



Carnival of Souls

Directed by: Herk Harvey

Production Company: Harcourt Productions

Produced by: Herk Harvey

Production Manager: Larry Sneegas

Assistant Production Managers: Larry Fellers, Richard Walker

Assistant Director: Raza Badiyi

Written: John Clifford

Story: John Clifford *, Herk Harvey *

Director of Photography: Maurice Prather

Editing: Dan Palmquist, Bill De Jarnette

Hair Styles: George Corn

Titles: Dan Fitzgerald

Music: Gene Moore

Sound: Ed Down, Don Jessup

Cast:

Candace Hilligoss (*Mary Henry*)

Frances Feist (*Mrs Thomas, the landlady*)

Sidney Berger (*John Linden*)

Art Ellison (*the minister*)

Stan Levitt (*Dr Samuels*)

Tom McGinnis (*boy in the bar*)

Forbes Caldwell (*gas station attendant*)

Dan Palmquist (*boy in the car*)

Bill De Jarnette

Steve Boozer

Pamela Ballard

Larry Sneegas

Cari Conboy

Karen Pyles

T.C. Adams

Sharon Scoville

Mary Ann Harris

Peter Schnitzler

Bill Sollner

Herk Harvey (*dead man*) *

USA 1962

78 mins

Digital

* Uncredited

Moviedrome transmission date: 23 June 1991

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Moviedrome: Bringing the Cult TV Series to the Big Screen

Carnival of Souls

'What is a cult film? A cult film is one which has a passionate following but does not appeal to everybody. Just because a movie is a cult movie does not automatically guarantee quality. Some cult films are very bad. Others are very, very good. Some make an awful lot of money at the box office. Others make no money at all. Some are considered quality films. Others are exploitation.' From 1988 to 2000 *Moviedrome* was presented by Alex Cox and then Mark Cousins. Across that time, more than 200 features were shown, and generations of movie fans and filmmakers would be informed and inspired by the selection, alongside the wit and wisdom of the introductions that preceded each screening. *Moviedrome* was a portal into the world of weird and wonderful cinema. This two-month season features some of the most notable titles screened and wherever possible they are preceded by the original televised introduction.

Nick Freand Jones, season curator and producer of *Moviedrome*

Alex Cox: *Carnival of Souls* is about a cynical church organist who... I can't tell you any more about the story. You have to see it for yourself. It's really strange. It was directed by Herk Harvey in Lawrence, Kansas, in 1962, featuring himself and a number of his neighbours and friends. (Mr H. plays the head zombie.) The only professional performer is Candace Hilligoss, who plays the organist. It was Mr Harvey's only venture into the exciting career of film director, unfortunately. Not only did he direct the film and act in it, he also paid for it. I think he ran a Chevy dealership. All the cars in the film appear to be Cheves, anyway. Lawrence, Kansas, is also the home of William Burroughs, author and adventurer.

The *Monthly Film Bulletin* called *Carnival of Souls* 'one of the most influential films of the sixties'. It certainly had a tremendous effect on George Romero, whose *Night of the Living Dead* resembles it in tone and zombie physiognomy. It has the strange matter-of-fact quality of *Honeymoon Killers*. There is a touch of Ambrose Bierce's *Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge* about it, but in tone it's not particularly Gothic or Lovecraftian. Overt weird stuff is kept to a minimum and an extremely strange sort of horror film emerges: one where you're never quite sure whether the sound is missing by accident or for some chilling reason; whether certain characters are 'off' because they're amateurs or because they're demons; whether the man across the hall is really just a sleazy, obnoxious oaf or... you don't even know what. You can't predict what twists and turns *Carnival of Souls* is going to take. That's what's so good about it.

Although the sets are pretty standard and the music is, shall we say, emphatic, the photography is sometimes quite impressive, particularly when we drive out past the edge of town, to the visit the old abandoned arcade... Maurice Prather, the cinematographer, was lucky to be working in the days when films like this had to be made in black and white because it was cheaper than colour. *Carnival of Souls* may sometimes look like it has shots missing (even the 'restored' version has charmingly ragged edges). But minute for minute it is better entertainment, and has better direction and more inspired performances, than films costing tens of millions more.

Alex Cox's original introduction for *Moviedrome*. Also published in *Moviedrome: The Guide 2* (BBC, 1993). With thanks to moviedromer.tumblr.com

Moviedrome: Bringing the Cult TV Series to the Big Screen

Johnny Guitar

Fri 1 Aug 20:30; Sun 10 Aug 14:45;
Tue 19 Aug 18:10

The Harder They Come

Sat 2 Aug 15:00; Fri 8 Aug 20:45; Sat 23 Aug 18:10
Yojimbo

Sat 2 Aug 20:45; Mon 11 Aug 18:15;
Sun 24 Aug 12:30

What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?

