





Anita Rosenberg

Assault Of The Killer Bimbos (1988)

Director: Anita Rosenberg

Cast: Elizabeth Kaitan,
Christina Whitaker,
Tammara Souza, Nick
Cassavetes, Griffin O'Neal



irecting **Assault Of The Killer Bimbos** is my big claim to fame in the movie business. I was thrilled to be given the chance to direct my first picture in Hollywood, and am happy it has become a cult favorite.

A year earlier I made **Modern Girls** (1987), a medium-budget film with a known cast including Daphne Zuniga, Virginia Madsen, and Cindy Gibb. I was given story and associate producer credit. My original story of girls going to nightclubs in Los Angeles looking for guys was a twist on **Spring Break** and **Hot Tub**, the popular T&A movies of the time.

Not being allowed to direct **Modern Girls** left me soured, yet I was exhilarated by the movie business. I had moved to Los Angeles from New York City with a Masters Degree from New York University Film School and was anxious to make my voice heard. The time period was 1982--pre-Madonna, pre-Cyndi Lauper, and right before Susan Seidelman's **Desperately Seeking Susan**, when female directors were still an anomaly. The world was not yet ready for "chick flicks"!

That is, until I met producer, director, and studio head Charles Band of Empire Pictures. I had been introduced to Charlie years earlier through one of his directors (he always had a stable of them), Peter Manoogian. I was surprised how the young Charlie had made so many movies. A true film buff and pioneer, he built his reputation in the low-budget genre with erotic fantasies, horror, and sci-fi. The late eighties in Hollywood was a good time for renegade filmmakers. There were many independent companies and a slew of movies were being churned out weekly. One of my favorite Empire titles is **Sorority Babes In The Slimeball Bowl-A-Rama**. I dare you not to smile when you hear that title! I remember being impressed seeing a poster of Demi Moore's screen debut in **Parasite** hanging on Charlie's wall. There was no shame in working with Empire--everyone was doing it. It was a great opportunity to make a picture.

Charlie called me into his office and gave me a title--**Assault Of The Killer Bimbos!** The story is that Charlie had already made a movie using this title. Apparently it turned out badly (later released as a slasher picture, **Hack 'Em**

High) and Charlie wanted to make a better film with this unique and marketable title. I am not sure he had used a female director up until he hired me. He had seen my thesis film from NYU, **Bachelorette Pad**, about Candy Stone, a swinging single girl with Barbie dolls that came to life. He had also seen my feature film **Modern Girls** and a short film called **Get Tux'd** starring Ice T and Arye Gross as Mr. Tuxedo out of control (**Nutty Professor**-esque). Charlie must have liked what he saw. Maybe he knew that female-oriented films were the new wave. Maybe he just had a sixth sense that I would make something special.

At first, I was insulted by the title. For years I had to fight off the stereotypical blonde bimbo role. Even Spike Lee wrote me a letter post film school telling me he no longer thought I was a blonde bimbo! Now I was being asked to direct a movie about "bimbos"! I took the weekend to think it over. I viewed a slew of girl gang movies with my friend and writing partner, Patti Astor, searching for inspiration.

When I moved to New York for film school, Patti took me under her wing. Already an established actress in the underground film scene, Patti starred in my student films. When she moved to Los Angeles, we started working on bigger projects. Together we watched every girls-in-prison, girls-on-the-run film of Roger Corman (**Candy Strip Nurses**, **Caged Heat**, **Women In Cages**, and **The Big Doll House**). We viewed all the big-breasted films of Russ Meyer (**Beyond Valley Of The Dolls**, **Vixen**, **Supervixen**, and **Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!**). Then it hit me! A story about girls on the run, framed for a murder they did not commit. Inspired by **Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!**, I would see a similar tale on the big screen years later with Callie Khouri's **Thelma And Louise**. There's nothing new under the sun!

On Monday morning, I told Charlie that if could make a girls-on-the-run movie from a female point-of-view, then I was on board! He liked the idea and thus began my assault on the low-budget film genre.

Empire Pictures was known for its down and dirty productions. Make them fast and make them cheap--no time for perfection. Charlie surrounded me with what he considered his all-star team. Producers John Schouweiler and Dave DeCoteau were part of the Charlie Band family. Director of photography Thomas Callaway was a joy to work with. Editor Barry Zetlin came on to save my butt from bad dialogue, awkward pacing, and other directing faux pas. And then there was screenwriter Ted Nicolaou, who re-wrote my earlier draft. I wasn't the happiest camper, but this was my opportunity to actually direct a film so I went along. Ted's script and dialogue were clearly his own and in the end I had to shoot the script that the studio approved. Welcome to Hollywood!

Once we got the green light, it was my turn to add my movie magic. My talent accents visuals--costumes, sets, the look of the film. My background as an artist from the San Francisco Art Institute allowed me to combine all my creative passions into the film process. And working with actors is fun for me. I was challenged to pull out campy yet believable performances. Comedy has many layers and I knew that without tongue-in-cheek, the picture would not make any sense.

