

A HOST OF HOSTS

VIRGINIA CREEPERS: THE HORROR HOST TRADITION OF THE OLD DOMINION

Starring Bill Bowman, Count Gore De Vol and Mr. Lobo
Directed by Sean Kotz and Christopher Valluzzo
Written by Sean Kotz
Horse Archer Productions

It's a good time to be a fan of regional horror hosts, those eerie late-night TV emcees that kept kids glued to their sets as they presented vintage monster movies. A spate of new documentaries, including *American Scary* and *Watch Horror Films, Keep America Strong!* have tweaked nostalgic interest in the phenomenon by tracing the fascinating history of this national craze. Similar to those entertaining films, *Virginia Creepers* is a more specialized doc that focuses on the illustrious pasty-faced ghouls that ruled the state's airwaves since 1952. And if there's any area that deserves an in-depth treatment for its horror host lineage, it's Virginia.

Hosted by Mr. Lobo of the nationally syndicated *Cinema Insomnia* series, *Virginia Creepers* is a wonderfully thorough survey of the creepy characters that have brought movies to monster fanatics over the last six decades. Directors Sean Kotz and Christopher Valluzzo take an extensive look at each and every one of the state's horror hosts, including Ghoulada, Ronald, the Bowman Body and Sir Graves Ghastly, all the way up to still-active spooks such as Count Gore De Vol, Karlos Borloff and Dr. Sarcoguy.

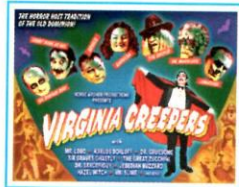
At two hours, *Virginia Creepers* runs a little long, but it's almost always compelling – from Ronald relating a story about some kids that stole his coffin, to the Bowman Body playing his old ukulele, to *Saturday Theater's* Tiny Thompson talking about cleaning bills from the Mynah bird that sat on his shoulder during segments. Along with fan reminiscences and vintage footage of the hosts at work, the doc ably captures the ramshackle charm of these local productions, the dedicated people that made them and how they became neighbourhood stars in the process.



Virginia Creepers: Jonathan, the state's first horror host.

Although focused on the local story, the doc cleverly ties the enduring popularity of the hosts back to the importance of regional broadcasting across the country. Sadly, the ever-expanding media behemoths of today have no interest in locally produced shows, and this attitude may eventually put an end to the storied tradition of horror hosts in Virginia and elsewhere. As this slickly produced documentary shows, that would be a truly scary outcome.

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