MOVIE5 MAGAZI

KEN RUSSELL'S IMAGES OF HORROR AND LUST

ASSAULT KILLER BIMBOS

MOVIES + THE FILMS OF RENÉ LALOUX + PORN PARODIES PLUS VAL LEWTON'S APACHE DRUMS, GHETTO BLASTER, AND MUCH MORE





Before its release, the schlock flick underwent a name change, which, at the time, seemed to be a minor creative decision. It wouldn't be.

"I changed the title to Assault of the Killer Bimbos," Bechard claims.

In the 1980s, Empire Pictures pumped out exploitation fare such as *Ghoulies* and *Re-Animator* with conveyor belt-like consistency in its factory of possessed sorority girls bowling strikes with decapitated geek heads.

Band has a different recollection of the title's origin.

"I'm not 100% it was my creation, I kind of think it was, most of them are, but I'm pretty sure it was something I came up with," Band says.

Bechard filmed the newly named Assault of the Killer Bimbos for seven weeks in the fall of 1987. The typical no-budget headaches of devouring Burger King catering and sweltering in buildings devoid of air conditioning only hinted at the turmoil that a phone call would bring.

"We filmed the entire film and then I get a call from Charlie Band at Empire, who I detest, who I think is just a complete fucking scumbag," Bechard says, "and he basically tells me, he just read the script after we finish making the movie. Good way to run a company. And that the movie is too dark for his liking."

Bechard alleges that Band insisted on major changes to the film, including taking the name, Assault of the Killer Bimbos, for his own use.

"[Charles Band says] he's going to take my title away and give it to another film and rename my film. At first it was supposed to be called Hack 'em High, and I remember saying to him, 'There's no high school. There's no hacking," describes Bechard. "It didn't seem to make much difference. Basically they only kept like 45 minutes of my movie and wrote this entire, horrible beginning of the movie, where the girls get raped and stuff in school, all that stupid, horrible crap was written by people at Empire."

Band explains his side of the story.

"I don't remember all the details, but we were involved with a filmmaker or a production company that may have made a few films for us on the East Coast. We weren't really happy with the results," Band remembers. "Before we sort of knew that, we assigned the project, Assault of the Killer Bimbos, to [Bechard's] team and here we had made some pre-sales and everyone was really excited by what they saw as kind of a unique film and then when the film came in in rough cut for us to look at, it was like, oh, my God, this is definitely not what we could live with because we had a certain vision and we sold it in a certain way."

The film, currently sold on DVD through Full Moon Features as *Cemetery High*, doesn't elicit a positive response from Bechard, whose 2011 film about The Replacements, *Color Me Obsessed*, was named one of the seven best documentaries of the year by *Rolling Stone* magazine.

"I don't even list the film on my resume. The two movies [Cemetery High and Galactic Gigolo] that I made for Empire, I don't even consider mine," explains Bechard. "I look at it as my lost years. I must have been on heavy drugs or something, like I was out in the desert. You know how Jesus had his lost years? My lost years. Not to compare myself (laughs)."

Bechard, who also alleges that Band never provided a statement from *Psychos in Love* to hide the film's royalties from him, grew wary of the industry, especially after losing control of the *Assault of the Killer Bimbos* title.

"That's sort of what made me stop making movies for 11 years," Becahrd says, "because I just couldn't deal with assholes like Band anymore."

do. Direct us.' So I felt like I was directing and working with the girls off-camera."

At that time, Rosenberg was also attempting to sell Get Tux'd, her remake of The Nutty Professor starring Ice-T, using a 14-minute faux-trailer. Get Tux'd also co-starred and was co-written by Patti Astor, the aforementioned member of the Women's Organized Liberation Front, FUN Gallery owner, and the star of cutting-edge films like Unmade Beds, Underground U.S.A., and Wild Style.

"I've known Patti since I was in high school. Her sister was my best friend growing up," Rosenberg remembers. "Patti was a big underground film star in New York City. And when we did our talent shows for high school, Patti would come home and choreograph them."



