#6 Winter 2004

The Magazine of Personal Cinema in Action



Jerry Stiller is THE INDEPENDENT

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE • Jeff Krulik • KWIK STOP D.P. Carlson • I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART • AFM 2003 OUR LADY OF SORROW • ShortKutzDVD • MIRROR MAN

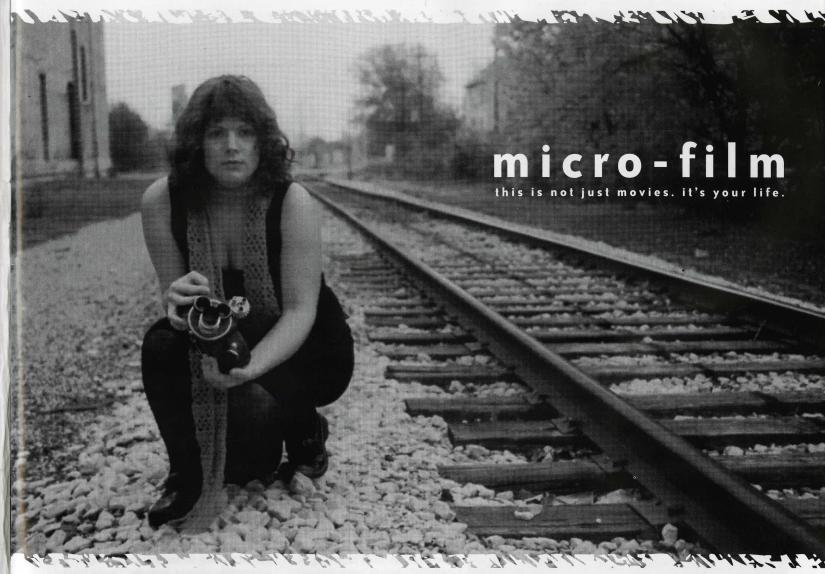
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Model: Liz Biondi Camera: Bell & Howell 70-DR 16mm, c. 1952 Photographer: JaPan Location: North Champaign, IL

issue 6

winter 2004

- MAINTAINING ORBIT OF PLANET KRULIK: Resident space cadet L. Rob Hubbard earns another pair of wings by tracking the busy flight pattern of Jeff Krulik, erstwhile navigator to the lands of all that is wonderfully eclectic from HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT to HITLER'S HAT and beyond.
- WHERE THERE'S A WILCO, THERE'S A WAY: Having captured a lot more fullmotion angst and drama than he's accustomed to, photographer Sam Jones tells music-loving chanteuse Holly Day all about filming a year in the life of the band Wilco for the documentary, I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART.
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 L. Rob Hubbard helps novice filmmaker Michael Gilio contemplate the limited
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- PICKING UP THE SCENT ONCE AGAIN: Hardy adventurers Jeff Sartain and Jason Pankoke return to the indie film microcosms selected for study in Brooklyn and Indianapolis to find OUR LADY OF SORROW mired in a Lynchian mist while UNTITLED FEATURE 2 migrates towards production.
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- MEET THE INDEPENDENTS: Pop culture author Mike Wilkins and commercial director Stephen Kessler handed the title role of their movie THE INDEPENDENT to comedian Jerry Stiller, a stroke of genius that electrifies this ribald spoof of the B-movie industry. Interviews by Jason Pankoke.

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Issue 6 Winter 2004

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MICRO-FILM (ISSN # 1528-2562) is published on an irregular basis by Opteryx Press, P.O. Box 45, Champaign, IL 61824-0045. This issue is © 2004 Jason Pankoke. No parts of this issue may be reproduced in any form without prior written consent from the publisher. All bylined articles are © their respective authors.

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Printed by Crouse Printing, 3102 Research Road, Champaign, IL 61822, (217) 356.9115, fax (217) 356.1381.

Distributed by FM International, Tower Records, Ubiquity Distributors, and Sub Rosa's Indie Force. Also available at Quimbys, Insound.com, and other fine independent stores and Web sites. If there's a nifty place near you that doesn't stock this mag but should, SPEAK UP!

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OPTERYX PRESS the evolution of expression

.... a micro-film editorial

Read About It

Take a good look at the magazine racks the next time you visit your favorite bookstore and you'll note that the number of periodicals in nearly every other genre outweighs the number of film periodicals. Hell, you'll even find more poetry magazines, although it's probably because those digests are more compact to shelve. With film such a dominant force in our media diet, why is it such a struggle for titles like MICRO-FILM, Cashiers du Cinemart, and Cinemad to survive? I don't imagine that B-movie magazines like Shock Cinema, Alternative Cinema, and Cult Movies have it that much easier, but at least they have the genre's built-in fan base. Do enough people care what goes on with the non-commercial movies to make our collective effort worth it?

If I were actually in this for the money or to raise my status on the hipster-o-meter, then maybe I should've taken a cue from the listings in Zine Guide and Zine World, where I've noticed two things. One, everybody and their punk kid brother has started a music magazine since the dawn of time (or at least, say, 1977). Two, a lot of people spend a lot of time printing up their views on politics and societal ills in order to call the modern world on the carpet. From what I've actually read of this material, I've noticed two more things. One, capturing the distinct character of a band's music with compelling writing is a really tough goal that few achieve. Two, throw down all the hard long facts that you want to make your point, but if you can't write well, don't expect anyone to stick with you.

I obviously didn't go down either well-traveled path, although you certainly can find traces of both scattered throughout MICRO-FILM. It's here for good reason, because it's part of the culture that we cover. So, what would I talk about if this very mag were instead Micro-Music or The Politics of a Microcosm of some sort of Stan Lee-ish alternate universe mish-mash? I'd hope to god that it would be Midnight Oil.

Just over one year ago, the veteran Australian quintet called it quits after iconic lead singer Peter Garrett packed up his mike and ventured towards other pastures. It was an amicable split, but after 25 years of recording and performing, how could a band go on without the front man it is so heavily identified with? 2002 seemed to mark a fresh start for Midnight Oil, with the release of their wellreviewed album Capricornia and a label move in America from Sony to Liquid 8, not to mention an extensive worldwide tour. We all know that rock bands are pretty much made to disband, but Midnight Oil's dissolution after so long is disheartening in an age when dinosaurs like the Rolling Stones, Aerosmith, and Rush lumber forth well past their culturally relevant

expiration dates.

Growing up on the junk-food ear candy of Eighties top 40 radio, I had no idea what alternative rock or punk music was like, and it took an Iron Maiden or Metallica t-shirt worn by classmates to remind me of metal. Not until I had left college did I get the drift (an amusing feat, considering that I had shows on college radio), but through it all Midnight Oil spoke to me on a different level. Like many, I picked up Diesel and Dust when the songs "Beds are Burning" and "The Dead Heart" broke internationally in 1988 and kept with the band through the subsequent hits Blue Sky Mining and Earth and Sun and Moon. Then came Breathe and Redneck Wonderland prior to Capricornia; these albums paled stylistically to their predecessors but still had plenty of worthwhile moments. I won't bother impressing you with a critical breakdown of their entire discography; this isn't the place for it.

However, what hits me time and again is how Midnight Oil not only played strong music throughout their existence, but also kept afire their passion for humanity and positive reform. Remember their 1990 guerrilla protest concert in front of the Exxon building in New York City after the massive Alaskan oil spill? How about Garrett running for and nearly winning a government office in Australia? Or, the band spending several weeks after hitting it big not pimping on MTV, not showing up in commercials, not getting hitched in Las Vegas while drunk, but sharing their music with the poor Aboriginal peoples in the deserts of their country? Most musicians pose banal questions through their work from the safety of their recording studios (Phil Collins, anyone?); Midnight Oil regularly ventured into the real world to discover what answers they could and reported back to their listeners through their albums.

Those who would label Midnight Oil as political are right *and* dead wrong. While much of their music took a proactive stance on arguably liberal beliefs, they never went so overboard as to rail for a New World Order borne of fist-pumping anarchy. Paraphrasing a wise reviewer from the punk magazine *Razorcake*, it's evolution of the world we live in, not revolution courting chaos, that must happen to improve the human condition, and the Oils knew it.

Australian cities, natural wonders, historical events, and notable people informed their music regularly. While much of its context was unknown to me, I *did* understand their more universal concerns: respecting indigenous peoples, protecting the environment, empathizing with the working man, and preserving memories and life lessons in order to bequeath them

to future generations. Midnight Oil's music will stand the test of time because it is infused with a power and passion that will always be vital while our world remains more Babylon than Utopia. I belatedly tip my hat to Peter Garrett, Bones Hillman, Martin Rotsey, Rob Hirst, and Jim Moginie.

Whereas the art of Midnight Oil consisted of getting the message across by rocking out, American satirist Michael Moore produces bludgeoning polemic disguised in artistic and literary forms that can't help but evoke a reaction. If you're reading MICRO-FILM, than you know Moore, the portly muckraker from Michigan responsible for filmed tirades against big business and government such as ROGER & ME, THE BIG ONE, and the little-seen John Candy comedy, CANADIAN BACON. This tireless one-man wrecking crew has also marshaled forces using the television airwaves (TV NATION, THE AWFUL TRUTH) and the bookshelves (Stupid White Men, Dude, Where's My Country?). Yet, for all the grimaces he pries from conservatives and nervous laughs he elicits from liberals with these outlets, is Moore wielding reckless abandon instead of honest compassion to achieve his goals?

I won't get into the controversies regarding the claims in BOWLING FOR COLUMBINEthat's what Anthony Zoubek's article is for (see pg. 18)—but indeed, I was intrigued by the film despite its disturbing undercurrents and distracting asides. Witnessing Moore speak at the University of Illinois in April 2002 to a packed auditorium towards the end of his Stupid White Men junket, one couldn't help but be won over by his Regular Joe demeanor and freewheeling bluster. I know I mouthed a few inaudible "hell, yeahs" throughout that evening, but maybe considering my current knowledge of COLUMBINE's machinations I wouldn't be apt to cheer on Moore so readily.

Conservatives and NRA members will claim that BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE eschews "fairness in reporting" every second of its running time. (Then again, progressives will claim that the average newscast does this every single day. Touché!) I hope there's a middle ground where we can identify some virtues in COLUMBINE, chief among them the director's knack for positioning volatile issues like gun control and fear in a personable light that is relatively easy to digest. The problem comes when viewers realize that the form-in this case, "documentary film"-doesn't quite function in the expected manner. Moore likened COLUMBINE to an "op-ed piece," which is a fair assessment, but his technique obscures the distinction between information and entertainment and will certainly confuse those who are used to the average Discovery Channel presentation. Unlike the recognizably sublime wit of a Will Rogers or the savage allusion of a Thomas Paine, it's become increasingly difficult over time to get a handle on this jovial wit if you accept his work at face value. To me, he is a versatile catalyst rather than a talented artist.

A bombastic tangent in Moore's UIUC presentation foreshadowed the trouble that haunted BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE several months later. Holding up a major daily—I think it was The New York Times-Moore focused on an article bemoaning the threat of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda to the world through a screaming headline, and then encouraged all in the auditorium to "turn the page." His point was that the jump to the back revealed apparent intelligence that an ailing bin Laden needed an operation, thereby diminishing the "threat" splashed across Page 1 and relegating it to a cheap sales tactic on the part of the Times. This exercise in "reading the fine print" of mass media is indicative of what folks like the aforementioned Mr. Zoubek have done with COLUMBINE, looking beyond the on-screen "truth" to discover what exactly the filmmaker might have excluded for his own means.

I even inadvertently employed Moore's "turn the page" advice not too long ago. Acting upon a tip from a friend, I discovered that the owners of a downtown Champaign bar had bought the real estate next to them. This space formerly housed the Gleismann photography studio and had been dormant for the better part of a decade. Its retired proprietor and an aide facilitated the sale with the bar people, which included nearly all the studio's existent wares. When I made my first trip into the musty halls of Gleismann, my jaw sum-

marily dropped. Hard. You could have just installed a ticket booth up front and opened a photography museum with little effort.

35mm cameras, medium-format cameras, aerial cameras, floods, backdrops, developing tanks, tripods-you name it, you could find it. (Even stacks of digest-size nudie magazines, which I'm sure were on the premises for the sake of research.) Using a typed itemization that listed hundreds of saleable pieces, I narrowed my attentions to some lighting gear and a handful of 16mm movie cameras, used by Gleismann to shoot commercials and industrial films. One particular device at the very bottom of the list on the last page caught my attention, so my guide directed me downstairs to a dirty, damp work room with red-brown film reels lining the wall and boxes of miscellany stuck in the far corner. While the device I wanted to see was good for a laugh with its JETSONS-style features, my heart sank to join my jawbone when I turned around to find a cramped closet filled to the ceiling with rusting cans of film.

Friend and shutterbug Colleen Cook believes that this footage is most likely on safety stock (a standard since the late 1950s; the material



A stack of rusting film cannisters, discovered in a dank storage room in the basement of an old photography studio in Champaign, Illinois. It makes your heart skip a few beats, doesn't it? (Photo: Colleen Cook)

seems to date between 1960 and 1980), so the majority of it might still be recoverable. We can presume that very little is of artistic significance, but it's worth might come in spades as a historical and community time capsule. While neither Colleen or I are planning on making Gleismann film preservation our magnum opus, it still will take sizeable amounts of patience and will power-not to mention money—to engineer something worthwhile out of this discovery. And even though we're not talking anything incendiary like BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE or lovingly spoofy like THE INDEPENDENT or charmingly offbeat like KWIK STOP, you now know Reason #30581 why I ultimately burn the midnight oil doing MICRO-FILM.

It's because I care about the non-commercial movies. Please show that you do, too.

Jason Pankoke January 2004

THE COVER



Front: Jerry Stiller and Max Perlich in THE INDEPENDENT (courtesy Arrow Films).

Back: (clockwise, from top left): Arok and Ben Skora in HOME MOVIE (courtesy Cowboy Films), Lucie Tulugarjuk and Madeline Ivalu in THE FAST RUNNER (M.H. Cousineau/ courtesy Iglooik Isuma Productions), Robin Garrels in INSANIAC (courtesy Sub Rosa Extreme), Michael Gilio in KWIK STOP (courtesy Rachel Tenner/ Kwik Stop LLC).

Thank You

Arrow Films, Michael Blieden, D.P. Carlson, Cowboy Films, Parker Cross, Brian Faiola & PromiseLand, Christopher Frieri, Michael Gilio, J.J. Huckin, Matt Jenkins, Sam Jones, Stephen Kessler, Kevin Kölsch, Jeff Krulik, MGM, Chuck Palahniuk, Robin Peters & Dreamscape Cinema, Route 66 Film Festival, Rachel Tenner, Tyler Tharpe, Ken Westermann & ShortKutz, Dennis Widmyer, Mike Wilkins, and all those who debated BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE.

