

Not By Lynch is a screening series exploring the "Lynchian": an often-used but rarely examined term whose lineage stretches before, around and after David Lynch's own cinema. While Lynch's films offers the clearest expression of this sensibility, the roots and afterlives of what we call the "Lynchian" extend across film history. From haunted noir and ghostly Americana to experimental digital worlds and paranoid Los Angeles labyrinths, nine films — spanning the nine decades of Lynch's life — trace different faces of the Lynchian: dream-logic beneath everyday life, the uncanny invading domestic space, identities slipping or doubling, worlds that bend at the edges, and dread that mingles uneasily with play, humour and desire.

...at the Cinema Museum
January - October 2026

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+ Introduction

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NOT BY LYNCH

THE LYNCHIAN BEFORE
AND AFTER DAVID LYNCH

...at the Cinema Museum
January - October 2026

Curated by **Arta Barzanji**
Presented in collaboration
with **Cinema Year Zero**

CARNIVAL OF SOULS

+ Introduction by **Kirsty Asher**



Death's Waiting Room

Words by **Kirsty Asher**

Carnival of Souls (1962)

Directed by Herk Harvey

With Candace Hilligoss, Sidney Berger, Herk Harvey

Written by John Clifford

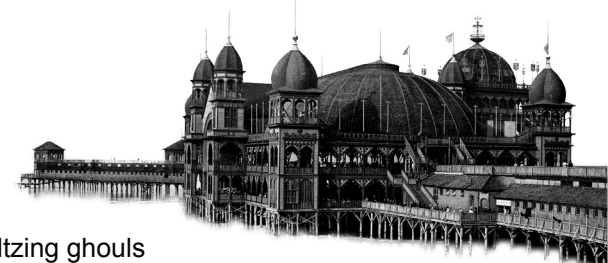
Cinematography Maurice Prather | Edited by Dan Palmquist, Bill de Jarnette | 80 minutes

"I hope she does leave"

"I hope she can"

Carnival of Souls, Herk Harvey's only feature film, was relatively overlooked by critics and audiences upon release in 1962. With only around \$30,000 to spare for his neo-noir fantasia, most of the location filming in Salt Lake City was done either at night in empty buildings or guerrilla-style with bribed locals playing brief parts. Screenwriter John Clifford attests that the Utah locals were, for the most part, completely unaware of production, which took on the air of a ghost ship passing in the night. It tells the story of a young organist, Mary Henry (Candace Hilligoss), haplessly surviving a car crash caused by her girl friends' streetracing another car full of boys. Later, she emerges, chalked with mud, from the river which took her friends but spared her, with no memory of how she survived. Despite an absence of press acknowledgement and no remuneration for either Harvey or his investors, it continued to haunt American airwaves thanks to a regular late-night television slot throughout the 1960s for New York City's night owls. It eventually accumulated a significant cult status through indie film festival slots, revival houses and Halloween screenings in the coming decades, which have all led to this: its screening in the context of that liminal zone we call Lynchian.

Liminality, the state of being in-between two worlds or planes of existence, is highly expansive in the imagination. The ellipses between an old world ending and a new one beginning. A beat between two chords. Ink drops of surrealism on the brain as reality becomes dream. Terminals, forecourts, waiting rooms, empty ballrooms, or even an abandoned pavilion — temptingly fascinating. Not heavenly, something less perfect. Not hellish, something possibly much worse. The film itself inhabits a liminality in American horror cinema. Settled in the nook carved out by *Psycho* (1960), where the horror of the fantastical in 1950s B-movies made way for the unexpected horror in the mundane, *Carnival of Souls* sits between *Psycho* and *Twin Peaks* (1990-2017) as testaments to an unsettled heart within Middle America. Long car journeys in the dead of night, and the uncertainty of where they might lead. A remote and unremarkable town where evil can conveniently hide its true face. Trapped within is the Middle American girl, whose fate, it seems, is to be caught between how she is and how she ought to be. Poor, staid Mary.



Whether diligently but dispassionately playing the organ, or playing it into a frenzy when possessed by visions of waltzing ghouls in a haunted ballroom, she is consistently told she lacks a soul.

It is not for want of trying that Mary can't seem to make an impression in Salt Lake City. The impression is either the wrong one or, more frighteningly, none at all. And from that, comes the abject terror of solitude, of being alone with the Caligarian ghoul (played by Harvey himself), a precursor to Lynch's Mystery Man in *Lost Highway* (1997), which grinningly pursues her as the shadow of her survivor's guilt.

And yet, it is the liminality of the abandoned Saltair pavilion, set well over a mile into Utah's Great Salt Lake, which draws Mary back to it again and again. Harvey's wide shots of its abandoned expanse allow her a space to breathe: out there, she is alone yet surrounded, in company yet overlooked. Here, she is a drifting spirit, perusing the expanse, examining the faded architecture. Despite her fears, she fits well into this emptiness; its dark silhouettes caress her form. Unremarkable though she may be, her undeniable otherness draws a veil between herself and the Salt Lake residents. And those ghouls who waltz in the dark, isn't their dance rather lovely, after all? The beauty of the torment, to be held in the arms of a monstrous man for a lingering moment. To want to be good, so good, but also race boys in cars, to sneak through the broken fence, to hunt for ghosts.

One can now only imagine what it was like to encounter this film in the late hours of the night, on a small, twentieth-century television. The casual viewer could be justified in thinking they had dreamt it. Besides the purposeful surrealism, the tell-tales of a shoestring budget — dodgy ADR, misfitting foley — inadvertently aid its oneiric nature. The electric organ music is at times chintzy and fairground-esque, drifting like Blanche Du Bois' polka, Mary's own psychogenic refrain. Random, kindly-looking extras smile for slightly too long. Silence engulfs Mary in shopping malls, supermarkets, the high street, creating the compellingly unnerving atmosphere of a mundane America on a tilted axis, which David Lynch would later go on to champion so effortlessly. Like Lynch, Harvey uses the liminal to plumb the dwelling depths of the human psyche — guilt, trauma, and fear. Always fear.

The possibilities of liminality: endless in the mind, capable of inspiring wonder and dread. Is it so much worse than what came before, or what lies ahead?

Kirsty Asher is Associate Editor of Cinema Year Zero, a film critic and folklorist based in London. She recently completed a Masters thesis in Folklore Studies on storytelling in London pubs and runs a Substack called A Place with Such A Name. She also believes Ken Russell will rise again like King Arthur.