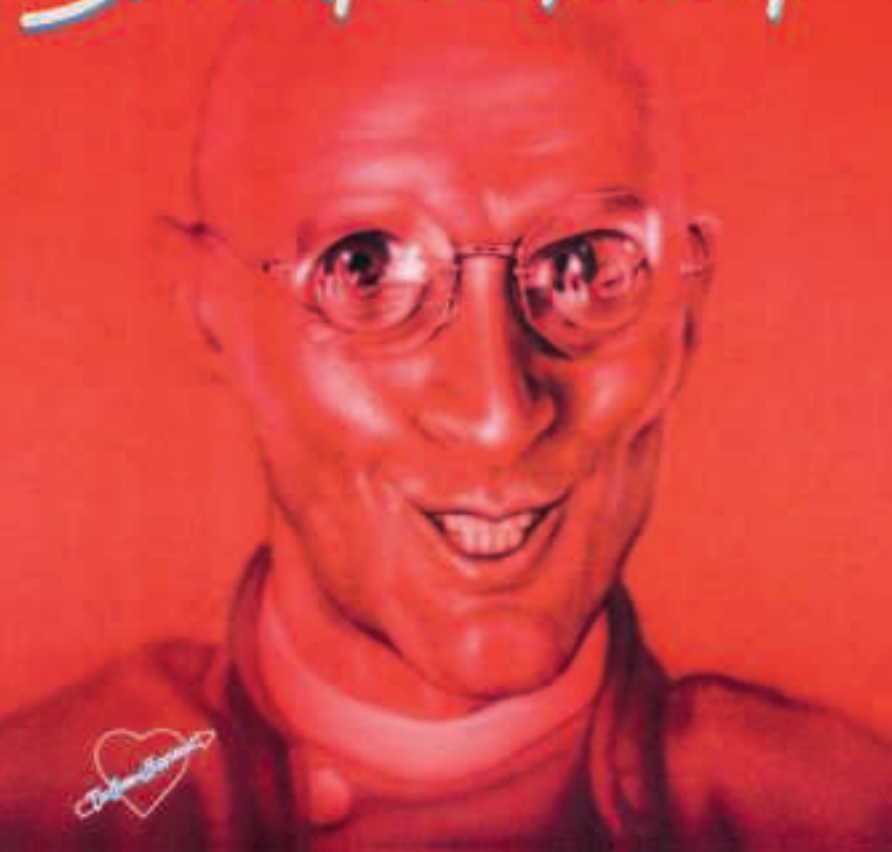
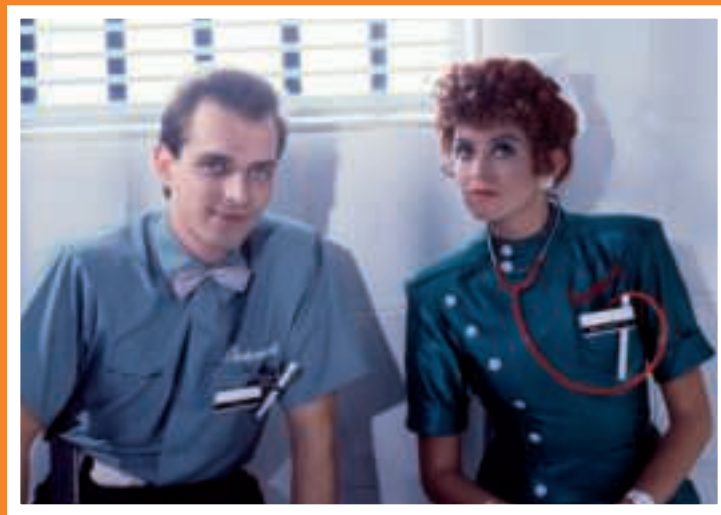


Shock Treatment



CAST

JESSICA HARPER as Janet Majors
CLIFF DE YOUNG as Brad Majors / Farley Flavors
RICHARD O'BRIEN as Cosmo McKinley
PATRICIA QUINN as Nation McKinley
CHARLES GRAY as Judge Oliver Wright
RUBY WAX as Betty Hapschatt
NELL CAMPBELL as Nurse Ansalong
RIK MAYALL as 'Rest Home' Ricky
BARRY HUMPHRIES as Bert Schnick
DARLENE JOHNSON as Emily Weiss
MANNING REDWOOD as Harry Weiss
WENDY RAEBECK as Macy Struthers
JEREMY NEWSON as Ralph Hapschatt