Also

Mom & Dad & Eric & Jamie & Hope & Rose, Brian Paris, Bill Kephart, Colleen Cook, Chris Folkens, Mike Trippiedi, Tom Konie & Illini Film & Video, Russ Forster, Paul Riismandel, Jules Beesley & Amy Raymond, Sir Alvin Ecarma, Dann Tincher & Damian Duffy, Joe Nero, Wm. R. Pace & Tom Rondinella, Brian S. Driscoll, Eric Tucker, Melinda Taub, Eric Stanze, Holly Rushakoff & all those cool local bands that let me hang out with them, Troy Michael & Innocent Words, Chris Gore & Film Threat. Kimberley Kranich & WILL-TV, Ron Bonk, Jeff Faoro & El Cinema, Nichole Wleklinski, L. Rob Hubbard, Danielle Cloutier, Inga Mucha, Andrew Horng, Liz Biondi, and the contributors.

Dedicated to

Stan Brakhage (1933-2003), who came into the world the same year as Kodak 8mm film and later became one with it in the name of "personal cinema."

Quote of the Issue

"C'mooooonnn, let's have some fuuuuuuuunn! Gimme the nuuuumberrrrr....'

—How inebriated-off-her-gourd Sarah (Wendy Allyn) gets her hands on the digits of an alleged Satanist and seals her own doom in Sal Ciavarello's HARDCORE POISONED EYES.

.... the life of micro-film

Let's crack open the door to the Secret MICRO-FILM Headquarters and take a peek at what's been happening on the Other Side that has kept us so darn busy ...

... Finally! Break out that electronic bookmark on your browser for the brand-new MICRO-FILM Web site (www.micro-film-magazine.com). Admittedly, what's up in virtual space now is pretty plain-jane, but over the spring we'll be refining its design and posting some long-delayed content, including interviews with indie directors Michael Galinsky (HORNS AND HALOS), Matt Goldman (THE PERPETUAL LIFE OF JIM ALBERS), and Brazil J. Grisaffi (LAUGHING BOY). Also sign up for our e-mailing list while you're there ...

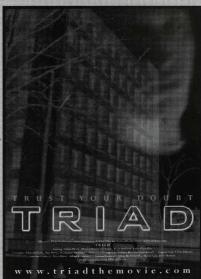
... When you're surfing, head on over to the Internet page for the ambitious student film TRIAD (www.triadthemovie.com), where you'll find a triptych of haunting movie posters designed by your editor for director Chris Folkens. This 40-minute thriller concerns specters and conspiracy on the University of Illinois campus, discovered by three wary friends. Also on the way is some spooky packaging created for the film's DVD presentation, which should be available by the time you read this ...

... MICRO-FILM spent time presenting movie shows in its home base of Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, throughout 2003. The series included EXISTO (M-F #4), HORNS AND HALOS (p.41), KILLING MICHAEL BAY (M-F #5), and Negativland's GIMME THE MERMAID in April at the Urbana Independent Media Center, Russ Forster's TRIBUTARY and an EXISTO encore in August at the Canopy Club, and RADIO FREE STEVE (M-F #3), LETHAL FORCE (M-F #5), and KILLING MICHAEL BAY redux in October at Mike 'n' Molly's. In November, we co-sponsored with Illini Film & Video a rare 35mm screening of CHARMING BILLY (M-F #5) on the University of Illinois campus, augmented with informational talks by director Wm. R. Pace and producer Thomas Rondinella. What cool events will we plot in the future, here or elsewhere? Join our e-mailing list to be in the know ...



Heinz G.R. Mueller displays a copy of MICRO-FILM #5 during an "Illinois indie" panel discussion at the Route 66 Film Festival in Springfield, IL, held in September 2002. Mueller snapped the photo of actor Michael Hayden that was used on the cover. (Photo: courtesy Route 66 Film Festival)

... Backyard Cinema will be the first MICRO-FILM spin-off in an occasional series that will highlight particular microcosms of independent film. Long-time friend Mike Trippiedi, a filmmaker whose work (DOGS IN QUICKSAND, BUCKY McSNEAD) and writing



Actor Adam Pasen meshes with the UIUC psychology building in this spooky graphic. (Courtesy Chris Folkens Films)

have appeared in these pages, will serve as guest editor for Backyard Cinema, which is based on his rare 1993 zine of the same name. The content will focus on ultra low-budget genre movies and be highlighted by a lengthy chat with J.R. Bookwalter (THE DEAD NEXT DOOR) ...

... In distribution news, MICRO-FILM was recently picked up by Indie Force, a marketing initiative for independent film products headed by Ron Bonk of Sub Rosa Studios. This arrangement will hopefully land the mag in more bookstores, newsstands, and comic book shops across the United States than ever before. Please feel free to contact your editor and tell him where you found MICRO-FILM or where you would like MICRO-FILM to be sold! ...

... Seems that your editor decided to get in on practicin' what he's usually preachin' in MICRO-FILM by volunteering for the Champaign-Urbana episode of A DAY IN OUR HOMETOWN (M-F #5). This production by local PBS station WILL-TV Channel 12 allows citizens to characterize their town by the short stories they choose to tell with video. In the spirit of interjecting something hip, my segment features artists connected with a sequential art (a.k.a. comic book) gallery show at the aforementioned Independent Media Center. Interviewed are Jason Pitzl, a local painter who organized the show, as well as artists

Layla Lawlor (Raven's Children, a fantasy epic) and Darrin Drda (Channel X, a satirical political strip), while Eric Tucker and Melinda Taub helped out behind the camera. The episode aired on WILL-TV in early December ...

The Natural History of Parking Lots

Jeff Krulik is best known for an underground video featuring Judas Priest fans, but don't forget about Lancelot Link, Classy Freddie Blassie, and HITLER'S HAT.

Interview by L. Rob Hubbard

Jeff Krulik may be the best-known "unknown" filmmaker in the United States today. His body of work has covered some of the quirkiest niches to be found in our culture: Ernest Borgnine touring America in his own bus, the creators of the LANCELOT LINK-SECRET CHIMP Saturday morning show, an American GI from World War II who owns Adolph Hitler's top hat. However, his most famous work is one that has not been widely seen in legitimate venues; rather, it has circulated for years via the "video

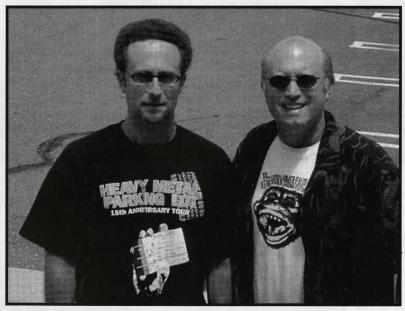
underground," hand to hand. That piece, done in the space of an afternoon, has turned into a legend.

Done in collaboration with John Heyn in 1986, HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT has amused and captivated the few that have seen it and the many more that have only heard of it. As Krulik comments, "I'm curious, like when people have heard about it for whatever amount of time, if it actually lives up to its [hype], because it's kind of a rough piece." It also spawned "sequels," of sorts. As HMPL looks at teenagers and the archetypal heavymetal band for its time, Judas Priest, NEIL DIA-MOND PARKING LOT takes

a look at the same passion in a somewhat older audience with a slightly different focus. Likewise, HARRY POTTER PARK-ING LOT examines the fervor in the pre-teen set, almost coming full-circle in obsessions within generations.

Not that it was necessarily planned that way. "We managed to tap into something that was innate and didn't have to be manufactured," Krulik says. "We did HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT as a fluke-it was a lucky break and everything somewhat worked in our favor. We managed to create something completely by accident that had this longevity. So 10 years later [in 1996], we thought,

'What would we do?' We decided on a lark ... I don't want to say 'goof' because we were serious about approaching the audience of Neil Diamond, but we thought, 'We got something with HMPL, let's see if we can duplicate it with Neil Diamond.' It was a challenge, because maybe the fans would clam up. In HMPL, most of the people were really drunk, and we couldn't imagine that being the same with Neil Diamond fans. I think it worked because people were passionate about Neil Diamond. I'm real proud of that.



John Heyn and Jeff Krulik, masters of culturally-relevant concrete, stand tall on the one and only HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT in 2001. (All photos: courtesy Jeff Krulik)

"We've never really thought about it or analyzed it, it's all just hindsight," continues Krulik about HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT. "You were either at that concert or you sat next to somebody in homeroom that was at that concert and you really just kind of identify with that experience. If you weren't there, you get it by just being close to it. That's really helped the longevity of that piece." Said longevity has also spawned tributes, such as the music video for "Flavor of the Week" by At the Drive-In, and has spurred enough interest for HMPL to be in development as a feature film or television series. The short also earned its belated theatrical berth in

2002 when Cowboy Pictures paired it with Chris Smith's HOME MOVIE (See review, p.40. - ed.) with an inevitable DVD release due later this year from a new company, Factory 515/Brainbox.

While Krulik may be thought of as "King of the 'Parking Lot' Movie," that just scratches the surface of his output, whether concocted solo or with HEAVY METAL partner Heyn. Films include OBSESSED WITH JEWS, KING OF PORN. MR. BLASSIE GOES TO WASHINGTON, and the alluded-to ERNEST BORGNINE

> ON THE BUS and I CREAT-ED LANCELOT LINK. "Some are real ambitious and other things were just done in an afternoon," confirms Krulik. "HMPL was just done in an afternoon. HARRY POTTER PARKING LOT was done in a couple of hours. [For] I CRE-ATED LANCELOT LINK, I had the shows on tape, which is something I collected because I could. I got them in the 1980s when I worked at the cable company [where HMPL was assembled]. Every afternoon at 4 p.m., I'd tape LANCELOT LINK from Nickelodeon onto a 3/4-inch tape just because I loved the show. I had no clue that I was ever going to do a documentary."

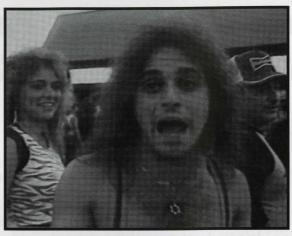
Krulik's films can be seen as just entertainment, but there's an element of social anthropology in the best sense of the term, for his approach to his atypical subjects is non-judgmental and reflects a genuine interest. "[These subjects are] off the beaten path, which is something that I've always liked and sought. I want to look at something beneath the surface and I really do have an affinity for the subjects I find," he comments. "Or, I actually know them personally or I really delve into their lives and make a personal connection with them. That's true for a lot of the stuff. I try not to put words in anybody's mouths. I mean, I can't write what these

people are saying [in the films], it's just so incredible! I like to think that my work conveys a particular style and sensibility that I've remained true to."

Krulik shaped his style and sensibility during his college days. "I'd worked in college radio at the University of Maryland, and we really developed this free-form station where anything goes. When I found out about community television, I was able to take that ideal of 'anything goes' to television," he remembers. "Public access is where I started to use a camera. I was selftaught. I took film appreciation classes, but never any hands-on production classes. I got it from public access." Along those lines, Krulik has worked extensively with video. "I would love to work in film. I've never done it, but that would require a much greater budget than I've ever had and require hiring people. I hope to do it one day, but if I never do, I'm still going to keep on doing what I've managed to do with video and DV."

Krulik's newest project, HITLER'S HAT, continues with two of his fascinations, quirky subjects and the elder generation. "HITLER'S HAT has a bunch of different styles in it. I was sort of aiming high in that production," says Krulik. It's the story of clothing manufacturer, professional magician, and ex-GI Richard Marowitz, who at the end of World War II ended up in possession of the ultimate war souvenir—a top hat that once belonged to Adolph Hitler. It's also the story of Marowitz's regiment, the 42nd Rainbow Division. As Krulik attends a reunion of the division, he gathers not only the full tale of the hat but also the camaraderie of the surviving members and a potent reminder of that most overlooked resource, the aged. "Somebody once made the comment that, 'You seem to like older people.' And they were right," continues Krulik. "I love people when they have stories to tell and I find that most older people have more stories to tell. I like being able to hear them and I've always been a fan of oral history. Who better to tell it than the people who've lived it?"

HITLER'S HAT stretches expectations beyond what fans of HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT and his other work may expect from him. Relates Krulik, "I heard that when people first saw a rough cut of HITLER'S HAT, they thought it was going to be OLD GUY PARKING LOT, which I don't want to be typecast as. I could see what they



HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT proves that one could have a David Lee Roth hair day *and* a pretty rad outlook on life.

"I want to look at something beneath the surface and I really do have an affinity for the subjects I find ... or, I actually know them personally or I really delve into their lives and make a personal connection with them."

- Jeff Krulik



In this day and age of trashy kiddie pop singers, there's surely no sin in having this veteran crooner turn on your heartlight. Just ask any denizen of NEIL DIAMOND PARKING LOT.

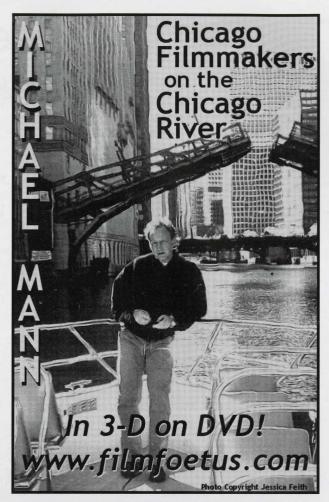
were saying and it affected some decisions in the editing. I had a Betacam crew for the sit-down interviews because I knew I could never duplicate that with my digital camera. I wanted it to look professional, but to maintain the sensibility that brought me to the subject in the first place. There is a certain style that you get from me just wandering around with the camera on my shoulder, shooting from the hip, and that does tend to keep me pigeonholed. I'm happy for whatever audience and appreciation I can get for that work, but opportunities for exposure in the marketplace are limited."

Krulik has since screened the final version of HITLER'S HAT at several festivals. In early cuts, Krulik set the tone with war propaganda footage of the day, including a clip set to Spike Jones' novelty hit "Der Fuhrer's Face" and a Disney war cartoon that's a far cry from that company's current sensibilities. This footage may or may not end up in the final version, depending on rights and clearances for the material. While Krulik has dealt with such issues guerrilla-fashion in the past (as in going ahead with it, regardless), he acknowledges that it may be time to grab the bull by the horns. "It's definitely a problem," says Krulik of freely appropriating others' work. "It's something I have to address and take seriously if I want to get to a certain level, because I won't be able to grow as a filmmaker or a professional if I don't. With HITLER'S HAT, we are trying to get to major film festival level. You have to change your thinking a bit, but I think you can still carry on the sensibilities of your style."