Patti Astor and Anita Rosenberg

As Cemetery High quickly drifted into the endless bin of cheap-thrill flicks, NYU film graduate Anita Rosenberg embarked on her goal to direct a Hollywood film before the age of 30. A year before Bechard filmed Cemetery High, the 28-year-old Rosenberg had captured enough attention from her short films like Bachelorette Pad to earn a stint writing and producing the loosely autobiographical tale of Los Angeles nightlife, Modern Girls, for Tom Coleman at Atlantic Releasing. Coleman brought in The Making of Thriller director, Jerry Kramer, to helm the movie. He later confided in Rosenberg that it might have been a mistake.

"Modern Girls was a movie that I had wanted to direct and Atlantic Releasing did not want me to direct it," Rosenberg says. "[Coleman] took my story and he brought in a director. And that was a very frustrating film for me because it was a male director and I was off-set and the girls were constantly saying, 'Anita, tell us what to

Rosenberg's efforts with Get Tux'd paid off when she landed a meeting with Empire Pictures, thanks to a father of a fellow student at NYU film school who worked for Charles Band. While impressed with the short film, Empire Pictures balked at the estimated million dollars it would cost to produce. However, they had another idea. They offered Rosenberg a title: Assault of the Killer Bimbos.

"I had showed [Charles Band] my short little movies and I guess he just sort of thought, 'Oh, well, we could bring in Anita as a female director. You might have an interesting new way that we could use this title in a different kind of movie," Rosenberg remembers.

Rosenberg called Astor.

"Anita said to me, 'I have a title and if we can come up with a story idea for this title,' it was Friday afternoon, 'he said if we can come up with a movie idea for this title over the weekend, we can get the job of making the movie.

They need the movie in three months," Astor recalls. "I said, 'No problem. I have it already."

While working at the Dino De Laurentiis building as a floater, the starlet received an issue of Film Comment focusing on girl-gang movies. With Empire needing to find a new use for the title, Astor thought back to the article. Rosenberg, however, still felt uneasy.

"At first I heard the title and I was a little insulted, because, you know, I was sort of taking it literally," Rosenberg says. "And then I thought, 'Wow, I was really into the Russ Meyer movies.' I had seen Faster Pussycat! Kill! Kill! and all the old Russ Meyer films and I had seen the Roger Corman girls-in-prison movies and I found them very kitschy and very sort of tongue-in-cheek. And I thought, 'Wow, if I could make my sort of comedic, tongue-incheek version using this title, it could be terrific. It could even be brilliant."

"We rented every single girl-gang movie that was in the magazine article, like, of course, Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill! but all these other ones too. We just researched everything. We spent two days just watching these girl-gang movies," Astor says.

After successfully pitching the film for the first round of evaluations—and celebrating in the parking lot of a Del Taco with fast-food Mexican cuisine and a bottle of champagne—Rosenberg and Astor were asked by Empire to write an entire screenplay in three weeks. That original draft featured the protagonists dying and an emphasis on feminist sensibilities, turning the 100-page screenplay into what Astor considered her "super-statement movie."

Charles Band and his filmmaker father, Albert Band, were confused.

"[Albert Band] goes, 'I don't understand this movie. I don't get it. Where are the teenage girls taking off their t-shirts?"" Astor says. "So we're like, 'Okay, fine. We can fix that!' Then they said, 'You know, what's wrong with you girls? Don't you understand how this works? You need three tit shots. Three shots of girls taking off their t-shirts to show their tits. And what is wrong with you? We don't understand all this girl gang and all this like Women's Lib, blah, blah, blah, whatever.' We're like, 'Fine. We can fix that!""

Rosenberg and Astor re-wrote the picture in three days, but Empire still decided to bring in Ted "Subspecies" Nicolaou to, as Band recalls, polish it into something that would work within the restrictions of the budget and time.

"Ted definitely had a challenge to help craft it into something we could shoot in the amount of days," Band says. "It's very, I don't want to say it's easy, but you write something and then someone who has the experience to go, 'It's great but we can't afford to do this. We can't have a fiftycar pile up. There are things we can't do here."

"I wasn't crazy about Ted's script," Rosenberg remembers. "I think Charlie had a vision of what he wanted the movie to be and I had a different vision. So we sort of merged our visions. "

"We get [the script] back from them and it was really gross," Astor says, referring mostly to the sexually charged dialogue of the three leads.

Although Rosenberg and Astor don't recall specifics of Nicolaou's revisions, Rosenberg says that he brought a male-oriented vibe to the script, which pleased Band enough for it to be given the green light. Although still unsatisfied with the screenplay, Rosenberg and Astor continued. The schedule just didn't allow another rewrite.

