

SAMHAIN

**I KNOW WHAT
YOU DID LAST
SUMMER**

SLASH IS BACK

TENDER FLESH

FRANCO'S LATEST
BLOODY BANQUET

WILLIAM LUSTIG

REVIVING HAMMER

BRITAIN'S LONGEST RUNNING HORROR FILM MAGAZINE



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Bloody

Michael Orlando Yaccarino takes a look at

Jess Franco is offering up a brand new and very bizarrely spiced dish indeed. Although his cinematic output has decreased during the past few years, the passionate film maker has never stopped working entirely. In addition, Franco's fare has been light on the horror element between his spectacular return to the genre with *Faceless (Predateurs de la Nuit)* (1987) and the not-so-memorable *Killer Barbys* (1995). Now the maverick Spanish auteur has prepared *Tender Flesh* (1997) a delectable morsel sure to satisfy the specialized tastes of his ever growing cult of devotees. *Boccato di Cardinale*, the new film's alternate title, is an Italian term used to describe a meal so consummately prepared, it would delight the taste buds of even a jaded connoisseur, such as a church cardinal of earlier times. The carnal delicacies presented from the very first scene of *Tender Flesh* would surely tempt the most faithful to reconsider a devotion of chastity.

The film begins during a seemingly routine nightclub audition conducted by Gorgona (Lina Romay). Upon the stage, a sexy hopeful dances and then strips awkwardly in response to increasingly cruder command. Although Paula (Amber Newman) is not completely sure what the outcome of this tryout will be, she wins the audition. Later at the nightclub, her nubile shape and unsophisticated gyrations catch the lascivious eyes of a perverse American couple, Irita (Monique Parent) and Peter Kalman (Aldo Sambrell), who are in league with Gorgona. Paula wins the audition and soon learns from her boyfriend, Carlos (Mikel Caffarena Kronen), of an intriguing proposition to earn an easy \$10,000. The nymphette agrees to a plan by which she must submit to the erotic whims of Gorgona and the Kalmans within the luxurious confines of a private island. The lewd games begin as soon as Paula and Carlos arrive at the magnificent seaside villa setting. But there are more partygoers already present on the island than anticipated by the money-hungry couple. They include the obedient and often nude Furia (Analia Ibars), a mute female servant who is equally proficient at boot fetishism and whip cracking; and Paul Radek (Alain Petit), a sinister chef whose recipes include the most uncommon of ingredients.