Sun 3 Aug 14:45; Sat 16 Aug 12:00;
Thu 21 Aug 20:25

Mommie Dearest

Sun 3 Aug 18:20; Thu 14 Aug 20:30

Carnival of Souls

Wed 6 Aug 18:40; Fri 15 Aug 20:50

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

Thu 7 Aug 19:00; Sun 10 Aug 17:30;
Sun 24 Aug 17:30

The Girl on a Motorcycle

Fri 8 Aug 18:30; Sun 17 Aug 15:40

Badlands

Sat 9 Aug 12:30; Sat 16 Aug 18:10;
Tue 26 Aug 20:50

Performance

Sat 9 Aug 18:20; Mon 18 Aug 20:50

Diva

Sat 9 Aug 20:30; Tue 19 Aug 20:40;
Fri 29 Aug 18:15

Escape From New York

Mon 11 Aug 20:45; Sat 23 Aug 20:50;
Thu 28 Aug 18:20

To Sleep with Anger

Tue 12 Aug 20:35; Sat 16 Aug 15:10

Mishima: A Life in Four Chapters

Wed 13 Aug 18:20; Mon 25 Aug 14:50;
Sat 30 Aug 20:40

White of the Eye

Wed 20 Aug 20:40; Sun 31 Aug 15:10

Electra Glide in Blue

Thu 21 Aug 18:15; Fri 22 Aug 20:45

With thanks to

Sue Deeks, Simon Chilcott, Carl Davies,
Josephine Haining and Andrew Abbott

25 & Under

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Director Herk Harvey is often classed among the cinema's one-hit wonders – *Carnival of Souls* was his only commercially released fiction feature – but he crafted an enormous amount of work in the shadows beyond the purview of the IMDb, assembling educational, instructional and promotional films to order in Lawrence, Kansas, for a wide range of clients.

Carnival opens with an impromptu drag race between a car full of guys and another driven by a girl with two female friends in the passenger seat, which leads to the women's car plunging off a bridge – all shot with the matter-of-fact tone of a driver safety film, as opposed to the gasoline-and-adrenaline approach of the typical car chase/crash exploitationer of the era. A crowd of poorly postsynched male authority figures gather to mutter disapproval – note the driver of the other car lying about what happened to shift blame away from himself – and muse that the bodies will probably never be found... then, some hours after she went into the water, bedraggled Mary Henry (Candace Hilligoss) emerges on a triangular wedge of mud, apparently recalled to life.

Over the next few days, seemingly numb to the deaths of her friends, Mary drives to a new town to take a position as church organist, which she describes as 'just a job'. Haunted by glimpses of a ghoulish figure (Harvey himself), she has dissociational spells where the sounds of the world are muted (a silent pneumatic drill is especially eerie) and shop assistants find her invisible. She moves into a rooming house and is aggressively chatted up by across-the-hall neighbour John Linden (Sidney Berger), a low-rent Stanley Kowalski whose company she still finds preferable to being alone with ghosts who want her as one of their number. Taking a cue from the protagonist's occupation, there's a near-constant organ score from Gene Moore which might be Mary's inner monologue. When the church's minister (Art Ellison) catches her playing such profane music he dismisses her on the spot. Even Mary's psychiatrist (Stan Levitt) is a patronising creep who literally seizes her in the park and drags her to his office, then hides behind a chairback 'making notes' solely to set up a later shock as the chair swivels to reveal the crumbling face of 'the Man'.

The once-obscure film has been so influential that few viewers will fail to realise that Mary is dead – though her exact status in the world is ambiguous. Is she having a moment-of-death hallucination (as in *An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge*, 1962), unnaturally alive but stalked by a cheated personified death (as in *Final Destination*, 2000), a ghost who doesn't know she should move on (*The Sixth Sense*, 1999) or a combination of all three (*Jacob's Ladder*, 1990)? She is drawn to an abandoned carnival (Saltair, Utah – the location inspired the film) where the Man and similar spooks dance, lurk in the water and form a harrying mob – evoking the art-film ghosts of *The Seventh Seal* (1957) or *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). It's a film whose meaning is at once plain and elusive – on this viewing, it struck me that the understandably aggrieved Mary might be well quit of the world. Men condemn her for being unspiritual (the minister), unsexual (the lech) or neurotic (the shrink) in a strident, grab-handed manner that makes atheism, frigidity and insanity seem positive choices. But the pull of the carnival and the increasing activity of the apparitions are still terrifying.

Kim Newman, *Sight and Sound*, December 2017