

# Time Out

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## 'Bongo Wolf's Revenge' at The Electric Cinema

Tom Baker, whose first film 'Bongo Wolf's Revenge' is to be shown both at the Electric Cinema and the New Cinema Club, is better known as an actor. The two roles which seem most to have affected his direction are those with Andy Warhol and Norman Mailer. In Warhol's 'I, A Man' he acts out a series of vignettes with a number of women, including Valerie Solanis, the assassin from the Society for Cutting Up Men. Baker described the film as a mixture of 'I, A Woman' and 'Alfie'. Three months later he played a busted, tripped-out longhair in Mailer's 'Beyond the Law'.

One of the qualities of Warhol's work is his ability to 'find' people and place them in such a way that their personality is exposed to the maximum advantage. Mailer operates within an atmosphere of calculated chaos, creating fast, vicious confrontations between the characters and a jerky, impatient camera style. And so with 'Bongo Wolf's Revenge' we have an individual selected out for his idiosyncrasies and placed in

various situations which are engineered to illustrate these idiosyncrasies. The material is P. J. Proby's bongo-player, whose interests include Satanism, witchcraft, werewolves and hairy armpits. Mailer's influence is very evident in two long scenes: a highly contrived interview where Bongo is fired aggressive and stupid questions by a medley of amused freaks, and an attempted orgy involving a rapacious bread-head and his three girls bartering snatch for a piece of his wallet. Unfortunately, Bongo does not have the personality to sustain a viable dialogue with the camera. Baker's use of 'various settings which suggest a suspension in time and a very strange bridge from Bongo's world to our own' works against our sympathy by pointing up a certain strained phoniness and artificiality which creates self-consciousness and embarrassment for both cast and audience. There is no overall intensity of approach: the film alternates between the extremes of a lazy dolly following Bongo down a main street to the blurred freneticism of the interview sequence. If you see the film it will leave you with an enhanced admiration for the quietly shattering grasp of film found in the movies of Andy Warhol.

*John Du Cane*

## Bongo Wolf's Revenge

U.S.A., 1970

Director: Tom Baker

*Cert*—(not issued). *dist*—Fair Enterprises. *p.c*—Tom Baker. *sc*—Tom Baker. *ph*—Paul Ferrara, Frank Lisciandro, Lewis Teague. *ed*—Tom Baker, David Naftalin. *m*—“The Georgia Swing” by Mike Bloomfield, “People Are Strange” by The Doors, “Hollywood” by Jim Ford. *sd*—Babe Hill. *featuring*—Bongo Wolf, Mike Bloomfield, P. J. Proby, Gemini, Jim Ford, Wednesday, Severn Darden, Noel Parmentel. 2,592 ft. 72 mins. (16 mm.).

Known as the “Bongo Beatle” on Sunset Strip in the mid-Sixties, thirty-eight-year-old Bongo Wolf now lives with his Ma in Beverly Hills, where he spends most of his time brushing up his bongo playing, reading about werewolves and maintaining his collection of dirty magazines. Sporting tweed jacket, baggy flannels and horn-rimmed specs, Bongo takes a trip into Hollywood to meet his friends and replenish his library. Tom Baker’s film is a loose record of some of his exploits: supplying a little hot rhythm for a Mike Bloomfield recording session; visiting a Count Dracula Society shindig; stocking up at an all-night bookstore; getting accosted by a flashy young pimp (who suffers from the illusion that he is Mick Jagger) and his adolescent female accomplices; lecturing the camera on such assorted topics as the Emperor Nero, werewolves, and his experiences whilst touring England with P. J. Proby during the latter’s trouser-ripping era; and holding court at a champagne reception to celebrate his emergence as a film star.

Although Tom Baker, the ‘superstar’ of Warhol’s *I, a Man* (as yet unseen in this country), directs almost without style and with a notable lack of technical finesse, his film nonetheless emerges as an engaging documentary. This is less the result of its several moments of high camp humour (like the discourse between Bongo and the pimp on the relative merits of lust and loot), which are usually sufficiently obscure to limit the film’s appeal on this score to the not insubstantial public of underground cineastes and rock music fans, than of the fascinating insight which Baker’s tubby subject provides into the flushed-out sub-culture of psychedelic Hollywood. The sex cinemas, neon-lit hamburger bars and riotous swimming-pool parties are shot, not with the detached charity of the professionally bemused, but with a familiarity, almost a fondness, that puts the whole thing on a relaxed and realistic level. Though one must add that without Bongo’s essential weirdness—his hammy proclivity for beaming cheesily every time a lens is pointed his way; his benign laconicism; and the constant companionship afforded him by the large vinyl bag “full of goodies” that he totes around with him—the film would be even less cohesive than it already is. And a lot less comic.

MARK WILLIAMS

# 'Bongo Wolf' in a World of His Own

BY KEVIN THOMAS

Staff Writer

Eccentrics seem natural subjects for documentaries, but they can prove treacherous. That's because by their very self-absorption they can quickly become bores.

That's the big trouble with "Bongo Wolf's Revenge" (at the Cinemathèque 16). Writer-Director Tom Baker too often lets his man drone on and on to the point of tedium—and without revealing all that much about himself either.

Bongo Wolf is a portly young man with heavy glasses (and narrow ties) so caught up in the world of the occult that he actually has devised for himself a set of fanged false teeth which he rather endearingly bares for pretty girls he likes.

## Freaky Fringes

Curiously, he's also a bongo drummer — apparently this grew out of an interest in prehistoric man—bringing him into contact with the freaky fringes of the Hollywood rock scene, which accepts him calmly.

It would have been helpful had Baker been willing to be a little more conventional and lots less haphazard in his approach to Bongo. (Not helping matters is his dizzying hand-held camera style.)

Who is Bongo (who apparently lives in comfort in Beverly Hills) really? Where did he come from? What does he live on? What is his family, if any, like? What do his friends, if any, think of him? Alas, Baker answers none of these questions in the 72 minutes of his 16mm. movie.

## Square Attitude

"Bongo Wolf's Revenge," therefore, is nothing much more than a series of repetitive, dragged-out confrontations between Bongo and a bunch of hippie types which shows him to be imper-

**Los Angeles Times** 15  
Tues., Sept. 7, 1971—Part IV

vious to the world, which in turn regards him with indifference — in typical Southern California fashion. There's a brief, banal interview with Bongo revealing him to be square in most attitudes, and there's a scene with him at a Count Dracula Society meeting in which another man does all the talking.

The movie is at its best when Baker, who was the handsome star of Andy Warhol's "I, a Man," emulates Warhol's pseudo-cinema-verite techniques. It's a sequence in which a spaced-out boy hippie takes Bongo to a couple of girls for hire. It's blatantly a setup, but it does illuminate Bongo for an instant when the hardened, teasing chicks ask him what he's got to offer—i.e., how much cash does he have—and he replies with a convincing lack of calculation, "I've got myself."