

Fango Flashback: "SAVAGE WEEKEND"

Written by Jack Bennett

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They say a film is made or broken in the editing room, and that's well-illustrated by SAVAGE WEEKEND's opening scene of unrelated shots arranged without continuity or narrative. Accompanying these images is an old-time banjo tune that starts and stops intermittently, with the occasional chainsaw noise dubbed over top of it.



The sequence climaxes with a handheld camera hobbling toward a terrified, mascara-streaked woman in a white dress who may or may not be the same woman running through the woods in the previous shots, and on the reverse angle the lens is clumsily approached by...William Sanderson! With a chainsaw! Which he apparently left running in the exact spot his quarry would pause to look terrified, since he was definitely not holding it as he chased her. Oh, but it turns out that was all actually the final scene. Confused? Us too. Did the filmmakers set out to make a perplexing experience aimed at inebriated appreciators of camp? Possibly.

This 1976-lensed flick challenges viewers to decide which they'd rather watch: Inexplicable scenes of heavy dialogue dutifully recited between long dramatic pauses, inexplicable action comprised of shaky shots apparently assembled at random or inexplicable sex scenes in which the actress appears to attempt a different position and gives up when her partner doesn't take the cue. Not a lot is straightforward in SAVAGE WEEKEND's story of cynical New Yorkers

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being stalked during their country trip to bumpkinville (though it doesn't even become a slasher flick until the last half hour), but the movie sometimes surprises you into enjoying it. A lot of scenes don't end up where they appear to be heading.

Apologies for the spoiler, but if you read this next part and chuckle, you might dig the movie: Early on, a generally offensive mincing gay stereotype (played with a certain charm by the late Christopher Allport) walks into a stereotypical redneck dive, flirts with the unamused bartender, has a disarming conversation with an old man playing pool, then is accosted by two locals who briefly bully him verbally. So what does our mincing gay stereotype do? Immediately kicks both of their asses right there in the bar. If you can appreciate a scene like that showing up in an exploitation flick with a minimum of irony, then you very well might get a kick out of SAVAGE WEEKEND.



To the film's bargain-basement-sadist credit, it does include occasionally unsettling violence and several bare breasts revealed through forcible top-removal. Also: John Denver-esque folk songs possibly inspired by THE LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT, a surplus of boom mic, the adorable film debut of then child actress and future sexpot Yancy Butler, a table-saw death with a twist, RE-ANIMATOR's David Gale with an awesome mustache, a general tone that could charitably be called "kooky" and the aforementioned Sanderson, who throughout his career has approached every role, comedic or serious, with sincerity and conviction. Even in this clumsy early performance, he brings the same pathos to Otis (and shouldn't every respected actor play at least one Otis?) that made his J.F. Sebastian so memorable in BLADE RUNNER. Sanderson's genre popularity may have inspired SAVAGE WEEKEND's theatrical run via Cannon Films (years after it was made) and DVD release, but you know what? It's bad even by trash standards, but it's fun.