It appears that Jeff Krulik may finally be discovered by the mainstream after all, possibly receiving a small piece of the financial words that could accompany it. Whatever gains may be looming in his future, Krulik is keeping his cool. "It might not happen," he says. "It's a crapshoot, but we're trying. You have to grow and you have to really challenge yourself to do things that will elevate you or at least make you feel compelled to keep going on. I started doing this as a hobby and I think I'll always do this because it can always be a hobby even if I don't do it full time to make a living, which I've been attempting to do for many years now. With the advent and availability of home-based editing and economical digital video, there's no reason I can't continue to do this." 9

9 Winter 2004





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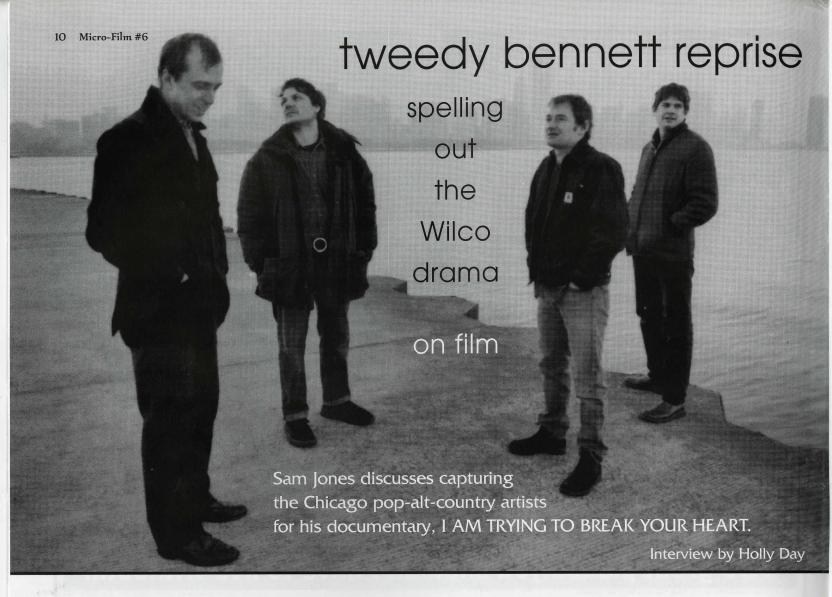


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High-profile rock/fashion photographer Sam Jones made his filmmaking debut in 2002 with I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART, a documentary of the band Wilco and the making of their fourth album, Yankee Hotel Foxtrot. As artful as Jonathan Demme's Talking Heads movie, STOP MAKING SENSE, and as claustrophobically invasive as any episode of VH-1's BEHIND THE MUSIC, Jones' film combines beautiful, high-contrast, black-and-white scenes of the Chicago landscape and in-depth interviews with Wilco. Shot over a period of 14 months, BREAK YOUR HEART follows the band's early days in the studio recording Yankee Hotel Foxtrot all the way through their successful attempt to find another label after being dumped by Reprise Records.

"How did this film come about? I wrote a letter to the band, asking if they wanted to take part in a documentary," says Jones. "My idea was to make it about the making of their record—which was, at that point, tentatively called *Here Comes Everybody*—and it turned out they'd only finished about 30 per cent of the record and hadn't begun mixing it yet, so my

timing was good. They just seemed like the right band to do it with. They were critically very acclaimed, but they were kind of under the radar so far as a lot of people knowing about them. I myself had been a big Wilco fan for a while, and I even wrote in the letter I sent their manager, Tony Margherita, that I believe Wilco is a band that will stand the test of time."

Jones met with the band in November 2000 to present his idea and, after many more meetings and discussions with Wilco and Margherita, finally received an invitation from lead singer/guitarist Jeff Tweedy to begin filming in mid-December. Jones had already decided what kind of film he was going to make—essentially, a straight documentary of Wilco in the recording studio-and asked the band members to have complete, unlimited access to their recording sessions as well as their personal lives. "The two things I asked for," says Jones, "were complete access to everything, and that they not have any control over the editing or that they would not see the film before it was finished, and they agreed to that. They were really good about letting me into

their lives. No one ever told me to stop rolling tape, or stop asking questions."

What no one realized when Jones began filming, of course, was that he would also end up documenting the dropping of the band's record from Reprise and the expulsion of guitarist/keyboardist Jay Bennett from Wilco. It's the infighting between Tweedy and Bennett that defines the structure of I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART. "It kind of made the film into a three-act thing," says Jones. "The first act is the creation of the album, the second act is kind of the whole Reprise [thing and] the conflict with Jay, and the third is how they kind of triumphed and were able to put the album out the way they wanted to. All I did was try to use scenes to support that story and also to give the audience an idea of how the people in this film made the kind of music they did. I was trying to pick scenes that showed new insight into the band members while still making it relevant to what was happening to them in that year."

I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART is loaded with scenes that seem to truly

define the band dynamics at these different points, opening with Bennett and Tweedy fooling around in the studio after laying down some tracks for the album. Bennett pulls a marker out of his pocket and begins drawing a face on Tweedy's stomach, with Tweedy giggling the whole time. The band members—Tweedy, Bennett, John Stirratt, Leroy Bach, and Glenn Kotche—just look happy to be with each other. Emphasizing that point, the frame switches to an interview with Chicago Tribune music critic Greg Kot, who emphatically states that Wilco "sounds like itself because of all the people involved in it," meaning that without those five particular people, it would be a completely different band. The focus then returns to the Wilco studio space, showing Bennett and Tweedy fleshing out mixes together and talking about what a collaborative project this band actually is.

Starting out as a pretty typical documentary/music video, I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART begins to grow dark after about the first half-hour when Tweedy takes off on a solo tour to perform some of his acoustic, non-Wilco material. While Tweedy deals with discomfort brought on by press people and groupies, the others continue working in the studio with Bennett trying to control the sessions, much to his remaining band mates' consternation. Even after Tweedy returns, Bennett still seems bent on dominating the sessions. One instance finds Bennett claiming that Tweedy's editing suggestions on "Heavy Metal Drummer" (completely contrary to his own) came as a complete surprise to him, and that he thought he was doing what the band had collectively decided to do. In this particular argument, Bennett finally announces that Tweedy is making too big a deal about the whole thing, and that it really doesn't matter what they do to the song so far as he's concerned. Immediately afterwards,

Tweedy runs out of the room to puke, with Jones' camera close behind.

It's obvious from the intimate portraval captured by Jones that Tweedy—apparently the most outgoing member of his former band, Uncle Tupelo-is not the most sociable person to be around. His comfort zone seems to extend only as far as his band mates and family; once things start getting tense with Bennett, it's obvious that said comfort zone has been shattered. It's hard to tell whether Bennett is aware of this discomfort and is exploiting it, or if he's just so wrapped up in his own frustration that he's unaware that he's making Tweedy uncomfortable. Whichever it is, these scenes with Tweedy and Bennett are painful in their voyeurism.

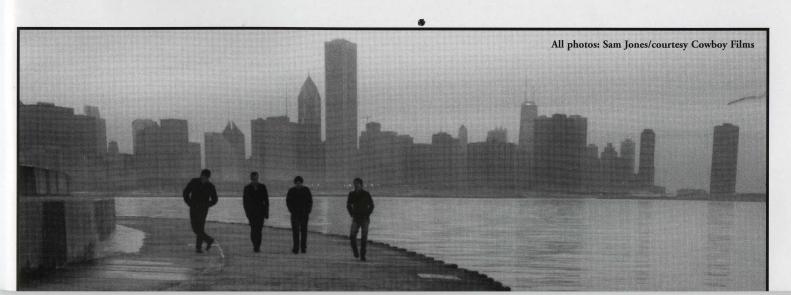
"When you're the director but also the cameraman, most of your thoughts as filming is going on is just how to get as much into the camera as possible, with good framing and good sound and focus," says Jones regarding these intimate scenes. "You try to follow what's going on and really anticipate what's happening; I don't think I stopped and thought about, you know, 'Am I intruding?' or anything like that. It was just more about, 'How can I capture all this that's happening?' It's almost too much work to worry about things like that."

Detractors of the film have claimed that these scenes with Bennett and Tweedy are too one-sided, with Bennett unfairly painted as an egomaniac. Jones defends their inclusion, saying that, "I don't necessarily think he comes off like a crazy egomaniac. I think people read a lot into it, but I think Jay comes off as someone working very hard on an album, and then getting stuck on a few points where he really wants to be heard. I think that maybe, in the interview [after his firing], his defense mechanism probably kicked in, trying to find reasons for why he was let out of the band, and maybe that comes across as an

ego thing. I just tried to represent him accurately ... I tried to include things that he could look at in 10 years and say, 'That's the way I felt.'

It's almost a given that you have to be a Wilco fan to truly appreciate I AM TRY-ING TO BREAK YOUR HEART. Non-Wilco fans would probably agree with Reprise's Bill Bentley on his decision to drop Wilco from the label and not release what he perceived to be a commercially non-viable album. It would also be hard for non-Wilco fans to buy into the excited ravings of Rolling Stone music editor David Fricke and his claims that Yankee Hotel Foxtrot was "the album of the year" and that "if you don't get it, well, I think that's just too bad." While non-Wilco fans may not appreciate these points, it's hard to fault Sam Jones for the incredible photoplay itself, from which any Chicago vista could be clipped out and turned into a poster. It's refreshing to find this type of hagiography made about a semi-obscure band for a change, with an attention to detail brought by a filmmaker who actually believes his subjects deserve the attention. \$

Postscript: In the fallout of the Reprise debacle, Wilco would fly in the face of conventional wisdom and not only land a new home-Nonesuch, a sister label to Reprise under the Warners juggernaut—but preview their entire album for their fans on the Internet! Many cynical tongues in the rock press found this move to be commercial suicide with the controversy regarding downloadable music, only to bite their tongues when Yankee Hotel Foxtrot landed in the top 20 of the Billboard 100 pop charts upon its release. I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART enjoyed several months of art-house theatrical bookings through Cowboy Films and became a best-selling DVD for Plexifilm. Jay Bennett, not one to sit idle, went back into the studio to record with long-time friend Edward Burch; their first release, The Palace at 4am, Part 1 (Undertow), hit record store shelves the same week as Yankee Hotel Foxtrot in 2002 with Part 2 due this year. - ed.



Why "Kwik Stop" Is Still On the Go



Lucky (Michael Gilio) and Didi (Lara Phillips) don't realize that the paths they're destined to travel aren't on a road map. (All photos: courtesy Rachel Tenner)

In the third of a series covering independent films hailing from Chicagoland, Michael Gilio and his feature KWIK STOP log endless miles in search of distribution.

Interview by L. Rob Hubbard

The road movie is a popular genre for many an independent film—indeed, for films of all budgets. But most directors of lower budget indies seem to have at least one road film up their sleeves to tackle at some point. The proven formula is pretty basic and elemental:

A young girl.... A young guy....

A fast car and lots of road and scenery to utilize.

They both meet in a small town convenience store....

Words are exchanged; attitudes and glances are thrown. The guy is headed for

California—Los Angeles, specifically—to make a name for himself. The girl ends up as his passenger. Off they go on the road, where many adventures are to be had, excitement and danger, love discovered, then lost. New friends are made, hearts are broken and mended, and eventually things resolve themselves at the end.

Now, throw in varying amounts of sex and violence as "spice," and varying amounts of success can be garnered. That set-up is also utilized in KWIK STOP, the debut feature film by Chicago native Michael Gilio. A graduate of Chicago's

Columbia College, Gilio is also an actor with numerous film and television credits (TO SIR WITH LOVE 2, ONLY IN AMERICA: THE LIFE AND CRIMES OF DON KING) and a nominee in the 2002 Independent Spirit Awards' "Someone To Watch" category. However, his intentions are a bit more ambitious than following any set formula. As Gilio describes his film, for which he directed, wrote, and acted, "It's a journey film, it's a fable—it's a lot of things to me."

KWIK STOP is a convenience store in rural Illinois where Didi (Lara Phillips)

encounters Lucky (Gilio), an aspiring actor who's heading to Los Angeles to make his break. Bored with her life in the small town, Didi wrangles Lucky into taking her along to Hollywood, and the two of them head off across the Midwest on their way to fame and fortune. Or so it seems, at first. An overnight stay in a motel leads to declarations of love, and the morning after reveals Didi left alone in the room and Lucky nowhere to be found. After Didi encounters lonely barfly Emil (Rich Komenich) at a neighborhood dive, she eventually meets up again with Lucky to start their journey anew, only to stop at a local diner for some food.

More obstacles surface in their journey as it turns out the waitress, Ruthie (Karin Anglin), is actually Lucky's girlfriend whom he left to pursue his acting dream. It becomes increasingly evident that Lucky, whose real name is Mike, has been leaving for Hollywood for quite a while but never seems to get very far. Determined to make it this time, he and Didi break into a few houses to score some gas money, only to land the girl in jail and force Mike to cook up a plan to get her out. The remainder of the aforementioned formula plays itself out to a degree, after these "quick stops" in the journey; however, things move in a direction not anticipated and the resolution is not necessarily a tidy one. Taking place over a year's time, KWIK STOP is a road movie where the characters actually never go anywhere. Instead, the terrain covered is mostly internal, and what binds the characters is a sense of longing for some sort of lasting emotional commitment that constantly eludes them.

Gilio recalls the circumstance that eventually led to scripting KWIK STOP. "I had written another screenplay in which the lead character encounters Didi in a convenience store," he says. "Everybody that read that script kept commenting, 'that one scene was so great and that one character was so dynamic; I'd like to see more of her.' So I decided to go from there and built this script from that scene. I didn't know exactly where the film was going. I just knew what these characters wanted. It wasn't until I was halfway though that I knew where this was going. That's not the most practical and intelligent way to write a script, but that's how I did it, nonetheless."

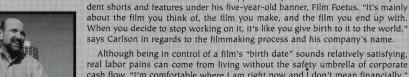
Gilio subverts most of the expectations of the road film, keeping the emphasis on the characters. "It was a real challenge for me, but I worked to make the film democratic. I wanted every character to have equal importance," he describes.

Filmmaking in a No-nonsense Town: D.P. Carlson

Interview by Erin Anadkat

Chicago independent filmmaker David P. Carlson is known for his cut-to-the-chase style and matter-of-fact honesty, traits borne out in his productions. Spoken like a true native and inhabitant of the City of Big Shoulders, Carlson claims to have neither the interest or plans to seek out the studio cusp of Hollywood, preferring instead to make ground in a Midwest city he is proud to call home.

An alumnus of Columbia College, Carlson works freelance as a director, producer, and cameraman for documentaries shown on national networks like Bravo and MSNBC. This supports the production of his own indepen-



Although being in control of a film's "birth date" sounds relatively satisfying, real labor pains can come from living without the safety umbrella of corporate cash flow. "I'm comfortable where I am right now and I don't mean financially," states Carlson. "I would like to be compensated for the work that I do and have an audience [through which] I can be reimbursed for my work.

