



IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

Ganja & Hess

Marlene Clark and Duane Jones star as the eponymous lovers of Bill Gunn's iconic vampire romance, one of the defining classics of the genre. After his erratic assistant stabs him with an ancient dagger, anthropologist Dr Hess Green (Jones) is afflicted with a ravenous craving for blood. When his assistant's wife Ganja Meda (Clark) comes looking for her now dead husband, she and Hess fall passionately in love.

Kelli Weston, bfi.org.uk

Philadelphia-born actor/playwright/novelist/ director Bill Gunn, who died from encephalitis in 1989 aged 54, remains one of America's most underrated creative forces. He was a fiercely individualistic talent whose work tackled issues germane to the African-American experience with an ingenuity and complexity that few could match. His acerbic screenplay for Hal Ashby's *The Landlord* (1970), for example, gets to the heart of white middle-class gentrification of economically deprived black areas in a manner that resounds today. Even in the more permissive climate of late-60s/early-70s American cinema, Gunn's work was seen by the establishment as overly controversial: his feature debut *Stop* (1970) – a tortuous love-quadrangle – was slapped with an X certificate, before Warner Bros recut and finally shelved it. It remains unseen today, though there is hope that it will be unearthed.

The issue of frustrated expectations is relevant to Gunn's best-known work, *Ganja & Hess*, which boasts its own dismaying history of troubled distribution. Its studio, Kelly-Jordan Enterprises, was expecting a straightforward blaxploitation cash-in after the success of William Crain's lurid *Blacula* (1972), and was horrified when Gunn delivered nothing of the sort. Despite its rapturous reception at Cannes in 1973, the film was swiftly recut into a travesty of skinflick salaciousness, and boxed up under no fewer than six different titles including *Blackout: The Moment of Terror* and, even more terribly, *Black Evil*.

So what offended the studio so much? Well, even by elliptical arthouse standards, *Ganja & Hess* is a challenging work. It's a bleak, kaleidoscopic vampire film in which the V-word is never once mentioned, and it substitutes bloody thrills for an oblique mélange of contemporary class, racial and religious commentary, Afro-European symbolism and sexual deviance. Its fragmentary structure and explicit (but never titillating) fusion of sex and death recalls the psychologically troubling work of Nicolas Roeg (in particular 1980's *Bad Timing*) more than the Manichean social dynamics of standard blaxploitation fare.

The hazy plot follows the exploits of wealthy anthropologist Dr Hess Green (*Night of the Living Dead*'s Duane Jones), who becomes a vampire after his crazed assistant George Meda (a terrifyingly intense Gunn) stabs him with a dagger that carries an ancient African curse. Meda commits suicide, and Green falls in love with his haughty widow Ganja (the statuesque Marlene Clark), who soon becomes his vampiric partner in crime.

This troubling film is so visually rich and thematically complex that it's not hard to see why Spike Lee co-opted it for his forthcoming Kickstarter-funded remake *Da Sweet Blood of Jesus*. If Lee attains half the disquieting power of Gunn's film, he'll do well.

Ashley Clark, *Sight and Sound*, March 2015

GANJA & HESS

Directed by: Bill Gunn
A Kelly-Jordan Enterprises, Inc. production
Released by: Kelly-Jordan Enterprises, Inc.
Associate Producer: Joan Shigekawa
Production Manager: Lou Pastore
Production Supervisor: Ed Dessisso
Assistant to the Producer: Janus Adams
Production Secretary: Janis Klein
Production Assistants: Scotti Lyew, Alan Skog, Lincoln Pasteur
Assistant Director: Anthony Major
Assistant to the Director: Roger Wall
Script Supervisor: Renoir Darrett
Written by: Bill Gunn
Lighting Director: Bill Lister
2nd Cameraman: Charles Blackwell
Assistant Cameraman: Thurman Faulk
Camera Assistant: James Walker
Best Boy: Dennis Murphy
Key Grip: Rex North
Still Photographer: Charles Stewart
Editor: Victor Kanefsky
Assistant Editors: Cynthia Castleman, Samuel Pollard
Properties Master: James Walker
Costumes Designed by: Scott Barrie
Wardrobe: Ceil Bryant
Make-up: Scott Cunningham
Hair Stylist: Annie De Mille
Titles Designed by: J. Sands
Music: Sam Waymon

African Instruments Played by: Nadi Qamar
March Blues Sung by: Mabel King
Musical Director: Ed Bland
Assistant Sound: Bill Meredith
Re-recording: Emil Neroda, The Sound Shop, Inc.
Sound Editors: Al Nahmias, Vincent Stenerson
Special Audio Effects by: Mike Lobel
Stuntmen: Tony King, Tommy Lane, Malcolm Drummond

Cast

Duane Jones (*Dr Hess Green*)
Marlene Clark (*Ganja Meda*)
Bill Gunn (*George Meda*)
Sam Waymon (*Reverend Luther Williams*)
Leonard Jackson (*Archie*)
Candece Tarpley (*girl in bar*)
Richard Harrow (*dinner guest*)
John Hoffmeister (*Jack Sargent*)
Betty Barney (*singer in church*)
Mabel King (*Queen of Mythria*)
Betsy Thurman (*poetess*)
Enrico Fales (*Dr Green's son*)
Tommy Lane (*pimp*)
Tara Fields (*woman with baby*)
the congregation of Evangel Revivaltime Church

USA 1973
113 mins

IN DREAMS ARE MONSTERS

Ganja & Hess

Mon 7 Nov 18:00; Sat 26 Nov 15:20

La Llorona

Mon 7 Nov 21:00

Frankenstein

Tue 8 Nov 18:20; Sun 27 Nov 13:00

Viy

Tue 8 Nov 20:50

Inferno

Wed 9 Nov 20:40; Sat 26 Nov 18:20

The Entity

Fri 11 Nov 17:55; Tue 15 Nov 20:30

Nightbreed – Director's Cut

Sat 12 Nov 20:35

Nosferatu (Nosferatu – Eine Symphonie des Grauens)

Sun 13 Nov 15:50 (+ intro by Silent Film Curator Bryony Dixon); Sat 19 Nov 14:10

The Skeleton Key

Mon 14 Nov 20:45

Def by Temptation

Wed 16 Nov 18:10 (+ intro); Sat 26 Nov 18:10

Candyman

Thu 17 Nov 20:50 (+ intro)

Kuroneko (Yabu no naka no kuroneko)

Fri 18 Nov 18:15

Cronos

Sat 19 Nov 12:10; Sun 20 Nov 18:30

Us

Sat 19 Nov 15:10; Tue 29 Nov 20:40

Let's Scare Jessica to Death

Sat 19 Nov 20:45

Jennifer's Body

Sun 20 Nov 15:15; Mon 21 Nov 18:00; Fri 25 Nov 20:45

Pontypool

Mon 21 Nov 20:30; Sun 27 Nov 12:20

Fright Night

Tue 22 Nov 20:40 (+ intro)

Under the Shadow

Wed 23 Nov 20:40; Tue 29 Nov 18:10

Ouija: Origin of Evil

Thu 24 Nov 20:40; Mon 28 Nov 18:10

Pet Sematary

Fri 25 Nov 18:15; Mon 28 Nov 20:40

Blacula

Sat 26 Nov 13:00

The Autopsy of Jane Doe

Sat 26 Nov 20:40

28 Days Later

Sat 26 Nov 20:45

Possession

Sun 27 Nov 15:30

Good Manners (As Boas Maneiras)

Sun 27 Nov 18:10; Wed 30 Nov 20:25

A Nightmare on Elm Street

Wed 30 Nov 20:50

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