CREW

Directed by **JIM SHARMAN**
Produced by **JOHN GOLDSTONE**
Executive Producers **MICHAEL WHITE** and **LOU ADLER**
Screenplay by **RICHARD O'BRIEN** and **JIM SHARMAN**
Additional Ideas by **BRIAN THOMSON**
Music by **RICHARD HARTLEY** and **RICHARD O'BRIEN**
Book and Lyrics by **RICHARD O'BRIEN**
Cinematography by **MIKE MOLLOY**
Edited by **RICHARD BEDFORD**
Production Design by **BRIAN THOMSON**
Art Direction by **ANDREW SANDERS**
Costume Design by **SUE BLANE**
Choreography by **GILLIAN GREGORY**

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THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

by Michael Blyth

The tagline for Richard O'Brien's follow-up to his cult behemoth *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* proudly claimed, 'It's not a sequel... It's not a prequel... It's an equal'. But although this quippy one-liner is certainly memorable, it is not strictly true. While the transgressive pleasures of *Rocky Horror* ensured its place in midnight movie history, the droll satire of *Shock Treatment* proved a slightly more challenging prospect for audiences who came expecting more of the same. Failure loomed, both critical and commercial, and before long, this overlooked and unloved oddity vanished into the cold depths of cinematic obscurity. Yet, for a film once dismissed as little more than a cynical attempt to recreate its predecessor's popularity, *Shock Treatment* has aged incredibly well. In fact, the film feels more prescient, and more bitingly intelligent than ever. It would seem, at long last, that *Shock Treatment's* time has finally come.

Far from being an equal, *Shock Treatment* is in fact almost completely unlike *Rocky Horror* (a different set of jaws, if you will). Gone are most of the familiar gang (Frank, Magenta, Riff Raff et al.), gone are the fishnets and (much of) the saucy innuendo, gone are the Gothic setting and the playful homage to B-movie schlock. Brad and Janet may be back, but do not let that fool you – these are the Majors, but not as you know them. Almost everything feels different this time around, from the surface details, right down to the overarching message. *Rocky Horror's* iconic mantra "don't dream it, be it" was a beautifully succinct soundbite, a call to arms for all the misfits of the world to embrace who they really are and go forth in the pursuit of absolute pleasure. *Shock Treatment*, on the other hand, bears no such memorable refrain. Instead of offering us a joyous celebration of difference and deviance, O'Brien's cerebral second instalment thrust unsuspecting viewers into a dystopian world of 24-hour reality television, in which the entire town of Denton is now inexplicably housed within a bustling TV studio. The resulting film is a dense, often esoteric, occasionally confusing, critique on mass media brainwashing and the soullessness of celebrity culture. It can be a cliché to describe something as ahead of its time, but when it comes to *Shock Treatment* and its prophetic depiction of a reality TV obsessed world, there could not be a more appropriate adage.

As for the plot itself, the action picks up a few years after the first film left off. Now (un)happily married, Brad and Janet Majors find themselves propelled to small-screen stardom when an impromptu appearance on the smash TV show *Marriage Maze* puts their relationship to



the test. As Janet's celebrity skyrockets, Brad is incarcerated in the local mental hospital (the popular TV show *Dentonvale*), and soon it looks like the increasingly estranged couple will be driven apart forever, especially if the mysterious Denton TV executive Farley Flavors has anything to do with it...

Or at least, that sort of covers it. To be completely blunt, *Shock Treatment* is a hard film to follow. As the central story develops, alongside a host of parallel plotlines and inexplicable sub-narratives (some of which make sense, some of which less so), logic and clarity invariably take a backseat, a fact no doubt a result of the film's fraught production history. Plagued with development issues from its inception, the film is a long way from O'Brien's initial idea for a sequel, entitled 'Rocky Horror Shows His Heels', which was to place our beloved Frank N. Furter back at centre stage. However, when Tim Curry declined the opportunity to revisit his infamous role, O'Brien rescued some of the songs he had already written and worked them into a new idea called 'The Brad and Janet Show'. Curry was later offered the role of Farley Flavors in O'Brien's revamped version, but subsequently turned that down too for fears he could not sufficiently nail the American accent that the role demanded.

However, it was the Screen Actor's Guild strike of 1980 which caused the biggest upset for the team, almost halting production entirely, and forcing O'Brien to undergo yet another radical rewrite in order to save his latest creation. Plans to shoot on location in Texas had to be abandoned at the eleventh hour, with production uprooted to a film studio in England, where the new script would see the story take place entirely within a fictional television studio. Given the myriad obstacles faced by the team, it is a small miracle that the film got made at all, and while the end result is undeniably the product of compromise, it is no less interesting because of that. Ultimately, the version of *Shock Treatment* which did grace our screens works best if viewed as a series of wild ideas and abstract concepts, as opposed to a fully realised and satisfying narrative in itself. Some ideas feel a touch under-developed (some even a little over-developed), but there are certainly enough of them to keep the mind buzzing, even as the plot becomes increasingly baffling. And perhaps that adds to the fun of it all? Unpacking the labyrinthine plot is just one aspect that makes the film so endlessly strange, and so rich for repeated viewings.