His most acclaimed Film Foetus project, CHICAGO FILMMAKERS ON THE CHICAGO RIVER, features insights from Chicago film directors and personalities ranging from Hollywood directorial leverage to the struggles of independence. All the interviews were conducted on boats travelling down the title body of water, with each vessel corresponding to its interviewee's position in the film-making world. Michael Mann (HEAT) coasts on a zippy cigarette boat, while indie godfather Haskell Wexler (MEDIUM COOL) rides in a small motorboat. "I was getting tired of people thinking that [filmmaking] was a glamorous profession. They don't realize there's a lot of hard work, a lot of things you need to know. Going to battle is a metaphor sometimes used," says Carlson



Andrew Davis, director of THE FUGITIVE, gets to know the boom operator.

Incorporating interviews with everyone from director John Landis (THE BLUES BROTHERS) and Chicago Sun-Times film critic Roger Ebert to Mayor Richard M. Daley and numerous indie desperados, CHICAGO FILMMAKERS received notice for its take on the Windy City and the creative process of filmmaking itself. Unfortunately, because it featured clips from Hollywood productions, the documentary ran up a \$75,000 price tag for usage rights courtesy of heavyweights like Warner Brothers and Universal. According to Carlson, although he nailed permission waivers from famous actors featured in the clips, and the films' directors wrote letters to the studios asking them to help cut Film Foetus a break, the efforts went unnoticed. In the end, Carlson was faced with the challenge of taking out the clips and re-editing the material to retain the context of the filmmakers' observations, as well as to gain access to distribution routes without being hampered by rights issues.

Carlson ultimately decided to self-distribute CHICAGO FILMMAKERS on an elaborate DVD that is due in early 2004, complete with an interactive menu and a Pulfrich 3-D feature enhancing the rolling river behind his subjects. "It's like a treasure map, an animated Chicago River cutting through different communities," details Carlson about the menu. "Along it are different boats, and you can either play the movie at the mouth of the river, or play

the film at a boat or building." The new, extended version of the film will reinstate personalities who didn't make it into the original hour-long edition, such as Michael Dawson and Ayanna U'Dongo, along with outtakes. "There's more shit in that 80-minute cut, more about being a filmmaker and being an artist, that takes a lot of years to live and understand," the director continues

Through the making of his documentary, Carlson recognized a quote by Wexler as a key moment of clarity in independent cinema. "Independence is what most film artists want to do. It's not up to mainstream filmmaking, it's up to independent filmmaking," says the famed cinematographer in CHICAGO FILMMAKERS. Carlson explains how this redirected his own thoughts, saying that, "I was hung up on the goal of being a Hollywood filmmaker. I realized that's not necessarily what I wanted to be. There are a lot of ways to make a movie. It doesn't have to be dumbed-down through the studio and doesn't have to cost a lot of money, really."

To that end, Film Foetus' upcoming projects include JOHNNY DODGEBALL, about a ragamuffin team of teenagers in pursuit of a dodgeball championship, and DIGGER, a coming-of-age story of a man in his twenties

D.P. Carlson (left) and Jim Sikora, having a good time while taping a scene for CHICAGO FILMMAKERS ON THE CHICAGO RIVER. (All photos: Jessica Feith/courtesy Film Foetus)

that works in a graveyard, frustrated by a small-town atmosphere and with no way out. In particular, DIGGER is based on an incident from Carlson's personal story vault. "In my early twenties, I knew [DIGGER] was a good idea but I couldn't have articulated the material," says the filmmaker. "The farther away from things [you get], it becomes a much more universal story." Carlson himself worked as a gravedigger, hustled newspapers, and labored in a boat marina, cleaning scum off the bottom of boats in order to support himself through school

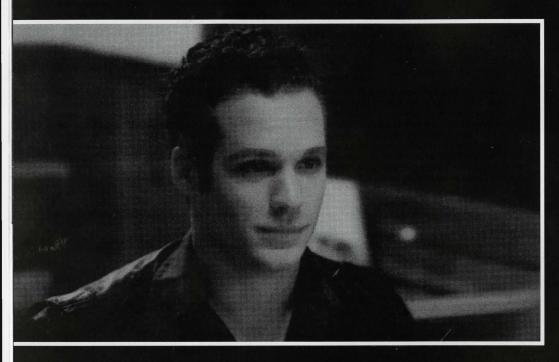
Carlson says he thinks back to another quote from CHICAGO FILMMAKERS by the late Gene Siskel when describing Chicago filmmaking. "I think that the Chicago style of filmmaking, if there is one, is very direct," says the former *Chicago Tribune* film critic in the documentary. "You see that amongst the people of the city, they talk very plainly. I think the filmmaking is very plain and direct ... Chicago filmmakers deal in reality and this is a very

Elaborates Carlson, "It's hard to capture the city. A lot of times, it's just a backdrop and it's not about who's inhabiting it. That's the trick—capturing the people that move and survive and dream. Chicago is the city that works. I like that about it. I like being able to meet a large variety of people. I'd rather sit down and talk with someone that's a bartender or teacher than someone who's in the business all the time. You can pretty much do what you want if you do hard work. You can use [Chicago] as a launching pad or a great place to raise a family and settle down.'

"It comes down to what you define as the main character—is it the one with the most screen time or is it the one [character] who goes on an emotional journey from Point A to Point B to Point C? And, if you define it as somebody who goes from A to B to C, then for the most part, all of the characters are the main character. The only character who's pretty constant and unchanging is Didi, to a certain degree. Her change happens off-screen. She is pretty much a catalyst for change in the other characters."

Together with his producer, Rachel Tenner, Gilio drew mainly from the Chicago area for talent and crew. All of the cast members are veterans of the Chicago theatre community, and a good majority of the crew eventually worked on the typical road movie. "In many ways, it's like a fable, a fairy tale," elaborates Gilio. "The choice of music [highlighted with selections from Roy Orbison, Roger Miller, Elliot Smith, and Sleater-Kinney], the DP's sense of color. I could've gone so many different ways with this; it came down to, 'what kind of film did I want to make?'"

Gilio also has high praise for Phillips (BULLET ON A WIRE; see M-F #4, p. 13. – ed.), who played what proved to be the pivotal character in the film. "That's why I cast her, because Lara, to me, is such an enigma—beautiful and strange and tough," he says. "She reminded me of silent movie actresses Louise Brooks and Clara Bow, and Giulietta Masina in NIGHTS OF CABIRIA in particular—



the first "Project Greenlight" feature film, STOLEN SUMMER (2001). Filming took place in northern Illinois and Indiana over an 18-day schedule. "A lot of being a director is choosing your collaborators carefully, then trusting them to do their jobs," comments Gilio. "There's always tensions and fights on any set, but in general, I think this film was very special to those that worked on it. I kept in touch with a lot of these people and I'll hopefully continue to work with them." After production wrapped, the film then sat for two more years as funding was sought to finish post-production.

The contributions of Gilio's collaborators, including Tricia O'Connell and Rebekah Wiest's art direction, David Blood's photography, and the fine acting by the cast, distinguish KWIK STOP from

independent women who follow their hearts and burn bridges everywhere they go and fall in love at the drop of a hat. And I don't want to rationalize her ... I think a lot of films want to explain why she does this or does that, [earmarking the cause as] 'bad dysfunctional family,' blah blah blah. I'm not interested in that.

"She brought such a masterful quality to the film; choosing her, KWIK STOP became more of a fable. The way we photographed her, the way her eyes are so big like Snow White, the pure white coat she wears in the film, this kind of endless and boundless idealism no matter what trauma and tragedy befalls her. I think Walt Disney is a huge influence on my movie," the director laughs. "I really do. People may think it's crazy, but I think it is, stylistically."

KWIK STOP hit the festival circuit in 2001 and is still screening in festivals today while gathering plenty of critical acclaim. However, no distributor has picked up the film, which is a situation that frustrates Gilio to no end. "The market is a social construction. It is, for the most part, whatever that sells, and who decides what sells is not the consumer," explains Gilio, "[but] a select few cultural gatekeepers that have been involved in the few distribution companies, studios, and theaters. They have a very rigid idea of what sells. I think the reason that KWIK STOP has not been distributed or never will be distributed is laziness and lack of imagination on the parts of those that make those kinds of decisions.

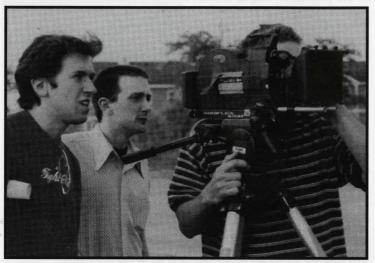
"KWIK STOP has been turned down by several distributors. You add it up; if you believe the market, what it's saying is that there is no audience for this film. My film has no audience at all. Yet, venues like film festivals are showing that there is an audience for this film and films like it. The fact is, the film has shown at several festivals [including Roger Ebert's Overlooked Film Festival in 2002] and has gotten good reviews and feedback, awards and nominations, all the kind of stuff that distributors need to market the film. But, for whatever reason," bemoans Gilio, "distributors feel that this film will not sell, that there is no audience for it. I refuse to believe that. I think the market's a sham when it comes to culture, a total sham.'

Gilio will continue with getting KWIK STOP out into the marketplace. He'll also be seen in David Fleer's NO SLEEP 'TIL MADISON, due next month on video from Vanguard Cinema, as well as Chris McKay's digital feature 2WKS, 1YR, which made its debut at the 2002 LA FilmFest. "Chris is a talented filmmaker," says Gilio. "[His film] was a great experience for me. I grew a lot as an actor." The feeling is apparently mutual, as McKay took on editing chores for KWIK STOP. Past that, Gilio plans to continue shooting in the Midwest. "I think a lot of [Chicago filmmakers] are frustrated with this vision of making Chicago the next New York, the next Austin, the next Hollywood. You talk to all of us and we'll tell you we love to reside in Chicago and to make films here, but there's not the kind of financial support needed; I'm talking about like what Austin has going on. The talent is here, but there's definitely a ceiling. That's why I'm in Los Angeles [to work]—it means I'm going to get the money, I'm going to get the production going, and I'm going to come back to Chicago to shoot." \$

The Parallel View, Pt. 2

In this outing of our simultaneous reporting on simultaneous movie productions, the makers of UNTITLED FEATURE 2 forge ahead while OUR LADY OF SORROW beckons.

Articles by Jeff Sartain and Jason Pankoke



OUR LADY OF SORROW co-directors Dennis Widmyer (left) and Kevin Kölsch (center) watch cinematographer Ben Kutchins line up a shot during the filming of the promotional trailer. (Photo: Rebecca Lopatin/courtesy Kinky Mule Films)

With principal photography on OUR LADY OF SORROW tentatively scheduled for early 2004, writers/producers/directors Dennis Widmyer and Kevin Kölsch have been gearing up to face the challenges of first-time filmmaking with creative solutions. It has been a busy time for the pair, recruiting cast and crew mostly through the Internet, raising funds with a t-shirt sale supported by a best-selling author, and filming a teaser trailer to help bring investors on board the project. The team has also dealt with the sticky legalities brought on by a disgruntled actor taking credit for the film and spreading rumors about David Lynch's involvement. Through it all, they still relish the opportunity to see their vision on screen.

Widmyer and Kölsch have tapped the unbound potential of the Internet at every turn for advertising and publicity, initially posting the OUR LADY OF SORROW script on their Web site in a bold gesture calling for the trust and personal involvement of people interested in the film. However, they recently have had to remove their script much to their dismay. As Widmyer explains, the removal was not an issue of film industry snobbery taking over a piece that they view as a communal artwork, but a legal problem brought on by a criminally slanderous actor.

"We had an actor named Pedro Andrade audition for us last year," says Widmyer. "When he didn't get the part, he took his printed-out copy of our screenplay from the Web site and fabricated a story back in his home country of Brazil. He did around a dozen interviews with the Brazilian press where he claimed that he was working on a new film called OUR LADY OF SOR-ROW, which would be directed by David Lynch. It ended up that he was lying about almost every facet of his story. He had

A new scene: The camera pans slowly across the horizon parallel with the land, a seamless glide marked by naked trees standing sentry on the roadside. Lumps of crispy, dirty snow fill up innumerable pockets littering the abandoned farmland, dropped from the cloudy heavens as a meager reminder of the season in these globally warmed times. Even though miles and miles can still go by while this gentle scenario repeats itself without fail, plumes of exhaust interrupt the stillness as a sturdy pickup truck pulls to the shoulder. Holding a movie camera, a man steps out of the truck to take it all in before calling the shots.

The climate has changed since I first wrote about Indiana native Tyler Tharpe's sophomore feature film, and so have other particular details in his life. The belated DVD release of his first production, FREAK, hit video shelves a year ago, while he has given the current project a fresh working title that still retains its enigma, UNTITLED FEATURE 2. Tharpe and his wife also welcomed their first child into the world during the extended planning stage of UF2, which originally was to begin principal photography last February. All of these details color a 2003 that culminated with the inevitable, as the Innerworld Pictures team finally tackled their first round of location work in early November and will continue until they wrap in March or April of 2004.

"We're filming about 35 per cent of the movie a few miles west of Muncie, Indiana, home of Ball State University where I went to college," says Tharpe, who updated MICRO-FILM on



As this setting for Tyler Tharpe's new film proves, Midwest authenticity beats Hollywood artificiality at any time. (Photo: courtesy Innerworld Pictures)

the progress of UNTITLED FEA-TURE 2 just after his first weekend in production. "The rest of the film will be shot north of Fort Wayne, where I shot all of FREAK. I'm very particular in choosing a location [and] I spent three to four exhaustive weeks scouting loca-

tions, finding what fit the script, and then tracking down the owners to get permission." This attention to atmosphere will undoubtedly paint UF2 with the spare Midwest gothic that also characterized FREAK, and will be captured by returning cinematographer Tony Hettinger while Charles Staley leads the crew in their duties.

Tharpe also welcomed back numerous actors from FREAK for the new film, including Linda McCormick, Amy Paliganoff,

LADY continued from previous page

never auditioned for David Lynch, never met David Lynch, and obviously wasn't starring in any David Lynch movie.

"Furthermore, Lynch wasn't directing anything called OUR LADY OF SORROW. Pedro had taken our script, story, characters ... even shooting locations, and thrown Lynch's name over it while erasing ours," continues the filmmaker. "He then did interview after interview, telling this tight, fabricated story to whomever would listen. He was soon plastered all over the Brazilian press as the hottest thing to come out of their country since [fashion model] Gisèle Bündchen. Since the truth has been uncovered, both Lynch and [myself and Kevin] were contacted to clear things up. The latest news about Pedro is that he supposedly fled the country."

Having cleared the air with Lynch's legal representatives, Widmyer and Kölsch were free to continue work on OUR LADY OF SORROW, but they encountered serious trouble getting investors interested in the project. They realized that they needed more than the existing marketing package, featuring the somber tones of art director Brad Choma. The project needed a distinct look in a dynamic form; it needed something memorable and striking that simultaneously conveyed the depth of the story and talents of the people involved. In short, OUR LADY OF SORROW needed a trailer.