Being on location in the Mojave Desert gave **Bimbos** its authenticity and uniqueness. My location manager pal George Agnew suggested the dusty dirt roads and abandoned gas stations of Palmdale and Lancaster. George was a genius. The desert was like another character giving **Bimbos** an intriguing look with very little set decorating. The fact is I disagreed with the set decorator and vetoed him every chance I got. Royce Mathew's direction was "if you add holiday decorations you can create a cheap theme." Hence, he decorated the motel lobby, restaurant, and bar with silly party store items. What I did to counterbalance this was to pick locations that had not changed in centuries and did not need any decorations--like the diner, the no-tell motel, and the gas station.

Casting was a blast! Our very smart public relations firm headed by Dale Olson created a buzz before we ever got started. We threw a giant casting call in search of "bimbos"! Hundreds of girls lined up around the block at the famous Roosevelt Hotel in the heart of Hollywood. E News Channel filmed the event. The local TV news channels ran the story. We were the talk of the town. Everyone was there from an aging Hollywood dancer in a wheelchair to the roller skating daughter of Charles Schulz (the Charlie Brown cartoonist). We did not end up hiring anyone from the audition, but it was a great publicity stunt.

My goal was to cast better than average actresses to play the parts of LuLu, Peaches, and Darlene. It is one thing to be stupid and another to play stupid. The casting agent found Tammara Souza to play Darlene, the waitress. I scoured the Hollywood theatre scene and found Christina Whitaker to play Peaches, the go-go dancer. Then we got lucky casting Liz Kaitan as LuLu, the waitress turned go-go dancer. Liz was a veteran on the low-budget scene. Cute, perky, and talented with a great body. She was perfect. Liz had the tough role of baring her breasts for the R rating. Too embarrassed, I did not even ask to see her body before hiring her. But I lucked out--she has great breasts!

With the girls on board, I assembled a wacky cast of characters from friends and acquaintances. I pulled in many favors. We got the quintessential nerd Eddie Deezen from **Grease** and **Grease 2** to play Dopey Deputy. My friend Paul Ben-Victor, who stars on HBO's **The Wire**, played the hubba-hubba drunk bar dude. Clayton Landey is a TV and theatre veteran who did double duty playing the motel owner and Juan The Latin Lover. John Dixon from **Friday The 13th Part V: A New Beginning** played a diner customer. And gorgeous Jeffrey Orman played a hunky deputy.

When it came time to cast the small parts of the three surfer dudes with no dialogue, I went after the cream of the crop. Actor friend Jamie Bozian brought in two of his pals from the Johnny Depp **21 Jump Street** scene. Griffin O'Neal and Nick Cassavetes had me star struck. They were adorable, charming, and doing me a big favor. They sure didn't need **Bimbos** on their resumes. Griffin is the son of Ryan and brother to Tatum who made his film debut starring in **The Escape Artist**. Nick Cassavetes comes from an equally impressive dynasty. Father John is the legendary filmmaker and Gena Rowlands is his movie star mother. Nick has starred in countless films and recently directed **She's So Lovely** and **The Notebook**. With these three "fun boys" in tow, the surfer trio of Billy, Troy, and

Wayne-O was cast.

The Surfer Dudes made a huge splash driving around the desert in their wildly-painted surfer mobile. On every take, pot smoke and hysterical laughter poured out from the windows. Their scenes were improvised with me lying on the floor out of sight prompting them on. I could have made an entire movie from their characters alone. Tall lanky Nick even showed up on the first day of shooting with his black hair bleached blond. He had done it himself to get into the role and every day it started turning orange. Working with Jamie, Griffin, and Nick was one of the more enjoyable aspects of shooting.

Another plus was having my sister Susan Rosenberg (now Wechsler) as my costume designer. Fresh from graduate school at NYU where she was designing costumes for Broadway plays, Susan did an amazing job. Because our tastes are so similar and because we think alike, it was easy to work with her and trust all her decisions. She made the girls look sexy, but not slutty.

My other partner in crime, Patti Astor, played Poodles The Moll. Patti co-wrote the original draft of **Bimbos** where we created an over-the-top flamboyant character for her as the gangster's girlfriend. Patti was such fun to have on the set. She kept everyone's spirits high because she knows first hand how great it is to actually be working on a movie. Patti always energizes me with great ideas.

The premiere of **Assault Of The Killer Bimbos** was a highlight. Held in style at the Pickwick Drive-In, it was the talk of the town. A high profile event, the premiere featured every kitschy film star in town from Angelyne to Connie Stevens to Jack Carter and The Barbarian Brothers as guest judges for the "bimbo" contest. The winner received a walk-on role in the sequel **Bimbo Barbeque** (a film that was never made). The bimbo theme permeated every aspect of the event, from the bimbo hot dogs to the bimbo fries and bimbo cola. It was bimbo mania!

Camera crews from the E Channel swarmed us. The nightly news channels interviewed us. It was my fifteen minutes of fame. **Assault Of The Killer Bimbos** was a kitschy low budget cult film. My most memorable review was from **Premiere** magazine's April 1989 issue rating The Best Of The Best: "Best Achievement in the Depiction of Women: Anita Rosenberg, director, **Assault Of The Killer Bimbos**." Now that's a review I can live with!