But anyway, let us be honest, it's not the narrative that holds the whole piece together, it's the songs. As with the original film, the storytelling can be nonsensical at times, occasionally muddled, often convoluted. But when the music is this good, who's complaining?

And now is the time for my big revelation, and I am fully aware that in divulging this long-kept secret I risk alienating (possibly even losing) some of you readers. But here goes

nothing... I think *Shock Treatment* has better songs than *Rocky Horror*. There, I said it! Phew. What a relief to get that one off my chest. Don't get me wrong, it's not that I don't love the songs from the original. It's not that I don't recognise their impact on popular culture, or appreciate the wit and invention that pours out of every rhyming couplet. But if I was to listen to the soundtrack of one of them, I would pick *Shock Treatment* every time.

In many ways, the soundtrack is as erratic and unruly as its narrative, defiantly mixing styles and tones, at once playful and frivolous, but at the same time shrewdly intelligent. If the songs of *Rocky Horror* worked together in perfect harmony to form one complete, logical whole, the ditties of its follow-up are more anomalous and more playfully idiosyncratic. Just one viewing of *Rocky Horror* will leave you incessantly humming the tunes of 'The Time Warp', 'Sweet Transvestite' and 'Dammit Janet' for days. *Shock Treatment* lacks those instant hits, and because of this (a factor which no doubt contributed to the film's financial failure), does not pack the immediate punch of its predecessor. This time around O'Brien's tunes grow on you. They require multiple listens in order to unearth their layers and complexities. Of course, this is something which might be good in the long term, but it does not make for instantly accessible musical cinema. Instead, the soundtrack to *Shock Treatment* feels more akin to the concept album of a mischievous, sonically adventurous post-punk outfit than it does the song listing of a movie musical. Even more than with *Rocky Horror*, O'Brien's invention astounds. From the toe-tapping exuberance of the title track, to the moody portentousness of 'Looking for Trade', the punky new-wave punch of 'Breaking Out' or the ska-pop swagger of 'Bitchin' in the Kitchen' (an ingenious ode to marital discord and home furnishings), the sheer range of musical styles and influences on display is staggering.

Only once could O'Brien be accused of missing the musical mark, namely with his chirpy ditty 'Little Black Dress'. A fine song in its own right, equal parts silly and substantial, it is, however, arguably the only moment which feels like a cynical effort to repackaging one of *Rocky Horror's* most famous scenes. The song's catchy refrain, "Well first you go rip rip rip, then you go snip snip snip, then you whip in a zip zip zip, and split it up to the hip hip hip", feels uncomfortably close to the similarly instructional chorus from *Rocky Horror's* 'The Time Warp' – "It's just a jump to the left, and then a step to the right, with your hands on your hips, you bring your knees in tight". While almost every other aspect of *Shock Treatment* feels entirely distinctive and separate from its predecessor, 'Little Black Dress' comes off as a distracting refashioning of a perfect pop moment that the film could do without.

Further distractions (although this time largely unavoidable) came in casting form, which saw some of our favourite characters played by different actors, and some of our favourite



actors playing different characters. In fact, the only *Rocky Horror* cast member to return in their original role was Jeremy Newson as Ralph Hapschatt, this time teamed, rather bizarrely, with Ruby Wax as his wife Betty Hapschatt (née Munroe). The aforementioned loss of Tim Curry was a blow, certainly, (largely for devout *Rocky Horror* fans who couldn't fathom a 'sequel/prequel/equal' without him), as was the absence of the original Brad Majors, Barry Bostwick, who could not return due to schedule conflicts. Luckily, Cliff De Young (who had in fact been director Jim Sharman's top choice to play Brad in the first film) was available to play the dual roles of Brad and Farley, which he did with wonderfully unhinged gusto. Meanwhile Little Nell, Patricia Quinn and O'Brien himself all returned in new roles as Nurse Ansalon, Dr Nation McKinley and Dr Cosmo McKinley respectively. But while the new incarnation of Brad, and the absence of much beloved characters such as Magenta, Colombia, Riff Raff (and of course Frank), was a bitter pill for some fans to swallow, it was the recasting of Janet that took the most getting used to.