In a move reminiscent of the Coen brothers and the trailer they shot for their first feature, BLOOD SIMPLE (1984), Widmyer and Kölsch set out to assemble their own that would entice investors into putting their money and faith into OUR LADY OF SORROW. Parker Cross, the film's producer, details the process. "The trailer took two days to shoot after a couple weeks of prep," says Cross. "We were confronted with many of the same elements for a longer piece, especially with respect to the SAG [Screen Actor's Guild]. The project came under the low-budget agreement, so we had to pay scale to the talent and go through the entire signatory process, which was quite arduous. Dennis and Kevin spent an inordinate amount of time scouting and securing locations—no easy task given the lack of funding. We spent under \$10,000 to produce the piece, and that was with the free rolls of Super 16mm film I provided that I had been keeping in my fridge for a rainy day."

Securing funding tends to be one of the most difficult tasks facing independent filmmakers, but Widmyer and Kölsch tapped an unlikely source that has helped maintain their project through its pre-production stages. Chuck Palahniuk, the author of Fight Club (1996), Choke (2001), and Lullaby (2002), provided more to OUR LADY OF SORROW than just a thorough critique of the script and a rousing endorsement of the film. (See last issue. - ed.) Palahniuk is taking steps to help ensure that the efforts of Widmyer and Kölsch receive the attention and opportunities they deserve.

One demonstration of Palahniuk's loyalty is the dedication in his recent novel, Lullaby, where he sincerely thanks Widmyer and Kölsch, "who read my stuff when nobody read my stuff." The dedication has helped raise exposure for OUR LADY OF SORROW, with people even asking Palahniuk about the film in packed audiences after readings of his novels. On a more personal level, it has been a very personal affirmation for the filmmakers, as Widmyer explains. "On a larger level, the dedication means a lot to me especially, because of all my hard work on the Chuck Palahniuk Web site," he says. "It's nice to see recognition of that sort from the guy you do it all for in the first place. When Chuck first told me about his plan to include us in the dedications, I kind of thought he was just goofing around. And then, when it was never brought up again, I just forgot about it. It wasn't until around two months before the book came out that a fan e-mailed me with an advance copy telling me that Kevin and I had made the dedication. It was a very cool feeling."

FEATURE continued from previous page

and Becky Niccum, while peppering the cast with fresh faces. "I ran an ad in Indianapolis' local 'free' entertainment paper, Nuvo," he continues. "I auditioned a number of Indy actors, but ironically, I ended up casting two [J.J. Huckin and Michael Ray Reed] from St. Louis for the lead and a supporting role. Two other actors I cast from a play that I saw in Indy, and the rest will be from FREAK. There are way fewer speaking roles in this film, somewhere around 13."

"I was initially contacted by a friend who lives in Indianapolis," begins Huckin, who recently acted in the Kansas carnival drama FIRECRACKER, an underground shocker from St. Louis called ABSOLUTION, and a national commercial for Levitra with former Chicago Bears coach Mike Dikta. "He saw an ad for auditions for this film. I called the number and Tyler had me send my headshot and résumé. I then went out there to audition and the rest is history." Quitting his day job several months ago to devote his attentions to acting, Huckin had the flexibility to make the six-hour-long trek between St. Louis and central Indiana when needed.

As with the nondescript title, the director hesitates to give too much away about the film's content other than likening it to the mood he set in FREAK. "The story centers around some regular people in a very small, rural, isolated little town," describes Tharpe, "and they unknowingly get picked to be used as guinea pigs for a developing technology ... that I really don't want to give

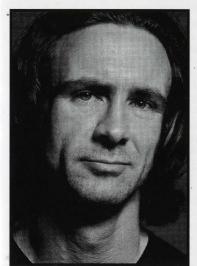
away just yet! The point of the story is to show the effects that it has on the townspeople, especially when they may never find out [the truth] until years later. I got the basic idea from listening to an author named Nick Begich on Art Bell's radio show."

Huckin looked to his hometown roots for insight into his character. "Bryan Boedecker is an antenna repairman," says the lead actor. "He is the type of guy that has the intelligence and knowhow to leave his small town, but he likes it there. He is a nice guy with a simple life." The unassuming Americana of towns like these, clinging onto their values in relative isolation as economic



Actors Linda McCormick, Keelan Rushing, and Becky Niccum go through a scene on the set of UNTITLED FEATURE 2. (Photo: courtesy Innerworld Pictures)

In a more tangible form, Palahniuk asked Widmyer to use all the proceeds from chuckpalahniuk.net t-shirts for the production of OUR LADY OF SORROW. To increase sales of the shirts, Palahniuk agreed to an online raffle; for every t-shirt purchased, a consumer received a raffle number. At the end of October 2002, six winners were chosen to have their names immortalized as characters' names in Palahniuk's Diary: A Novel, released this past August. The author is very enthused about the raffle, saying



Author Chuck Palahniuk (Photo: Chris Saunders/courtesy Kinky Mule Films)

that, "The t-shirt thing is a great idea. I figure that I can help get people interested and involved in Dennis and Kevin's work through my work in this way."

Widmyer, Kölsch, and Palahniuk have been pleased with the initial response to the raffle. Widmyer clarifies that the funding raised by the t-shirts was "not so much a question of a lump sum. The raffle didn't work that way. Rather, there was always a small, but steady, income coming in from the t-shirts that helped keep us afloat this past year. We were able to remain unemployed, yet frugal, for long enough to get the trailer for the film shot and the marketing package into circulation."

At a book signing in Oak Park, Illinois, Palahniuk told MICRO-FILM that he was quite enthused about OUR LADY OF SORROW and happy to contribute his support to its makers. "I figure that you can't help everyone in the world out, but you need to help out the people that you can. That's why I'm doing the t-shirt thing, and why the dedication in Lullaby is for them. If you can help some people get a good start, then they might help others get a good start eventually," says the novelist. "I was happy to see that someone really valued my work early, and that it had resonance for so many people. [Dennis and Kevin] seem like they're really moving ahead well on this project, and I'm eager to see it completed."

Indeed, OUR LADY OF SORROW seems to inspire people to donate their time and resources to see it made. As producer Cross explains, "It is an utterly timely piece—it exists as somewhat of an allegory of morally aimless times and the toll that aimlessness takes on the psyche. Dennis and Kevin hate the word existential, but ... the depictions within the script [of displacement, alienation, and truthfulness], both in terms of setting and character development, are very much derived from a direct, consuming confrontation with human limitations. The inability to [gauge] those limitations go a long way in the unraveling of a person's sanity under the right circumstances."

Kölsch explains that the project's cultural relevance is one of the primary reasons the film needs to be made now. "I feel that the film reflects many of the fears and paranoia that are so relevant today. Which basically means, if you see movies as entertainment or a form of escapism, you'll want nothing to do with this film [because] it may be a little too close to home. But if you want to see movies that deal with timely issues, this film will put you face to face with your fears and, despite the negativity that people seem to see in the script, [give you] a pretty decent outlook on overcoming them." Adding jovially, "It's a self-help film, really." •

- Jeff Sartain

For more information on OUR LADY OF SORROW as the production unfolds, refer to www.ourladyofsorrow.com as well as upcoming issues of MICRO-FILM!

shifts have made their survival difficult, will presumably be preyed upon by the story's sinister element. "I took a lot of inspiration from a few guys that I saw while growing up [and] I really worked on molding a character that is charismatic, intelligent, and funny," notes Huckin.

With the filming of UNTITLED FEATURE 2 underway, Huckin has been pleased with the Indiana team for whom he's brought his persona to life. "Aside from the normal things, the experience has been very good," salutes Huckin. "Tyler has done a lot of preproduction and that has helped a lot; I have been very impressed by him. Everyone on this project really wants this to be a good product. I have never been on a set where everyone involved puts so much into it day after day.

"There are a lot of creative minds at work here. Because we all respect each other, we can talk through the things we are thinking and get to where we want without anger or egos getting in the way," continues Huckin, who singles out Hettinger and Staley for their hard work as well as his fellow St. Louis thespian. "The cast is great also, and one person to watch out for is Michael Reed ... this guy is beyond talented and he raises the bar for all of us," he praises. "He will steal every scene in this movie that he is in!"

Tharpe will trust this well-oiled group to help him keep to his unusual production schedule. "This script breaks down into three different parts as there are three separate story lines that intertwine," says the filmmaker. "We will shoot everything in story line number one, then everything in story line number two, and

so on. I've tried to arrange it so that the third story line we shoot will be the hardest, [including] the big finale with a lot of major set-ups. Obviously, I chose to shoot the easy story line first!"

Hearkening back to Huckin's earlier comments about his detail-oriented director, it seems that Tharpe has no intention on sacrificing quality with this self-financed venture, even if time once again stretches out for a spell. "I have no idea how long post-production will take," postulates Tharpe, "but I'm shooting for it to be completed in time to take to the American Film Market a year from this February. (See p.53 for Robin Peters' adventures at AFM 2003. - ed.) I like to take my time in post, especially since I do everything myself in this stage, but also because I'm a perfectionist and everything has to be just right."

"I have no doubt that this film will be picked up and distributed," notes Huckin, rested up from a weekend shooting in the Hoosier state at the time of this mid-December interview. "Tyler has some good things in place so I am excited about that. I think the best thing I can say about this film and my expectations is that everyone involved is very serious about it. This isn't a group screwing around and making a film in the process. They're treating this with the respect every film deserves."

- Jason Pankoke

Refer to www.innerworldpictures.com for more information on UNTITLED FEATURE 2 as the production unfolds, as well as upcoming issues of MICRO-FILM!



Michael Moore &

America learned a few things while watching BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE,

"I have invited my fellow documentary nominees on the stage with us, and we would like to—they're here in solidarity with me because we like nonfiction. We like nonfiction and we live in fictitious times. Whether it's the fictitions of duct tape or fictitions of Orange Alerts, we are against this war..." — Michael Moore's acceptance speech after winning the Academy Award for Best Documentary, as broadcast 1 on television.

"I was backstage when Moore met with hundreds of reporters and lectured us. 'Do your jobs!' he commanded, before making the ludicrous claim that only 'five people' had booed his speech. Talk about your instant revisionist history." — Film critic Richard Roeper, reporting from the Oscars.

FROM AS EARLY AS I CAN REMEMBER, I was obsessed with 1950s kitsch culture—soda jerks,



chicks in poodle skirts, pompadours and the like—and, as a novice cinephile, considered REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE (1955) the greatest film ever made.

That changed when a journalism studies classmate suggested I see

ROGER & ME (1989), Michael Moore's comedic hybrid of muckraking and guerrilla filmmaking. Immediately, ROGER & ME (or, as it could be renamed, REBEL WITH A CAUSE, MOVIE CAMERA, AND MICROPHONE) took the top spot on my best-of list.

Moore is the rebel in ROGER & ME, and he, too, is enamored with the 1950s, an era in which his hometown of Flint, Michigan, seethed in the American Dream. In the 1980s, however, General Motors closed Michigan manufacturing plants and laid-off much of Flint's workforce,

even as they were making record profits. Moore scoured his home state and filmed his misadventures in trying to convince GM chief executive Roger Smith to visit Flint and see the devastation caused by the plant closings.

Moore's filmed polemics seemed like the rallying cry of a nostalgic middle-class Midwesterner on the outside looking in. I loved every minute of it. Sure, it contained the content flubs noted by Film Comment's Harlan Jacobson and late New Yorker film critic Pauline Kael, whose damning critique is considered by scholarly sects the reason why ROGER & ME did not receive an Oscar nomination. Moore fiddled with the time sequence of GM factory shutdowns, compressing key events to fit the movie's framework.

But that meant nothing to an aspiring journalist and wannabe documentarian watching ROGER & ME for the first time. Jacobson and Kael's nitpickings were overshadowed by the valuation of fellow Midwest native Roger Ebert. "The genius of ROGER & ME is that it understands the imagemanipulating machinery of corporate public relations and fights back with the same cynicism and cleverness," Ebert wrote. In other words, if Moore was lying for fun and profit, he was doing so only in an effort to mimic the lies of corporate profiteers. His ends justified his means.

That was acceptable enough to me.

FLASH-FORWARD TO THE DEATH OF Moore the Midwesterner and the birth of Moore the Celebrity. He no longer lives amongst Flint's masses² but claims to have his blue-collar roots firmly planted. In BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE (2002), Moore announces his topic like he did in ROGER & ME by recalling his childhood in Flint.

"Moore puts on this trait much as he wears his baseball cap," *The Nation* film critic Stuart Klawans points out in the November-December 2002 issue of *Film Comment*. "It's a sign, meant to establish a rapport with the audience by proving he's like us."

Yet, most of "us" will not see our book on worldwide bestseller lists, where Moore's Stupid White Men sat for most of 2002. Nor will we be selected by Entertainment Weekly as an "Entertainer of the Year," or by the BBC as the number one "Newsmaker of the Year." Moore took both titles after BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE became the highest-grossing documentary of all time.

The movie also made history as the first documentary to win Best Original Screenplay from the Writers Guild of America. More than 100 film critics put it on their end-of-the-year Top 10 lists. At the Cannes Film Festival, the jury unanimously awarded Moore their 55th Anniversary Prize and prompted the longest standing ovation in the festival's history. "Almost 20 minutes by my watch count," wrote *Chicago Tribune* film critic Michael Wilmington, "and that says something about both America and the ways we're perceived abroad." As reported by the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, Moore also received the Cannes Prix Educational National award, making his movie a certified part of the French national curriculum.³

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE recently arrived on home video curtailed by more controversy than it saw during its initial theatrical run. Over the last several months, Dan Lyons in *Forbes* magazine, Ben Fritz in the *Orange County Register*, and attorney for the NRA David T. Hardy published articles from which almost every post-Oscar-ceremony critique of the film has derived its information. Lyons, Fritz, and Hardy were the first to accuse COLUMBINE of shortcoming the documentary genre's purported task—telling the truth.

That is, if you believe documentaries are required to be truthful in the first place.

MY CONFUSION AS A Moore fan is not the result of reading the *Forbes*, *Orange County Register*, and Hardy essays. *Forbes* claims that Moore places sole blame for a shooting by a child in Michigan on the work-to-welfare program that prevented the boy's mother from spending time with



Getting to the truth of the matter means that Mike will take aim using whatever mass medium necessary.



There's no question at all that Mike gives a damn.

The Awful Truth

but did the documentary genre pay a price? Investigation by Anthony Zoubek



her child. Forbes' finger-pointing lacks merit because Moore does mention that the mother sent the boy to live in a house where her brother kept drugs and a gun.

