



# Viva

By VARIETY STAFF

An Anna Biller Prods. presentation. Produced by Anna Biller. Co-producer, Jared Sanford Directed, written, edited by Anna Biller. **With:** Anna Biller, Jared Sanford, Bridget Brno, Chad England, Marcus DeAnda, John Klemantaski, Barry Morse, Paolo Davanza, Cole Chipman, Robbin Ryan, Andrea Lain, Carole Balkan.

**Its titular heroine a neglected housewife drifting into all the sexual revolution mischief 1972 Los Angeles has to offer, "Viva" is a spot-on spoof of low-grade '60s/early '70s sexploitation pics. It's the first feature from multihyphenate Anna Biller, who's made some memorable shorts in a similar vein. There are quite enough campy delights here to attract fest midnight slots and eventual DVD release.**

Voluptuous Barbi (Biller) is bored, since hunky hubby Rick (Chad England) is a workaholic, indifferent to her needs. She first finds diversion in swinging neighbors Mark (Jared Sanford) and Sheila (Bridget Brno). When latter duo split up, and Rick stomps out following an argument, Barbi and Sheila decide to explore their wild sides.

Sheila finds an elderly billionaire to milk for furs and jewels. Looking for love as well as adventure, Barbi instead experiences a series of wrong-turn liaisons that encompass a gay hairdresser (Barry Morse) and his ostensibly uber-heterosexual neighbor (Cole Chipman); a Free Love-espousing hippie nudist (Paolo Davanza); an avant-garde stage director (John Klemantaski); a Sapphic model (Robbin Ryan); and a modern artist (Marcus DeAnda) so hip he has a Liverpool accent. Latter, whom she's been holding out on, drugs Barbi during a climactic orgy sequence that tips hat to Russ Meyer's "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls" and Radley Metzger's "Camille 2000."

Indeed, pic itself is a chronologically progressive tribute to pre-porn sexploitation from the early '60s onward, initially aping suggestive but tame exploiters like "Sin in the Suburbs." Then breasts are bared in the mode of "nudie cuties" by Doris Wishman, Herschell Gordon Lewis and such, followed by a riot of gratuitous full-frontal nudity (sans actual sexual activity).

"Viva" (the moniker Barbi takes on when she decides to create a "new, liberated me") is faithful to those cult-adored obscurities in nearly every detail, including their soporific pace. Here, however, sly in-jokes come often enough to make said pacing funny in itself. Performances are slightly stilted or over-the-top in ways true to the original genre. Musical backing is actual swingin' instrumental muzak of the period.

Biller takes inspiration not just from Z-grade pics of her favorite era, but also from its Playboy magazine aesthetic and TV cologne/liquor commercials. Her production design is a triumph of dedicated thrift-shop acquisition, with decor as much as drop-dead costumes amplifying the cheesiest aspects of early '70s flamboyance.

C. Thomas Lewis' cinematography heightens color to an eye-popping degree, while his compositions delightfully reproduce all the era's lower-budget conventions.