Previously played with girlish charm by Susan Sarandon (whose escalating stardom had made her too expensive to cast this time around), Janet was an all-American girl gone wild, her sweet and innocent exterior betraying a yearning which lurked beneath. Played by Jessica Harper, *Shock Treatment's* Janet 2.0 is a different animal altogether. She's tougher, more worldly, more cynical. Harper's husky pitch is a far cry from the girlish chirps of Sarandon. In the same way one couldn't imagine Harper's almost Karen Carpenter-like tones warbling away to 'Touch-a, Touch-a, Touch-a, Touch Me', it would be similarly unfathomable to replace Harper's croon with Sarandon's shrill voice on atmospheric numbers like 'In My Own Way' or 'Looking for Trade'. Janet's turning point song, 'Me of Me', in which she publicly celebrates her own inflated sense of ego, demands the vocal depth and range of Harper. Her name may be the same, but this is a different Janet, a new Janet. A Janet who could only be played by Jessica Harper.

Interestingly, Harper had unknowingly laid the foundations for her take on Mrs Majors some years earlier, in Brian De Palma's eccentric rock opera *Phantom of the Paradise*, in which she played Phoenix, another rising star whose ego gets the better of her when she is chosen for the lead in a lavish stage production. *Phantom's* uncommon blend of Faustian melodrama, garish visuals and good old-fashioned rock and roll is an interesting precursor to *Shock Treatment*, and in many ways makes for a more compelling double bill with O'Brien's film than the original *Rocky Horror* itself.

Many have said that *Shock Treatment* was responsible for its own failure – that it was too desperate an attempt to offer audiences a ready-made midnight movie. That might well be true (after all, cult classics need to earn their status, they can't simply claim it for

themselves) but looking back now, perhaps failure was the best thing for it – all the best cult classics were flops at first, right?

Now that *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* has not only had a television remake, but even had an episode of smash hit show *Glee* produced in its honour, its crossover into the mainstream is an irrefutable fact. The cultural impact of O'Brien's iconic original can never be underestimated, but to like it is no longer the act of subversion it once was. Everyone likes it. On the other hand, it is probably safe to say that the ever-unpopular *Shock Treatment* will never have a tween TV show produced in its honour – it is too weird, too bleak and too damn clever for that. Simply put, no one likes it. And that is precisely why you should.

Michael Blyth is a film programmer for the BFI London Film Festival and BFI Flare: London LGBT Film Festival.





SOUNDTRACK DETAILS

TRACKLISTING

1. OVERTURE
2. DENTON, U.S.A.
3. BITCHIN' IN THE KITCHEN
4. IN MY OWN WAY
5. THANK GOD I'M A MAN
6. FARLEY'S SONG
7. LULLABY
8. LITTLE BLACK DRESS
9. ME OF ME
10. SHOCK TREATMENT
11. CARTE BLANCHE
12. LOOKING FOR TRADE
13. LOOK WHAT I DID TO MY ID
14. BREAKING OUT
15. DUEL DUET
16. ANYHOW, ANYHOW

CREDITS

Musicians:

Dave Wintour/**Bass Guitar**

Mark Hayden/**Guitar**

Hugh Burns/**Guitar**

Leslie Morgan/**Drums**

Michael Weaver/**Keyboards**

Richard Hartley/**Keyboards**

Geoff Daley, Mike Davis, Martin Drover,

Chris Pyne, Steve Rye, Ray Warleigh, Jim Wilson/**Brass Section**

Recorded at Regents Park Recording Studios, London

Recorded and Mixed by **Phil Chapman**

Musical Arrangements and Direction by **Richard Hartley**

Album Produced by **Richard Hartley**

Music and Lyrics by **Richard Hartley** and **Richard O'Brien**

© 1981 Ode Sounds and Visuals

ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Shock Treatment is presented in 1.78:1 with 5.1 and stereo mixes. The film was remastered at Fox and the HD master was delivered by Hollywood Classics.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Ewan Cant**
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**
Technical Producer **James White**
QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**
Blu-ray/DVD Mastering **David Mackenzie**
Artist **Graham Humphreys**
Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Lou Adler, Alex Agran, Donny O'Bryan, Nell Campbell, Sam Dunn, Benedict Jewer, Sophie Kendrick, Mark Kermode, Alistair Leach, Gia Milinovich, Sal Piro, Patricia Quinn, Jim Sharman, Marcus Campbell Sinclair, Kjetil Muri Skarstein, Larry Viesel and Michelle White.

This release is dedicated to the memory of **Michael White**, the last impresario.





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