"Charlie makes his movies really fast and furious. You're writing the script and we have a shoot date. I think the script had just gotten done then we were casting then we got the locations," Rosenberg says.

The casting procedure proved to be just as atypical as the entire movie was turning out to be.

"It was kind of like I had done my research and I knew who some of the character players in town were and I just contacted them and said, 'Do you want to come be in the movie?" Rosenberg says.

A friend of Rosenberg's from their hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio, James Bozian, who plays the surfer bum, "Billy," helped in the nontraditional approach to casting.

"At the audition, I remember Anita asking me if I had any ideas regarding actors for the other

surfer dudes. [Griffin O'Neal and Nick Cassavetes] and I were great friends, having done The Wraith a year or so earlier, so I suggested them," Bozian says. "Now that I think about it, I believe I came back in with them when they had the meeting and those bastards didn't even have to read. I don't think. It was just a meeting with a bunch of joking around and shit-talking."

Mike Muscat, who portrays the hit man "Big Vinny," got the job after impressing Rosenberg with his small part in Modern Girls.

"I didn't even audition for it. It was like, 'Do you want to do this?" Muscat, who would go on to have parts in films like Terminator 2: Judgment Day, recalls.

The blonde, bubbly Elizabeth Kaitan captured fans' hearts as good-hearted "Lulu," but she almost didn't make the cut. Auditioning for

the role just a week before shooting started at the urging of Cassavetes, Kaitan had a more traditional casting process. However, her uncertainty with the title almost prevented her from ever setting a high-heel on set.

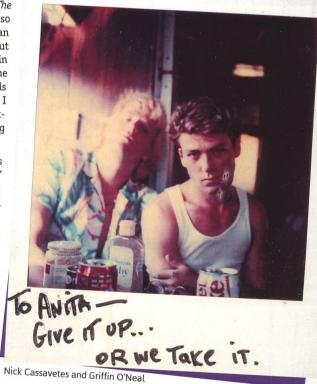
"Honestly when I heard the title, I thought, 'Oh God. It sounds terrible. Assault of the Killer Bimbos? Oh my God.' I didn't really work on the sides," Kaitan says. "I didn't even look at the sides really until I got to the audition. And once I read the side, I thought, 'Oh, my God, this is so cute, so funny, and so well-written. Then I immediately regretted not working on them at all."

Due to her lack of preparation, Kaitan tanked the original audition for Rosenberg. Kaitan was told she would be notified that night if she got the role. While her phone stayed silent that evening, an afternoon call the next day would deliver her the good news.

"What had happened was Anita had picked somebody else, because my audition was pretty bad," Kaitan says, "And they took that girl in to read for Charlie Band, and her audition in front of Charlie was bad so Charlie had asked Anita if there was anybody who had energy. She said, 'Well, Elizabeth Kaitan came in' and he said, 'Oh, we already worked with her so just hire her.' And that's how I got the part."

Kaitan believes that the early reluctance for her to be cast motivated her performance. She didn't want to disappoint Cassavetes - or the director who had other choices in mind.

"What really inspired me was that I didn't want to let Anita down. I knew I wasn't her choice," Kaitan says. "And after about our third day, I got a note under my hotel room door and it was from



Anita. I still have this letter. She wrote me this letter saying how happy she was that she had hired me. And that she was just really grateful that it didn't work out with the other girl."

Another major casting switch involved Astor's original plan to portray "Peaches" and not the mob girlfriend, "Poodles" as ended up occurring. Astor believes that it was because Empire wanted a more "stripclub chick," which the new "Peaches," Midnight Cabaret-star Christina Whitaker, had experience in. It would not be the last time that Astor and Empire would disagree.

And it obviously wasn't the first time.

"I can't tell you how bummed we were when they said, 'We don't like this screen-play and now you have this piece of shit to shoot,'" Astor says. "Then we were like, 'Okay.' But then what happened was they just go, 'Well, here's three weeks. Here's your motel in Palmdale, here's your film crew, go do it and we'll see you in three weeks.' We were like, 'Okaaaaaaaay."

Astor found a brilliant way to make Nicolaou's script work.

"We just re-wrote everything," Astor says.