An indictment made in the Orange County Register that BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE presents altered footage of an ad run by the Bush-Quayle campaign in 1988 also lacks credence. "Trying to make a point about how radical symbols have been used to scare the American public," Fritz writes, "[Moore] shows the Bush-Quayle ad called 'Revolving Doors,' which attacked Michael Dukakis for a Massachusetts prison furlong program by showing prisoners entering and exiting prison. Superimposed over the footage is the text 'Willie Horton released. Then kills again. This caption is displayed as if part of the original ad." Watching the scene again, I'm not so sure, although Fritz has a point about Moore's legitimately placed caption being incorrect in its meaning. Horton did not kill anyone on furlough; he raped a woman.

In his online essay, Hardy questions why BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE won its Academy Award when it includes staged scenes and facts taken out of context. "[Moore] won the Oscar for best documentary," Hardy writes. "Unfortunately, it is not a documentary, by the Academy's own definition ... One need only consult Rule 12 of rules for the Academy Award: a documentary is a non-fictional movie." Hardy neglects to mention that Rule 12 defines a documentary as a movie that deals "creatively with cultural, artistic, historical, social, scientific, economic or other subjects. It may be photographed in actual occurrence, or may employ partial re-enactment," as long as "the emphasis is on fact and not fiction." The Academy's definition of a documentary (not Hardy's definition of the Academy's definition)* accurately describes Moore's creative toying with factual details.

Mary Ann Hult, executive director of national publicity for BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE, says distributor United Artists went "back and forth" on issues raised by the Forbes article in particular.

"In the end, Michael is able to prove most of the points that Forbes disputed," Hult says. "Therefore, we stand by Michael and we stand by the film ... If you actually go to the essence of Michael's notes and where he came up with his information, it is all verifiable."

I'VE HEARD THE CLAIM MADE BY Moore's defenders that, for all intents and purposes,



conservative media outlets like Forbes and the Orange County Register published their reports to discredit the liberal grounds on which Moore stands. A leftist without political bones to pick, I sought my own answers regarding

key contradictory scenes in BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE.

MICHAEL AT THE BANK

North Country Bank & Trust of Traverse City, Michigan, appears in an introductory BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE sequence. Moore discovers an ad in a local Michigan paper touting that, if you open an account at North Country Bank & Trust, the bank will give you a gun.

Moore goes to the bank, is greeted by a customer service representative, and moves on to an unnamed teller who helps him open an account. Moments later. Moore is handed a shotgun in the bank lobby. He asks another unnamed bank employee, "Do you think it's a little dangerous handing out guns in a bank?" Before the employee can respond, Moore turns his inquiry into a punch line by cueing Teenage Fanclub's "Take the Skinheads Bowling," the tune to which he marches out of the bank.

"That we would give out guns in the bank is very untrue," Helen Steinman, the customer service representative seen greeting Moore in the bank, explains, "Under the account Moore opened, instead of getting interest on a CD, you get a gun. But before you get the gun, there's a ton of paperwork that has to be done. We have to do the background check. There has to be a designated place where you pick up the gun—at a gun shop. You can't just come in here and get a gun." Nor does the bank "just hand you the gun," Steinman adds. "No way, no way. That was very misrepresentative on Moore's part.'

Steinman says the bank "didn't realize Moore would be insinuating what he insinuated. He was only supposed to be coming in and pretending to open up a CD. What the girl who opened up the account really told him was that there would be a background check and that he wouldn't get the gun for six weeks." Regular customers familiar with the account-opening process have asked about the "confusing" sequence in the film. "We just have to tell them that what they saw is not what happened and that's not the way we do business," Steinman adds.

Hult says Moore assured United Artists that the bank sequence "happened exactly the way it was shown in the film. Very early on, I had a conversation with one of the kids who worked at the bank because they wanted to come to a screening of the movie," she adds. "It all seemed true to them then, so I do not know why they would change their position on that now. At the time, they were standing behind it. And United Artists stands behind the film 'as is'-as a documentary."

WMD IN LITTLETON, COLORADO

Moore visits a manufacturing plant in Littleton, Colorado. After panning its exterior and a sign identifying the building as "Lockheed Martin," Moore superimposes a title card that reads "World's Largest Weapons Maker." Inside the plant, Moore interviews Evan McCollum,



....but it's his tactics that leave some critics up in arms.





Mike makes nice during the infamous "open an account, get a gun" sequence. (All photos: courtesy MGM)

a Lockheed Martin public relations representative. McCollum stands before what looks like a giant missile, on the side of which is printed "U.S. Air Force." Immediately, we jump into McCollum's answer to Moore's unheard question.

"This facility, where we are located right now, and two other major facilities where our employees work, are either in or very near Littleton,' McCollum explains, 5,000 employees who work at the facilities have children who attend Columbine High School.

"So you don't think," Moore asks, "[that] our kids say to themselves, well gee, you know Dad goes off to the factory every day and, you know, he built missiles, these are weapons of mass destruction. What's the difference between that mass destruction and the mass destruction over at Columbine High School?"

"I guess I don't see that connection," McCollum answers.

Moments later. Moore explains in voiceover narration that "once a month, Lockheed transports one of its rockets, with its Pentagon payload, through the streets of Littleton, passing nearby Columbine High School on its way to an air force base on the other side of Denver. The rockets are transported in the middle of the night, while the children of Columbine are asleep." What Moore doesn't explain is the difference between rockets and missiles, and that the Littleton Lockheed plant manufactures the former and not the latter.

"We do ship our rockets in the middle of the night," McCollum says when I speak to him. "What [Moore] is implying is that we don't want people to see these big bad weapons. But they aren't weapons. These rockets are communication vehicles and they launch communication satellites for DirecTV and weather satellites. These are not weapons of mass destruction. We make no weapons in Littleton. Moore ignored that.

The rockets are shipped in the middle of the night, McCollum explains, "because these launch vehicles are extremely large. There is a convoy and some 14 other vehicles used to make sure the rockets don't hit anyone or hit any overpasses or overhanging wires, lights, and so on. It would not be wise of us to make that transport during daylight hours when there is more traffic. We do it in the middle of the night when there is nearly no traffic, to save people grief on the highways.'

Lockheed is "probably the largest weapons supplier in the United States," McCollum admits. "I don't know about the world. But our facilities near Denver have nothing to do with weapons. The Titan 2 [weather satellite rocket] I was standing in front of during the interview was refurbished. The insinuation that I am standing in front of a weapon of mass destruction is misleading."

Moore's producers called McCollum and used a "false premise to get in the door. [Moore's producer] said she was from a small production company out of New York and that they were doing a documentary about suburban American

life," McCollum explains. "She said they just happened to be filming in a suburb of Denver. 'We understand you guys are a major employer here, and we saw a news story about a contribution you had made to the Jefferson County School District, which includes Columbine, and, gosh, we would really like to talk to you about that.' Moore's people lied to me to get me to talk to them in the first place.'

TO BOWL OR NOT TO BOWL

In his narration, Moore says the morning before the Columbine shootings was "pretty much like any other morning in America. The farmer did his chores. The milkman made his deliveries. The president bombed another country whose name we couldn't pronounce ... and out in a little town in Colorado, two boys went bowling at six in the morning."

Forty minutes into the film, Moore shows us stock footage of a news conference at which Jefferson County Deputy Sheriff Steve Davis fields questions shortly after the massacre. "What were the suspects doing the morning of attack?" Davis says, repeating a reporter's question. "I told you, that I'd heard they were bowling."

Hence the movie's title. In a "Frequently Asked Questions" section of the official BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE Web site, Moore states that the film's title "is taken from the little-known fact that the two killers. Dylan and Eric, were supposed to be in bowling class at Columbine High School on the morning of the murders. At least five witnesses, including their teacher, told the police that they saw one or both boys that morning at the bowling alley for their first-hour class."

Kate Battan of the Jefferson County Sheriff's Department was the lead investigator on the Columbine shootings case. She says if Moore "wants to take one or two or three reports out of thousands of pages of documents and say, 'see, it says right here that they were in bowling class that day' and call that a 'fact,' then he can do that.

"I think that, in any documentary, there is going to be a bit of artistic license," Battan adds. "Otherwise, it would be kind of a boring movie. There are some things that we dispute, like Moore's claim that [Eric and Dylan] went to their bowling class that day. Initially, some of the Columbine students who were interviewed said they saw the boys in bowling class. We later found out, through talking to the [bowling class teacher] and through other evidence, that we do not believe Eric and Dylan were in class that day."

Battan went and saw BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE as an "average Joe Citizen. I did not go there as an investigator with the Sheriff's Department to see whether or not the movie was accurate. Because it's Michael Moore's movie. The First Amendment—I believe in it. Michael Moore can say whatever he wants."

Battan says she has "no interest in starting a war" of words with Moore over the discrepancy. "I don't want to get the Columbine victims' families angry at us," she continues. "I don't want to get Michael Moore angry at us. It's been four years. We're tired of everybody being angry at us. Whether or not [Eric and Dylan] were in bowling class that day is not the point of the movie. If someone thinks that was the point of the movie, then they didn't get it. I got it, and I agree with it."

I DO, TOO. But the steps Moore takes in presenting his metaphors as "facts" are troublesome. Before talking to Battan, I thought "artistic license" was a film director's right only in adapting plays, books, and fictionalized accounts of reality-based events. The documentary genre includes a core of truthfulness under which, I would think, "artistically licensed" misrepresentations would be intolerable. What is the difference between a scripted movie and a documentary if both types of films are allowed to construe the source material into something that is inherently fictitious?

DECIDING WHAT CONSTITUTES TRUTH in any Moore movie depends on "what one decides con-



stitutes 'truth' in any documentary," says Dana Benelli, assistant professor of theatre at Illinois State University. Benelli taught documentary film courses at ISU, Clark University in Massachusetts, Tulane University in New

Orleans, and Carleton College in Minnesota over the last nine years, and has authored numerous articles on the relationship between Hollywood and documentary filmmaking.

According to Benelli, truth in documentary may be split into two categories. "There is literal accuracy, as in the documentarian has all his facts straight," Benelli explains. "And then there is 'core truth,' that which is found in the significance of the situation being represented, through which errors in detail may not undermine the point of the documentary as a whole.

That is one of the things I am inclined to think about in BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE," Benelli continues. "Moore may be significantly warping some of his details, but the question about whether his basic take on the culture of violence in American society remains valid.

"Another issue, however, is the credibility of the person making the movie," Benelli explains. "That's where factuality and accuracy come to a head. To what degree are we inclined to believe Moore and what he is preaching to us? Is he making a straight documentary? If he is, then, yes, he is breaking the rules by not giving you a straight story on the details he's calling your attention to.

'But I begin to wonder if Moore is just a prankster, if he is in fact playing the documentary form and making fun of documentaries by doing something that looks like a documentary to make his points," Benelli continues. "From your research, you know that there are these nuances to the literal process of opening the bank account and getting a gun. Moore might tell you those nuances are too complicated to put in the film and that he represented the bank to make a point about his worldview. Is it possible, for example, that we live in a society where we can walk into a bank, open an account, and walk out with a gun?

"Moore might be asking us as a means of making us question how far our society has gone."

IN A CHICAGO SUN-TIMES ARTICLE assessing Oscar nominees, Roger Ebert predicted Moore would take the Best Documentary prize despite "recent charges that [Moore] made up stuff ... [Because] somehow you know, watching it, that Moore has granted himself poetic license."

Moore responded to Ebert's remarks with a letter, published in Ebert's biweekly "The Movie Answer Man" column. "I am sorry you had to reprint Internet crap in your column today,' Moore wrote. "It is a lie to say anything but the following ... I was handed that gun in that bank and walked out with it and have it in my possession to this day. I never had to go to any gun shop. The scene happened just the way you saw it. I'd be happy to send you all the raw footage....

"The Columbine shooters did go to the bowling alley that morning. I can supply you with the five witnesses, including their teacher. It's all there in the investigation conducted by the state of Colorado. I don't understand why, after all these years, you would run stuff that wasn't true," Moore the Midwesterner concluded. The "signature" on his letter read "Michael Moore, Flint, Michigan."5

Ebert and Roeper gave BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE thumbs-up on their nationally syndicated movie review show. Roeper recommended COLUMBINE as "a piece of performance art for Michael Moore" who "I don't think [is] always being honest."

Roeper elaborates on his critique after I write him regarding Moore's accuracy. "The very act of filming something or someone alters the event itself," Roeper says. "There's no such thing as 'pure' documentary. However, some documentaries are more authentic than others. Moore, as he always admits, clearly has an agenda and is not interested in presenting a balanced look at the facts. He's interested in advancing his cause and creating humorous situations, often at the expense of the feelings of others, and certainly at the expense of the truth.

"BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE is an entertaining non-fiction film," Roeper adds. "I'm not so sure it's a documentary." The film critic stands by his recommendation of the movie because "it does present some legitimate arguments about America's gun-mania, and it is an enjoyable piece of work as long as the audience understands that the filmmaker is a political satirist. [Moore is] not a journalist."

Not so, says Dann Gire, Chicago Daily Herald film critic and president and founding director of the Chicago Film Critics Association, which gave BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE their Best Documentary award at the annual Chicago Film Critics Awards. Gire says Moore practices what the late Northwestern University journalism professor Curtis McDougal called "interpretative reporting," supporting his information through a point of view that engages an audience on a narrative level.

"I recall what [director] Bernardo Bertolucci told me back in 1987, [that] 'Movies are lies that tell the truth," Gire explains. "I suppose Moore's documentary is a movie that uses facts to the tell the truth, but does it not by simply relating information, but by telling us a story.'

"Every documentary has an agenda, whether it be to cause attention to something like Moore does or adopting a certain point of view," explains Erick Childress, movie review contributor to UR Chicago magazine and HollywoodBitchSlap.com. "I think in this day and age, the whole concept of documentary has to be questioned. Look at any documentary and you can find staged incidents. Are we really to believe that filmic documents just happen to always be at the right place at the

"I wouldn't really consider Moore a journalist, as that's a title I believe has all but been eliminated in this tabloid, 'I will check the facts later' society," Childress continues. "He deals in the exaggerations and the ironies about the facts and life in general. I don't necessarily have a problem with his camera-in-vour-face tactics. What I do have a problem with is when he doesn't know when to quit."

Gire says he accepted Moore's staging of scenes as "dramatic devices to push the story along, give it some transitions and provide that narrative framework to make his film fascinating and revelatory, on a level beyond the surface facts.

"[A] mere collection of facts conveyed has limited power to attract or hold viewers," Gire explains. "[To] tell a real story with a real protagonist in it is to give his collection of facts a personality and a motivation for viewers to be curious about what happens next."

"Whether the facts were twisted or not, the structure of the film plays like a great mystery," Childress adds. "Getting down to the root of the problem is Moore's goal and if he plays hard and loose with the facts to make a cohesive story, much the way bio-pics and true stories fudge with the facts for dramatic purposes, then that's what he'll do."

