin' Roadshow All Day - The Del Rays 6-10pm

Sunday

8TH ANNUAL FOX VALLEY MOTORCYCLE SHOW AND SWAPMEET
All makes-models welcome 14 trophy classes \$15.00 entry fee
Registration 8am-1pm awards at 5pm
Sizzlin' Sonny's Rockin' Roadshow All Day - The Bobby Evans Band 1-6pm
Live Radio Remote with Rob & Louise from 99.5 fm & 104.9 fm The Wolf

All weekend

Comedian & MC The Mowhawk Man & his Rolling Veterans Memorial
Ride with & meet Rob & Louise of the Wolf - Tony (Pan) Sanfelipo
Founder of ABATE - Senator Dave Zien (The Million Mile Man)
Gary Wetzel, Congressional Medal of Honor Recipient
Sell your Bike in our FREE Motorcycle Corral
Tons of Vendors - 1,000's in Raffles & Prizes - 50/50

In Memory of Emily
To Benefit Children's Hospital of Wisconsin
Wisconsin's best bike show party
All registration forms available on website
Check us out at www.graybeardproductions.org & www.cw1auto.com
For more info contact Doug at (920) 426-2791

Tattoos By
Elvis & American
Vintage Tattoo