The plot of *Bimbos* deals with two go-go dancers, Peaches (Christina Whitaker) and Lulu (Elizabeth Kaitan), who are framed for killing their boss, "Shifty" Joe (David Marsh). After picking up an unhappy waitress at a local diner (Tammara Souza), the three girls drive to Mexico where they meet three surfers (Griffin O'Neal, Nick Cassavetes, and James Bozian) and confront the real murderer, "Big" Vinnie (Mike Muscat) and his girlfriend, Poodles (Patti Astor).

Although the exact budget remains a mystery, Astor believes they were armed with \$120,000—and Empire's all-male crew that were skeptical of the female outsiders.

"We meet these guys and they're like, 'Oh, you girls are gonna pull this off?" Astor recalls.

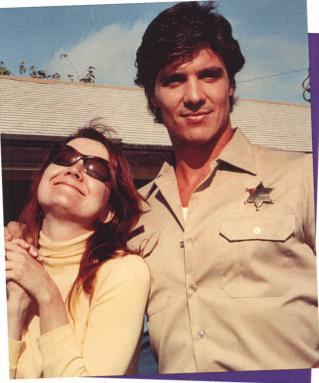
The first-day shoot took place at the gas station, which required 37 setups and which Rosenberg and Astor completed without hassle. "After that, we didn't hear anything from the crew how we were girls and we didn't know what we were doing," Astor says.

The shoot also started on a poor note for two of the actresses. Kaitan and Souza sought alternative lodging arrangements when the hotel that the cast and crew were staying at became completely booked. It wasn't ideal.

"We get [to the alternative hotel] and there were all these gangbangers outside literally like listening to rap music outside our door. There was a train track right behind the hotel, right behind where our room was, and once [the people outside] had gotten into our room and freshly peed on the radiator. It was awful," Kaitan says. "So that's how our shoot began (laughs)."

While Kaitan and Souza would be moved to better accommodations, some issues, particularly those with the script, remained.

"[Rosenberg] said, 'I want you to come down and meet my friend, my co-writer, Patti, who's



Patti Astor and Jeffrey Orman

also going to be playing your girlfriend in the thing," Muscat says. "I went down there to meet Patti and Anita just kind of excused herself. She just said, 'Look, we only have a rough idea of some of these scenes.' It wasn't like a really line-by-line type of script... [s]o Anita just said, 'Okay, I'm going to leave you guys and you finish writing what you want to say."

While co-lead actress Kaitan remembers having a more developed script, Cassavetes, Bozian and O'Neal were also left with little to nothing to say.

"Talk about a Ted Nicolaou script, [the surfers] didn't have any lines of dialogue," Rosenberg says. "So you get these three actors who are better quality than anyone else really we have on the shoot and then of course, Nick goes off to direct big movies and Griffin goes on to do things that he does, and they don't have any dialogue!"

This made the scenes of the highly intoxicated surfers driving to Mexico rather memorable.

"I was in the front seat on the floor," Rosenberg says. "And they were smoking pot and the car was full of pot. I was getting a contact high and they didn't have any scripted dialogue lines so they're all chatting and I'm telling them what to say."

Bozian's memory differs just a bit from Rosenberg's. Although he admits to drug use during production, he doesn't remember it ever occurring on the set and insists that Cassavetes never took part in it.

"I do remember that Anita had to chime in from under the seat with lines we were missing, plot stuff or shit we're forgetting," Bozian says. "We were all laughing our asses off the whole time. And that epic bong did not have weed in it—to the best of my recollection." One aspect of the script that couldn't be compromised was the required nudity. Rosenberg's solution? Make it quick.

"I think for me some of the difficult [scenes] were when I had to do some topless things. They were kind of embarrassing. It was gratuitous," Rosenberg says. "I remember a scene in the nightclub where she's dressing and then she takes her top off. I decided that she would pull down the suitcase cover so you see her boobs for a couple seconds and then she would lift the lid of the suitcase to cover them (laughs)."

In the film, the three women hide out at a no-tell motel. The same eventually went for almost all the cast and crew, who, in reality, also hunkered down at the same location. Muscat remembers how they "kind of moved in and took over the hotel and had a good time" while Kaitan, who

placed David Bowie posters all over her room, equated it to a sorority and a frat house.

Then there's Astor's way of describing it.