"I did see a private screening of [BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE] in late June [2002]. Very flawed filmmaking, but I don't mean dishonest documentary technique when I say that. I don't know the 'truth' on this one. I do know that Mike hugs too many victims, ambushes Dick Clark about bullshit, and draws an absurd inference about Columbine, Littleton, and the heaviest day of

bombing in Kosovo.... "My comments [from the book Spike, Mike, Slackers & Dykes—that in filmmaking, you can either start with fiction or documentary, but whichever you start with, you inevitably find the other] still represent my feelings about the 'greater truth' that ROGER & ME represented. I stand by that position years later, although Mike's self-aggrandizing ways have gone from bad to worse to truly egregious." - John Pierson, in an e-mail to me regarding the "greater truths" of BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE. Pierson worked as Moore's producer's representative and sold ROGER & ME to Warner Brothers for \$3 million.

IN DECEMBER 2002, THE NON-PROFIT International Documentary Association polled



2.000 documentary filmmakers and compiled a "Top 20" list of the greatest documentaries of all-time. The roster included NANOOK OF THE NORTH (1922), TITICUT FOLLIES (1967), and THE THIN BLUE LINE (1988). BOWLING

FOR COLUMBINE, the youngest movie on the list, was ranked number one.

Sarah Jo Marks, programs coordinator for the IDA, says BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE made it to the top because "it's the documentary that's on everybody's mind right now. [T]hat's what I've been telling people who've had questions about why the film topped the list. Everyone has just seen the movie. If we tabulated the list in a year, we don't know what changes there would be or how anyone would track it.'

Aware of the film's content contrarieties, Marks would not comment on behalf of the IDA regarding the organization's criteria for what makes a movie a documentary. "What I would feel comfortable saying is that BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE is still a movie. Any documentary is still just a movie," Marks says. "It still requires editing and writing and lighting and all of the same elements a fiction film requires. In that way, you can manipulate the film to generate an audience's response the same way the music swells in-TITANIC and GONE WITH THE WIND and you cry. That same emotion can be created

Life After "The Awful Truth"

Commentary by Anthony Zoubek

Several months after "Michael Moore & the Awful Truth" first ran in central Illinois' Daily Vidette newspaper, I am still obsessed with the moviemaker because of the intellectual challenge his filmography represents to documentary enthusiasts. Recently reviewing Moore's maiden voyage, ROGER & ME, I flashed back to the first time I saw the film and knew it was something special. Taking another look at Moore's most recent op-ed piece, BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE, I went cross-eyed trying to figure out why the director would leave his valid observations in the shadows of his self-aggrandizing ways. Discussing with other cinephiles how and why Moore went from Point A (middle-class Midwestern muckraker) to Point B (hopeless egotist whose next "homegrown" documentary is being funded by Mel Gibson and Disney) rekindles my simultaneous infatuation and infuriation.

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE spent more than 10 months in theaters—a remarkable time span, especially for a documentary that played as many shopping mall venues as art houses. To put that in perspective, THE MATRIX RELOADED spent about 14 weeks in first-run theaters. The summer's biggest blockbuster, FINDING NEMO, spent 12 weeks in theaters before it wore out its box office breadth. COLUMBINE stayed in theaters for more than 44 weeks and was still playing some first-run theaters at the time of its home video release in August.

I originally wrote about BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE last April at the height of Moore mania, when the article was cited at Moorelies.com, Moorewatch.com, and by attorney and COLUMBINE critic David Hardy on his Web site HardyLaw.net. In late July, I was quoted as a main source for a joint piece by The Wall Street Journal and New York City Journal called "Michael Moore, Humbug." (Humorously, for all their fact checking, The Wall Street Journal

attributed my article to the "fictitious" roving reporter, Anthony Zoubeck.)

I mention these praises not to replicate Moore's patented self-commendation, but rather to make my point. When a major publication like The Wall Street Journal "gets in on the action" by quoting a student newspaper's fledgling wannabe film critic, the topic of choice must be hot. As I write this sidebar, THE VIEW talk show is featuring a plethora of comedic political commentators, from Al Franken to Dennis Miller to Bill O'Reilly. Moore's name has come up (and, in O'Reilly's case, been fiercely deliberated) in each and every interview.

With BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE and ROGER & ME now available as special-edition DVDs (released on the same day, no less), I watched both back to back. My confusion as an "on-the-border-of-being-a-former" Moore fan continues.

Both DVDs contain running optional commentary tracks. On ROGER & ME (Warner Brothers), we get Moore himself. On BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE

(MGM), we get Moore's interns-purportedly a means for Moore to honor "the little people" involved in producing the most fiscally successful documentary ever made.

For every insightful, charismatic, noncombatant remark made by Moore on the ROGER & ME commentary, there are three or four asinine, nitwitted, and arrogant remarks made by Moore's interns throughout the course of BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE. Hearing Moore discuss4 ROGER & ME awoke the original passion I had for documentary filmmaking as a result of seeing this movie so many years ago. Hearing the director allow his unintelligent, sometimes unintelligible college-age cronies make fun of every person in COLUMBINE with a view opposing Moore's made me want to feed that DVD to my girlfriend's cats.

The BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE disc is a missed opportunity for Moore to have defended the sequences maligned by critics. What we get instead are socially retarded production assistants who make fun of the looks and speech patterns of anyone who crosses Moore's camera with a right-wing point of view. The interns mimic Lockheed Martin's Evan McCollum, for example, because he has the "speech pattern of a robot."

Piggybacking the interns' tasteless lame attempts at humor are some equally troubling extra features on the DVD. In one, we get a collage of Moore award acceptance speeches. In another, we watch Moore hug more Columbine victims after he returns to Colorado six months after his film's release. In the wake of this presentation of BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE, every wonderful aspect of the ROGER & ME package seems shallow, null, and void.

Moore and I share similar political values. But, to use a baseball analogy, the BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE video makes me want to trade him to the other team.

"Please, give us your Bill O'Reilly and Dennis Miller for our Michael Moore. His stats were pretty high 15 years ago. All you have to do to tolerate him is to ignore his last season's worth of errors. What's that? Nope, sorry, no way in hell! We're not trading Al Franken."

through documentary manipulation."

Declaring BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE the greatest documentary of all time was not the first Moore-related controversy prompted by the IDA. Last November, the organization's International Documentary magazine published "Lock and Load," a two-page love letter to Moore written by IDA Board of Directors member Michael Rose. "Moore believes that when documentarians start with a rigid thesis and plan, it's a prescription for creating boring films," Rose writes. "To him, 'It's more interesting if I let you in on my sort of sense of discovery than if I start the documentary with a set agenda.""

That quote in particular caught the attention of Albert Maysles, the documentary filmmaker who, along with his late brother David and filmmaker Charlotte Zwerin, co-directed SALESMAN (1969) and GIMME SHELTER (1970). Both titles appear on the IDA's list and are considered by scholars to be two of the greatest movies of any genre ever made.

Maysles responded to Rose's article with a letter published in International Documentary's

More than any other filmmaker, Moore has his mind set-and closed-from the start with the same dishonest and unethical method in hand: out to get his subject(s) by any means," Maysles writes. "It's a shame Rose failed to let us in on the deceit and what might be the public's love for Moore's shenanigans."

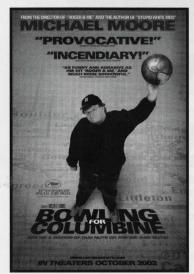
Moore's films in general "are dishonest," Maysles explains after I call him regarding his letter. "He is out to get people and he uses people to prove his points rather than allowing his cameras to discover what is really going on. Left to its own devices, the documentary filmmaker, in seeking the truth, has to be open-minded. Moore's mind is closed to everything but his own preconceptions.'

Maysles admits he has not seen BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE for fear that he "might start believing some of Moore's total fabrications." If he did see the movie, Maysles says he might actually agree with Moore's politics. "But I will never agree with his methods, because they are shameful," Maysles explains. "An honest documentary would have been more ethical and, maybe by representing two sides instead of just one, Moore might've been able to convince those who don't already share his views to put down their arms.

"Instead, he just waits and watches people damage themselves in front of his cameras," Maysles continues. "He has made a statement in print that you don't always have to put people up to damaging themselves. That if you are watchful enough, they'd do you the favor by doing themselves in. Is that the way you make a truthful film? By being cynical? Is it a proper purpose to try and merely 'do people in'? The guy brings us back to Nazi Germany, for Christ's sake. Michael Moore may not have the same purpose as Adolph Hitler, or 'The Protocols of Zion,' but he does use the same methods."

A true documentary, Maysles says, is created when the filmmaker takes on events that are "going on now, when the filming is taking place, because then you don't need a reenactment, and you don't need a narrator or host. Moore is not finding the truth, because he is using all those things to create the truth.

That fucking fraud," Maysles continues. "I should not even dignify his low-grade documen-



tary filmmaking with the word 'truth.' Because, to the extent that a filmmaker has biases and exercises them, he is not seeking the truth. And what he ends up with cannot and does not constitute anything but his own, one-sided agenda. What fucking good is a documentary, no matter how you define the genre, if it doesn't give us unfiltered knowledge of the real world? What good is knowledge of the real world if it is not even truthful?"

Maysles says it is possible to produce a truthful documentary. The process, however, requires filmmakers to submit themselves to self-control. "If you control events, your film is no longer capturing reality," he adds. "Obviously we are all human beings, and there is a very human limitation on our ability to seek out and record the truth. But some filmmakers can get closer to it than others. They do so, however, by not using Moore's methods. If they did, their films would do nothing more than conform to their biases."

The shift from healthy skepticism to total cynicism in documentary filmmaking is to be blamed "on our culture's new philosophy that you just can't know anything for sure. And that spurns one of the saddest things [in documentary filmmaking], and that's a filmmaker who, out of a sense of modesty or cynicism, looks at their own documentary work as a process of manipulation. He who believes that it is the job of a documentarian to carefully select what the audience sees because you can never really tell the truth anyway, so why even try telling the whole truth at all. If that's how a filmmaker feels about it," Maysles reasons, "[and] if that's the low regard they have for what they are doing, then they should be in some other business.

"Our culture is so confused about what the truth is and our ability to arrive at it," continues the veteran filmmaker. "Most believe in the cynicism, and that you can't ever tell the truth. Others go overboard on the other end of the spectrum and believe that we all tell the truth. Those are the people going to BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE in droves, further buying into it because it's now the biggest documentary of all time and is winning awards everywhere.

"But that's the hypocrisy," Maysles concludes. "It's the judge who turns to the witness-to-be and says, 'Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?' I've yet to hear of a single witness who has answered, 'Look, Mister. I'll do the best I can."

MOORE INTENDED to shoot BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE on celluloid. Midway through the



production, the choice was made to switch to highdefinition video. Enter cameraman Michael McDonough, who previously worked with Maysles and shot many Moore-directed music videos. McDonough estimated that he

"roughly 60 percent" of the footage seen in the final cut of COLUMBINE.

"Moore is a genius," McDonough says when I speak to him in March of last year. "He is a fantastic filmmaker. Shooting many of the film's

interviews—[Charlton] Heston, Marilyn Manson, all of the Columbine footage—was very moving. There were moments where I was crying into my [camera] eyepiece."

McDonough admits "there is re-creation in BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE. There are cutaways and there is some B-roll footage." These elements exist because "that's just the way documentary films are shot. Basically it's there to make the story more understandable, to give the editors options so that they could cut a film that made sense. These are well-understood techniques. They are not in every single documentary you'll see, but probably nine out of every 10 documentaries honored [in 2002] had some form of re-creation in them."

McDonough filmed Moore's interview with McCollum and does not see how the scene falsely imputes Littleton's Lockheed plant with the production of WMD. "Do you have proof that Lockheed Martin doesn't make weapons of mass destruction?" McDonough asks. "[What about] the stuff that Lockheed ships overnight, secretly, to various parts of the country? I am not saying one way or the other what those materials are, but find me proof that they don't make the stuff that goes into America's nuclear missile program. That's what people should be looking into.

"Lockheed Martin-maybe not [in Littleton] but at other [plants]—does make parts that go into these weapons, and that is a valid point for Michael to make," McDonough explains. "I was standing there, as cameraman, party to the interviews as they took place and I filmed them. From that perspective, I do not feel any [subject] being questioned was misrepresented. It is all a process of filmmaking.

"You should write your story about how people are being killed by guns," McDonough continues. "Write a story going after Heston for going to various cities for political reasons right after those cities experience gun-violence-related tragedies. Don't write your story about some cutaways.'

It is naïve for viewers to think that, because they saw it in a documentary, it must be true, McDonough says. "Because there is no truth," McDonough continues. "There is only your own perception of things. [Documentary filmmaking] is not about going out and saying, 'I am going to make this film and it is going to be true.' It is about having ideas on a subject and presenting those ideas to an audience. BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE is Michael Moore's idea of what is going on with gun control and what is going on in American society."

Filmic documents are filtered through the potential biases or agenda of their makers, McDonough says. "Or at least, it's better to say that than to say that because it is in a documentary, it represents your truth. It can't.

"It's someone else's truth." 🗘

FOOTNOTES

¹Moore changed his speech—most notably in removing the made-up term "fictitions"—in the text version posted on his personal Web page. The tweaks are minor. Regardless, they represent revisions to what he truthfully said.

²There is some question as to whether Moore resided in Flint at all. I spoke to one of Moore's high school classmates, who asked to remain nameless. Moore actually

went to school in Davison, Michigan, 25 miles east of Flint. "Growing up in Davison and telling the world you are from Flint is like growing up in Bloomfield Hills and saying you are from Detroit," Moore's classmate said. "It just doesn't cut it."

³The special edition DVD of BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE comes complete with a teacher's guide.

⁴On his Web site, Moore jokingly claims he convinced Lockheed to let him into their plant by "[threatening] them with bombing.

⁵Moore the Celebrity admitted in a Fox News Channel interview that he currently resides in a \$1.9 million New York home.

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Originally serialized on April 3, 10, and 15, 2003, on the Web site of The Daily Vidette, Illinois State University, Normal, IL



Interviews by Jason Pankoke



(Top) Irascible indie filmmaker Morty Fineman (Jerry Stiller) and assistant Ivan (Max Perlich) consider their next move. (Above right) Morty calls for "Action!" on the set of MS. KEVORKIAN, and he means it! (Right) A casual home-cooked dinner by Paloma Fineman (Janeane Garofalo) allows Morty to get to know banker Todd (Jonathan Katz) a bit better. (Photos this page: courtesy Arrow Films. All other photos: courtesy Stephen Kessler/ United Lotus Group)

He's a maverick, an entrepreneur, a movie *artiste* with a rebel yell that rings loud and clear over southern California where he makes his living and his home. Without a doubt, you've seen at least some of his 400-plus epics, for they are as ubiquitous as they are unavoidable. In BROTHERS DIVIDED (1969), the drama of conjoined twins' conflicting proand anti-war stance plays out against the Vietnam War. In BALD JUSTICE (1973), the toughest chrome-dome pistol-packers this side of Yul Brynner take on the drug lords. And with WORLD WAR III II (1978), the roman-numeral sequel is invented in the immediate shadow of the modern Hollywood blockbuster. If nothing else, THE WHOLE STORY OF AMERICA (1992) proves that the man has literally tackled it all during a three-decade career in the trenches.