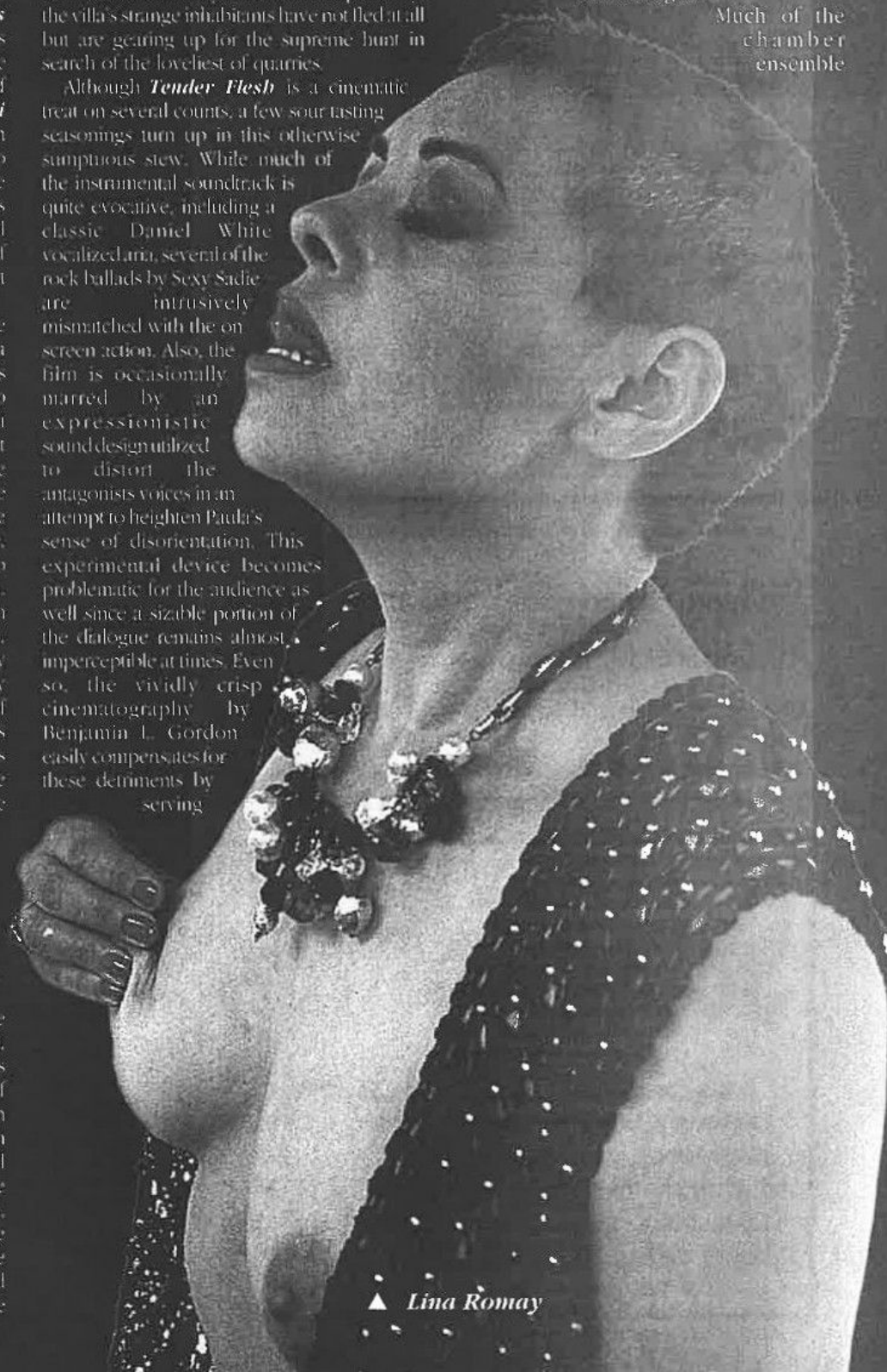
It becomes clear soon enough that the quote by James Joyce which cleverly begins the film, "God made food, the Devil the cooks", does not apply to him alone. After a variety of intimate encounters, the festivities culminate in a crazed orgy of sexual sadism during which Paula is administered a mind altering cocktail and the stinging kiss of the lash. Awakening the following morning in the now deserted villa, the unmarked condition of her body causes the confused girl to question the reality of the previous night's brutal activities. Her boyfriend is nowhere to be found as well. But before

Paula can convince herself that it was all simply a weird dream or narcotic induced fantasy, she is confronted by Gorgona's challenge via videotape. The abandoned girl must escape the island in order to receive the promised payment. She has no choice but to accept and it is soon revealed how Carlos has tricked Paula for his own monetary ends. More importantly, the villa's strange inhabitants have not fled at all but are gearing up for the supreme hunt in search of the loveliest of quarry.

Although *Tender Flesh* is a cinematic treat on several counts, a few sour tasting seasonings turn up in this otherwise sumptuous stew. While much of the instrumental soundtrack is quite evocative, including a classic Daniel White vocalized aria, several of the rock ballads by Sexy Sadie are intrusively mismatched with the on screen action. Also, the film is occasionally marred by an expressionistic sound design utilized to distort the antagonists voices in an attempt to heighten Paula's sense of disorientation. This experimental device becomes problematic for the audience as well since a sizable portion of the dialogue remains almost imperceptible at times. Even so, the vividly crisp cinematography by Benjamin L. Gordon easily compensates for these detriments by serving

up a visually lurid feast. Especially memorable is the wild bacchanal in which the delirious Paula is enjoyed by almost every guest. Set to unnerving organ music, all of the action is caught within the unreal glow of a spotlight to bathe the actors in saturated primary colors giving the entire scene a staged sense of the Grand Guignol.