"It's exactly what you see. It was that cheesy and horrible. It was awesome."

Although the majority of the cast enjoyed living the movie by shacking up at the motel, one actress took offense to it. Whitaker, who hasn't been seen in the public eye since the mid '90s, acted above the production.

"She was like our big star. And so she couldn't stay at the motel in Palmdale. She had to stay in this other hotel," Astor says.

"I did think she did a really good job [in her role], but I think she was doing theater at the time and I think she had a vision of herself that maybe was unrealistic (laughs)," Rosenberg says.

Whitaker's stubbornness even cost Rosenberg, Souza, and Kaitan an opportunity to promote the film on David Letterman. "She didn't want to be on the show. She said it would be insulting. This is fucking David Letterman. We just did a movie called Assault of the Killer Bimbos!" Rosenberg exclaims.

"Every night [on the set], we would have a meeting and everyone just talked about how much they hated Christina," Astor recalls. "And John [Schouweiler, the producer who also has a small cameo as a member of the mariachi band] even said, "We saved \$300 today, maybe we can buy Christina some hips."

The campiness of the film birthed a premiere worthy of its dangling earnings and on-therun escapades. It debuted in 1988 at the Pick Wick Drive-In in the San Fernando Valley

cluttered with oddball celebrities and surreally placed meet-and-greets.

"That was right up there with one of the most unusual things I ever took part in working in film and TV (laughs)," Muscat says. "We were actually in the concession stand standing by the hot dogs signing autographs. We were all watching the movie from our cars. It was a real kick."

"That was much bigger than I ever thought, I was really shocked," Kaitan remembers. "We had it at the drive-in, the big drive-in at the time. And I couldn't believe how many people showed up and also I was shocked that that night we were reviewed by Siskel and Ebert!"

Among the celebrities brought in to add flavor to event were Connie Stevens, who helped judge a bimbo contest, and billboard goddess Angelyne driving her trademark pink Corvette. There was even a future Academy Award winner lost in the crowds of fans, greasy food, and hubcaps.

"A couple years ago I was at a bar down underneath where I live and Quentin Tarantino came to sit at the bar stool next to me and we started chatting and then I don't know how the conversation went, but I had mentioned I directed Assault of the Killer Bimbos," Rosenberg says. "He was working in a video store at the time [of the premiere]. He wasn't making movies. He was a big fan of the type of movies I was into. And he was a big fan of Bimbos. He was so excited. He said, 'I was at the premiere to that!' It was so much fun. He was a huge fan."

Astor's recollection of the event is a little more bittersweet. Her life as an underground New York star allowed her the opportunities to become friends with many avant-garde personalities and publications. When she contacted Empire with her ideas, the company allegedly didn't share the same enthusiasm. Astor believes that the initially poor box office draw could be attributed to what she thinks was the mishandling of the premiere.

"By this time, I was really pissed at everybody at Empire. And they hated me because I was the upstart that wanted to make it into an art movie and wanted to be in it and blah, blah, blah," Astor remembers. "It's a tragedy, because I contacted Empire. I said, 'These are my friends. I can get you in paper. I can get you in Details. I can get you in Interview. I can get you in all these places' and they didn't do anything with it. They never even returned my phone calls."

Astor had some measure of revenge. She reserved a '59 pink Cadillac for the premiere. When the publicist that Empire hired for the film requested that they use it at the drive-in, Astor said no.

"They were like, 'We need that Cadillac,' I said, 'I'm sorry I made the reservation. You can see it at the premiere," Astor remembers. "That was fun."

"We did release Bimbos as maybe 30, 40 prints," Band says. "It wasn't significant and played some markets. We thought we'd catch a weird little wave since it was a unique film. It didn't really do anything theatrically, but people certainly did see it on video."

Fans found Bimbos when it was later released on VHS, DVD and LaserDisc via Band's labels. Urban Classics, Cult Video, and Shadow Entertainment, as well as when clips of it showed up in the CD-Rom game and video, Bimbo Movie Bash. During its first run, the film even had merchandise tie-ins like t-shirts, bumper stickers, posters, and a soundtrack issued on Rhino Records. It eventually caught on.

"I still get letters [saying] Bimbos 2!" Band says about the announced but unproduced sequel, Bimbo Barbecue.

