



## PROGRAM NOTES

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THE BIG DOLL HOUSE (1971)



Directed by Jack Hill.  
Produced by Jane Schaffer. Director of photography: Fred Conde. Supervising editor: Millie Paul. Film editor: Cliff Fenneman. Production manager: Mario David. Assistant director: Maria S. Abelardo. Production designer: Ben Otico. Unit manager: Canon Gonzalez. Set director: Bobby Bautista. Sound mixer: Willie Arce. Script supervisor: Ethel Fernancez. Make-up supervisor: Antonio Artieda. Wardrobe: Felisa Salcedo. Special effects: Teofilo C. Hilario. Music by Hall Daniels. Song: "Long Time Woman" by Hall Daniels; performed by Pam Grier. Screenplay by Don Spencer. Executive producers: Eddie Romero and John Ashley. Running time: 93 minutes. (Distributor of tonight's print: Films Incorporated; 733 Green Bay Rd.; Wilmette, IL 60091.) CAST: Judy Brown (Collier), Roberta Collins (Alcott),

Pam Grier (Gear), Brooke Mills (Harrad), Pat Woodell (Bodine), Sig Haig (Harm), Christiane Schmidtmer (Miss Dietrich), Kathryn Loder (Lucian), Jerry Franks (Fred), Jack Davis (Dr. Phillips), Gina Stuart (Ferina), Letty Mirasol (Leyte). With Shirley De Las Alas, Myrna De Vera, Siony Cordona, Katy McDaniel.

I'm a long time Woman  
Ain't nobody to please  
Got a natural feeling  
Like a bad disease  
Well 99 years is a long, long time. . . .

--Opening song of THE BIG DOLL HOUSE,  
Sung by Pam Grier.

Some people say that little girls should be seen and not heard  
I say  
OH BONDAGE, UP YOURS.

--X-Ray Specs

Although cultural revolutions occur and, by necessity, only in the realms of the more mainstream areas of productivity, they are frequently born in the lowest gutters of art forms. Dashiell Hammett *did* revolutionize American detective fiction writing between 1927 and 1931, writing just five novels and maybe two score short stories. But the very first spark of the fire he fueled was ignited by such an unrepentant and truly irredeemable hack as Carroll John Daly, whose fiction matured, if that is the word, much quicker than Hammett. By 1922, he was turning out the first bits of prose that would contribute to the creation of the hard boiled detective school that Hammett was to so completely dominate by the end of that decade. Similarly, the reason Roger Corman is the single most important figure in American film during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s is not only because of the astonishing amount of talent he introduced into the industry (and nurtured to maturity) but because of the many topics he either explored for the very first time, or re-examined in new and revolutionary ways. Corman literally, leading an army of novices, revolutionaries, burnt-out talents and hacks--who became innovators because they had no idea of how

to do anything correctly--redefined the subject matter of American film to a radical extent. What had been subversive, exploitative, tasteless, exhibitionist, outrageous, shocking, brutal, unacceptable or crass during the first decade of his best work (the 60s) seeped into and come to dominate mainstream filmmaking by the 70s. If we look at the sixties as a time of Walt Disney, SOUND OF MUSIC, biblical epics and endless musicals, we see the 70s as a decade of JAWS, THE GODFATHER, STAR WARS: horror, violence, science fiction--all genres nurtured by the uncouth, tainted by the outrageous, celebrated by the bawdy and driven. These films were produced by the children of Roger Corman, those brilliant dedicated talents as in love with film as they were with life.

So major a claim to influence cannot be made for the women-in-prison films, a genre that began in 1971 with the relatively extraordinary success of BIG DOLL HOUSE. This was followed by WOMEN IN CAGES (1971), THE BIG BIRD CAGE (1972; produced by Jane Schaffer, written and directed by Jack Hill), THE HOT BOX (1972; written by Jonathan Demme and Joe Viola, directed by Joe Viola), and BLACK MAMA, WHITE MAMA (1972; produced by John Ashley and Eddie Romero, directed by Eddie Romero, based on a story by Joe Viola and Jonathan Demme). The genre reached its peak in 1974 with Jonathan Demme's brilliant CAGED HEAT and its absolute nadir with the fabled ILSA, SHE WOLF OF THE S.S. (directed by Don Edmonds). Still, this short-lived genre, as with so many of Corman's genres (such as the nurse series--STUDENT NURSES, PRIVATE DUTY NURSES, NIGHT CALL NURSES and teacher series--STUDENT TEACHERS, SUMMER SCHOOL TEACHERS) which began, matured and turned self-reflexive in very short periods of time, also proved extremely influential. Profoundly influential, in fact, because here in the critical slum of commercial American movie making a revolution of sorts took place. These films both exploited and celebrated women, both treated them as sex-objects and revolutionary figures. They cast women into roles traditionally reserved for men on the American screen, from rapists to exploiters, from freedom fighters to group leaders, role-changes that were both liberating and, because of their uniqueness, risqué and

exploitative. Still, better one violent desperate woman, armed and dangerous in a prison cell, holding a knife to a man and demanding, "get it up or I'll cut it off," than a generation of "Unmarried" women looking to be satellites in a male universe.

Critically we are not pretending these films are anything they are not; they are crude and lewd, low budget and simplistic, violent and lacking in sophistication, bull of action and lacking in motivation. *But*, they are filled with actions committed by and about women, they are stories of women, unapologetic, determined, strong, perverted, driven by desires, lusts and poetry, and so are unlike most films turned out by the commercial American cinema, a cinema by, about and for men (and men's version of women). These are songs of revolution, half-formed and barely articulate, but the first mutterings from which some day a mighty, beautiful and unstoppable chorus may emerge. In our own ways, each and every one of us, knowing and unknowing, await that day.

--Darby Smotherman  
Louis Black

Jack Hill filmography unavailable



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