Much of the chamber ensemble



▲ Lina Romay

BANQUET

Jess Franco's latest film *Tender Flesh*

cast is quite good. American film actress Monique Parent, as the luscious Irina Kalman, is a standout possessing one of the wickedest smiles to grace a Franco opus in many a year. One hopes the director will call upon her delectable services for future projects. But it is the presence of the unstoppable Lina Romay which gives *Tender Flesh* its kinky kick. Sporting a butch, two-toned buzz cut and a lusty voice capable of making the lewdest of orders sound inviting, she is a constant delight. Ms. Romay is an actress who has reached an erotic maturity that the camera still devours with relish. Utilizing her real name for the technical screen credits, Rosa Maria Almirall, Romay is no less skillful as the production's editor expertly blending a veritable menu of nightmarishly sensual scenes.

The films of Jess Franco are connected by a web of associative elements linking them in an almost organic fashion. In this way,

his motion pictures are truly that, imbued with an idiosyncratic dynamism by which certain themes vital to the director are advanced. He has accomplished this through the use of parallel character names and types, locales, plot lines, and actors. For the observant, *Tender Flesh* mixes in a liberal dash of these meaningful elements. From film to film, Franco often employs a revolving list of character names which may or may not correspond blatantly to a specific type to present an alternately amusing, frustrating, or insightful puzzle to the viewer.

One of countless examples of this mischievous game refers to the name of Radek, the master chef of *Tender Flesh*. The director himself portrayed the psychotic killer known as Radeck, who is equally adept with a carving knife in his *Exorcisme* (1974). Ever since the appearance of the dead-eyed henchman Morpho Lautner (Ricardo Valle) in *The Awful Dr. Orloff* (*Gritos en la Noche* /1961), Franco

has devised similar mute assistants to do the bidding of evil superiors. Actor Luis Barboo played silently loyal underlings to both Cagliostro (Howard Vernon) in *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (*La Maldici de Frankenstein* /1972) and the vampiric Countess Irina of Karnstein (Lina Romay) from *La Contesse Noire* (1973). *Tender Flesh* gives

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the creation of the previously-mentioned Furia. A typical convention of the Gothic horror novel is the use of isolated settings far from the reach of society's laws and morals. Franco adapts this device ingeniously by frequently having his narratives unfold within similarly solitary but instead lushly tropical seaside locations. The multiple debaucheries throughout *Tender Flesh* are committed in and around such a luxurious place, one which recalls particularly the Haitian plantation house of *Call of the Blonde Goddess* (*Ruf der Blonden Gittin* /1977). Thematically, *Tender Flesh* has its most obvious but superficial antecedents in Franco's *La Comtesse Perverse* (1973) which also concerns cannibalistic aristocrats seeking the ultimate hunt. But wherein the earlier film ends with the evil Comte Rador Zaroff (portrayed by Howard Vernon with chilling glee) proclaiming suggestively over his slain wife (Alice Arno), 'You shall be the tastiest addition to the collection', *Tender Flesh* depicts the grisly truth of his intentions. But Franco's new film has deeper connections with *Shining Sex* (*La Fille au Sexe Brillant* /1975). Lina Romay starred as Cynthia, an exotic dancer, who unwittingly succumbs to a possibly alien couple (Evelyn Scott and Ram Ardid) through a series of frenzied sexual contacts and the use of a hallucinogenic lubricant.

The idea of total erotic domination by an outside force in which the seeker becomes finally the victim of her own desires is often explored by Franco. These brief examples show why delving into the often overlooked complexity of this director's work can be such a fulfilling banquet for the viewer. It is fortunate for Jess Franco and his fans that the director has finally found producers respectful of his talent and willing to allow him total artistic control of his work. One Shot Productions team of Kevin Collins and Hugh Gallagher and Peter Blumenstock of Germany's Lucertola Media are the daring producers of *Tender Flesh*. During 1997, the film has been exhibited to appreciative audiences at Spain's *El Festival de Cine Fantastico de Bilbao* and at the *Fant Asia Festival* in Montreal. It was given a Halloween 1997 release date on video in America exclusively from Brook Edwards Productions, Edwardsville, Illinois, USA. Committed to the director's desire to continue creating more enticing films, One Shot Productions will assist him in making his vision a reality. Tantalizing future titles include *Marie Cookie and The Killer Tarantula* and *The Legend of Lady Frankenstein*. But certainly by the time of this article's publication, Jess Franco, the irrepressible gourmet of horror erotica cinema, will have surprised everyone with further projects sure to satisfy very peculiar cravings indeed. ■