"We wanted to do it. It's such a perfect series concept, but [Bimbos] just didn't do well enough," Band says.

"It might have been due to finances and maybe Charlie's business changing and Full Moon changing. Or maybe he didn't make enough money off of the first one to warrant it, but I don't even think we did a script or anything like that," Rosenberg says.

Although Rosenberg attempted to return behind the camera on several occasions, nothing ever materialized in the male-heavy showbiz world. The filmmaker's frustration can be perhaps best exemplified with the abrupt end to Denise DeBlasio Suburban PI, her project for the Fox Network and its Fox Night at the Movies programming.

"It was a really great script. The concept was a secretary to a private eye in the suburbs. He's missing so she becomes a private eye to find him," Rosenberg remembers. "It took eight or nine months in development and then Fox Night at the Movies closed (laughs)."

Rosenberg currently flourishes as a feng shui consultant, while occasionally writing books like Thursdays with Mom & Michael and articles for Los Angeles Confidential.

"I would like to say that it's not like I walked away from the movie business. I just found that instead of hitting my head against the wall, I found something else that was satisfying and was working. So I kind of learned the lesson that's taken me in life is that you should go with the flow and go where your talents are," Rosenberg says.

As for Astor, who insisted that Bimbos be a SAG film to get better actors like Cassavetes, her relationship with Charles Band remained strained. While she's received her initial payment from her duties on the set, Astor alleges that she hasn't made any royalties.

"I went to SAG and I said, 'This has been showing on cable, it's been showing on HBO, it's been showing here and there, I've never seen a dime off this film," Astor alleges. "I said, 'Charles Band' and they started laughing. They were really laughing. They're like, 'Charles Band? Hahaha. Get in line."

Astor's currently preparing a showcase of her underground films called The Queen of the Downtown Screens, as well as her autobiography and a documentary about the woman who takes sole responsibility for writing the line "Oh, no, a bimbo with a gun!"

Despite all the headaches the film gave her, Astor sums up Assault of the Killer Bimbos with four words: "I love the film."

Other Bimbo alumni prospered, such as Cassavetes who went on to direct blockbusters like The Notebook and Souza who earned five Emmy Awards in her career as a television meteorologist. Kaitan landed in crowd favorites like Friday the 13th Part VII: The New Blood as well as roles in mainstream fare like Twins, but Bimbos almost wouldn't let her.

"It's really strange because when we finished, I actually missed playing Lulu. I never had that with another character ever. There was something I missed about her," Kaitan reveals.

Kaitan grew as attached to the character as she did with some of the cast, getting together with them for about a month after filming to play touch football on Sundays. While the friendships would turn life-long, Kaitan's career as an actress wouldn't. Outside of being interviewed for the 2009 documentary, His Name Was Jason: 30 Years of Friday the 13th, and a subsequent signing for the film with other cast members from the franchise, Kaitan has chosen to stay out of the limelight. Her last acting role was in 1999.

"I loved every second of [my film career]. But when I was getting married, about that time, the industry was really, really changing, too. So it was starting to get harder to make a living doing kind of fun, decent movies that weren't three-day shoots or struggling to try to get into the big movies. The time that I was doing movies, you could make a really nice living with a decent four, six week or two month shoot. And that all started changing with the bigger budget movies and the prints and ads. It was kind of the perfect time to get out."

Over 20 years since its release and Kaitan still considers Assault of the Killer Bimbos a favorite film of hers. And as for Rosenberg and Astor, it's also more than just another outrageously titled flick in the flood of Surf Nazis Must Die and Vampire Vixens from Venus. It's what they wanted when others pressured them for something else. It's their achievement. But most importantly, it's just theirs.

"Look it wasn't a brilliant movie, it was a campy, kitschy, low-budget movie that was probably a little stiff and silly dialogue and stiff acting and all that, but you know what?" Rosenberg says about the film that allowed her to achieve her goal of filming a Hollywood movie before the age of 30. "It was my movie. I don't care (laughs)."

A very special thanks to Anita Rosenberg who provided much guidance and information, as well as photos from her personal collection.

Writer's Note: Many of the allegations made against Charles Band came after my initial interview with him. I attempted to get a response several times from Mr. Band regarding these claims. Eventually, Full Moon Features and I lost contact. I want to thank Mr. Band and the entire Full Moon staff for their cooperation.