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What's even more impressive about Morty Fineman is that he's merely a fiction, a rambunctious amalgam of every stogie-chomping, penny-pinching impresario who has ever stepped behind the camera and dropped a tall tale in the laps of movie-going America—and not exclusively the ones on the silver screen. Real-life independent filmmakers Stephen Kessler and Mike Wilkins have immortalized Morty's purported life and times in THE INDEPENDENT, a lovingly satirical salute to the old-school directors of whom very few are still left. Finally available on DVD after a protracted big-city release by Arrow Films, this ambitious hybrid of mockumentary and comedy stars Janeane Garofalo, Max Perlich, and Jerry Stiller as the irrepressible Morty.

Indeed, THE INDEPENDENT takes liberal cues from Morty's would-be contemporaries, including legendary B-men Roger Corman, Samuel Z. Arkoff, David F. Friedman, and Andy Sidaris. "We had the Morty Fineman character rolling around and had written a short film script," says screenwriter and co-producer Wilkins, who originally fashioned a P.T. Barnumtype persona with Kessler. "We thought, he's a good character, [and] because it's going to be a low budget and we had these ideas for film parodies, that we could get a lot of production value by shooting the main parts as a documentary and then the film parodies big if we needed to."

The filmmaking history that informs Morty actually leaned a lot heavier on Wilkins' shoulders due to his love for fringe culture, as seen in his published work such as *Roadside America* (with Jack Barth and Ken Smith) and *Sex and Zen and a Bullet in the Head*. "Stephen doesn't really have an affinity for [B-movies]," he explains. "He likes A-films and art films and so on. I *do* have an affinity for them; I did put in a lot of hours watching the movies before we started to do this film,"

citing Something Weird Video's exploitation trailer compilations and Jim Morton's classic Re/Search volume *Incredibly Strange Films* as influences. However, it took the recognition of the aforementioned Corman's formula to ultimately propel the approach to Morty's art and madness.

"Back in 1994 or 1995, Mike and I watched a documentary about Roger Corman called HOLLYWOOD'S WILD ANGEL," begins Kessler, who worked at the Los Angeles production company PromiseLand while making THE INDE-PENDENT. "In the documentary, Jonathan Demme (THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS) says that Corman believed that all films should have some sex, some action, a car



The Farrelly brothers' STUCK ON YOU has nothing on BROTHERS DIVIDED, Morty's wartime critique wrapped in conjoined camp.

chase, and a slight social message, so we thought it would be funny to turn that order around. Originally, the film was meant to be more of a KENTUCKY FRIED MOVIE, like a whole bunch of trailers connected with a really thin story." Instead, Kessler and Wilkins opted to downplay an assault of "tits, ass, and bombs"—the unwritten Fineman Films credo—in lieu of addressing the strained relationship between Morty and his daughter Paloma (Janeane Garofalo) along with the host of slightly off-center dreamers that they associate with.

After a series of financial flops, including the indulgent \$40 million art film THE WHOLE STORY OF AMERICA, Morty talks Paloma into rejoining the family business to help develop a hot property as well as dredge up a secondary revenue stream for his massive back catalog. Their bank, led by mousy Todd (Jonathan Katz), offers to alleviate Morty's loans by purchasing his entire library (by the pound!), but of course the old-school schlockmeister will have none of that. Wearing pride and determination on his sleeve like Mickey Rooney, Morty and his loyal movie crew relocate their offices to a run-down motel with a pool—because the director can think better when he floats-and subsequently hit up every avenue imaginable in hopes of striking gold.

While his boyish production assistant Ivan (Max Perlich) and secretary Iris (Priscilla Taylor) call practically every film festival in the book, Morty struggles with the concept that will put him back on the map and into the black. A newscast grabs his attention one afternoon, reporting that the infamous serial killer William Henry Ellis (Larry Hankin) has finally been apprehended. Knowing that the sensationalism around this case might just net him investors were he to secure the rights to the killer's story, Morty sees dollar signs while Paloma goes along with the scheme in utter disgust. All the while, a pair of DV camera-toting filmmakers (roles filled by Kessler and Wilkins themselves) sporadically tag along with Morty to interview him for their own documentary.

As Morty pursues the Ellis rights with the help of a too-jovial gift horse almost destined to buck at the wrong moment, Ivan encounters a representative for a first-time film festival in Nevada who turns out to be quite interested in Morty's work. This opportunity eventually serves as a needed escape for Morty once the bottom inevitably drops out, but more importantly offers him downtime during

1

which he can look at his accomplishments with a renewed sense of self-worth. Even this creature of curious habits will earn a bittersweet redemption.

"Stephen went out trying to find a feature to do, and then he finally got VEGAS VACATION," says Wilkins, who first worked with his creative partner on the Oscar-

winning 1991 short BIRCH STREET GYM. "VACATION did fine at the box office, but it was a studio comedy and there's a formula you have to follow." However, directing the fourth entry in the Chevy Chase/Beverly D'Angelo series didn't necessarily win Kessler any studio-backed clout to do a subsequent project more to his liking. "Instead, he got scripts for the new Sinbad movie and so on," bemuses Wilkins, "so he said, 'Well, let's just do one ourselves.'"

"I wanted to do something I had more control over," confirms Kessler about his decision to produce THE INDEPENDENT independently. While Wilkins helped raise the majority of the budget through clients of the money management firm where he worked at the time, the duo enlisted veteran VEGAS VACATION producer Jerry Weintraub (OCEAN'S ELEVEN, THE AVENGERS) as an executive producer on their film. "Once we rented the office and formulated the limited partnership to get the money and started going forward, a lot of things happened," adds Wilkins, who coined the production entity United Lotus Group with Kessler to make it sound like an Asian holding company. "And once [actors] see that 'Oh, you're serious, you've got A, B, and C in the movie,' they say, 'Damn right, I'll do it!'"

Jerry Stiller-presumably, "A" in the aforementioned formula—makes the lead role of Morty Fineman his own after a career of supporting roles in television (SEINFELD, THE KING OF QUEENS) and film (HAIRSPRAY, ZOOLANDER), not to mention his theater work and a longstanding comedy partnership with wife Anne Meara. "I knew Ben Stiller and I asked him to make the introduction," says Kessler. "Jerry couldn't have been more wonderful. He is really quite an introspective, emotional guy [that] really gave great thought to who Morty was, and there are many times in the film where you see him hit it just right." In fact, the elder Stiller proved on the set that his real-life humility challenged Morty's ego

in stature. "There's a scene where he takes some spaghetti sauce off a stove and goes to drain it," Wilkins points out as an example, "[and] he did it so that his back was to the camera as he turned. We had to say, 'No, Jerry, you're the star! Turn so we can see you!"

"B" would be Janeane Garofalo, the sharp-tongued, raven-haired comic who has appeared in numerous Generation X favorites such as REALITY BITES, WET HOT AMERICAN SUMMER, and MYSTERY MEN. "We had Janeane for four weeks because she was in between films," remembers Wilkins, who fashioned her character Paloma to be the rough equivalent of Hugh Hefner's daughter Christine, who runs the business end of Playboy. "She's been around smaller budgets and knows what to expect. She and Stephen knew each other from doing commercials together." This familiarity allowed the director to entrust Garofalo with shaping Paloma beyond the script, such as suggesting the hideous tanning job doted on by



In the Fineman Films classic, WHAT PLANET IS THIS? (OH MY GOD, IT'S EARTH!), the future may look haggard, but dig that shiny stretch wear!

the documentarians. "I think the insight Janeane brings is intuitive and very observational," says Kessler, "as well as having a finely tuned ear for what dialogue sounds correct."

Eclectic actor Max Perlich (DRUG-STORE COWBOY, GUMMO) earned "C" hands-down with his winning portrayal of Morty's mild-mannered assistant with a big heart, Ivan. "We got very lucky with Max wanting to do the role, because not only was he very good at it but he was very willing to do what we asked of him, shooting at weird times," praises Wilkins. The actor not only entertained a flexible schedule during principal photography, but also returned for additional production a full year later. "We wanted someone with that long-suffering quality to him," adds the screenwriter, to which Kessler adds that "Ivan is one of Max's favorite performances because most people use

him to play the oddest people on Earth."

Landing A, B, and C without much of a problem meant that United Lotus could suddenly fill out their cast with plenty of name talent as well as cult movie stars who ply their trade in Morty-style productions every day. Anne Meara plays Morty's ex-wife Rita, living out of a Rolls Royce in Beverly Hills with chauffeur Jean-Claude (HUNTER star Fred Dryer), while Ben Stiller appears as the agua-spouting lead actor in Morty's sole studio film, WHALE OF A COP, and Amy Stiller as a snobby film professor. Additional bit parts were given to Andy Dick (NEWSRADIO), Bob Odenkirk (MR. SHOW), and Ethan Embry (EMPIRE RECORDS), who alternate screen time with fringe personalities such as porn star Ginger Lynn Allen, ex-Sex Pistol John Lydon, and statuesque direct-tovideo queen Julie Strain. Referring to both cast and crew, Kessler observes that the production "was a mix of people [like Strain] for whom it was really exciting to be in a film that had legitimate actors, and younger people whose only experience might have been in commercials or soft-core porn."

THE INDEPENDENT originally rolled during a 35-day shooting schedule in May and June of 1998, primarily in the Los Angeles area. According to Wilkins, the production ventured twice "out of zone," once to a ranch in Los Angeles County to create footage for THE WHOLE STORY OF AMERICA, and once to the small town of Colfax, California, transforming it into Chappelle, Nevada, the home of the story's climactic film festival. Invaluable help from co-executive producer Lesa Lakin Richardson and co-producer Jack Ziga, both of whom had worked with Kessler at PromiseLand, allowed the show to proceed as smoothly as a low-budget movie can. Eight months of editing then followed with Kessler and Chris Franklin prior to reshoots.

Kessler discovered during the making of this movie that in many aspects, size doesn't necessarily count when it comes to the daily needs and difficulties on the set. "Doing any first film is immensely helpful for doing a second film; they just all build on each other to an extent," says Kessler, who went the opposite path of most rising directors by taking on a scaled-down feature film for an encore. "Once you're on the set, you have a camera and a cameraman and the assistant camera people, grips, gaffers, stylists, and make-up people. It doesn't matter what your budget is, you're making a film and you're trying to figure out what your next shot will be."

"The best time is when you're actually filming," elucidates Wilkins, who was present on the set for three weeks' worth of principal photography. "Everything is ready, the lights are on, and you're going. That's what it's focused on and everybody is quiet and busy doing his or her work. Stephen is in there trying to tweak and control and whatever—that's a very exciting part of it. The rest of it moves way too slow." He admits that, even though he's ready and willing to script another project in the future, he's not so sure about tackling the producer role again. "As the producer, there are always problems to solve just to get back to step one," Wilkins explains. "You've got headaches all day and at the end of the day, if you solve them all, you're not ahead, you're not behind."

Not that concocting the people, places, things, and gags while initially scripting THE INDEPENDENT was a cakewalk, either, for comedy can be a tough act to plan. "People make mistakes in comedy when they try and push their character to be that stereotype where they say, 'He's so crazy, he does this and does that," says Wilkins. "If you portray your character as a human being, then every once in a while you can put something in there that's way out in left field, like the bank wanting to buy Morty's films by the pound. It's ridiculous, but if everything in the film were ridiculous, then it wouldn't be funny or as funny.

"Stephen and I have been writing together since college, so we have a sense of working as a team," he continues. "On the page, it's very easy to see things that are working; what's very interesting is how different it can be on film. I think the main thing you end up doing in editing is taking a joke that was good on paper, but for some reason didn't work in your footage, and figuring out a way to make it work again." Case in point is the aforementioned bank scene, where Morty and Paloma meet with Todd, played by Jonathan Katz. "In a way, there's a music, a rhythm to it, and you have to get people in that same rhythm. Jonathan has a very different rhythm in his speaking, which is why Stephen and I like him as a comedian, but we had to make sure we could get his material in phase with the others because he's acting with them."

Kessler admits that it was tricky not only to nail the jokes in editing, but also to balance the comedic and dramatic aspects of THE INDEPENDENT. "What we tried to do-sometimes successfully, sometimes not-was to mix an emotionally real story with some ridiculously broad

humor," he says. "It was kind of an interesting, experimental part of the film. I don't think I would do another film that varies so much in tone ... the Farrelly brothers (THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY) pull it off sometimes, and of course, Woody Allen pulls it off sometimes. It's something that you don't really see that much in the movies." Despite Kessler's reservations on the finished film's effectiveness in this respect, Wilkins feels that "one of Stephen's best achievements in the film was editing what we had into something that was pretty smooth and coherent.'

However, as editing progressed with Kessler and Franklin, THE INDEPENDENT had trouble coming together when it came to the mockumentary dimension. "What happened was, we had filmed a lot of the movie, and we felt that we were missing something to pull people in right away," says Wilkins. The filmmakers decided to invite some of their own to speak on camera as if Morty was a real person, provid-



THE INDEPENDENT director Stephen Kessler gives Ben Stiller his motivation while filming yet another wacky film spoof, WHALE OF A COP.

ing humor in their mere presence as well as their droll anecdotes. "I started going after guys that were my contemporaries, like Ted [Demme] and Nick [Cassavetes]," remembers Kessler, "and then I called Roger [Corman] and told him Ted and Nick were doing it. When I had Roger, I started going after people that worked for him." Corman, one of the main producer/directors of the famed drive-in outfit American International Pictures and the founder of New World Pictures and Concorde Pictures, is known for launching the careers of numerous A-list filmmakers.

That said, Kessler talked up the cameos to Ron Howard (APOLLO 13) and Peter Bogdanovich (THE LAST PICTURE SHOW) along with Cassavetes (JOHN Q) and the late Demme (THE REF). Also appearing on Morty's behalf are actors Karen Black (HOUSE OF 1,000 CORPSES) and Fred "The Hammer" Williamson. "With Ron

Howard, we'd ask these things [about Morty]," says Wilkins. "And then, right at the end [Stephen said] 'You know, Morty made this movie where bald people are the heroes [in the aforementioned BALD JUSTICE], and we were hoping that you'd say how much it affected you.' Ron said, 'Yeah, okay, I think I got it.' The idea of him taking off his hat at the end, that was just Ron doing it and it was very nice of him!" One notable person who turned down the opportunity to rib Morty on camera was Roger Ebert. "To his credit, he said, 'I'm not going to do that for a film that I might have to review one day," Wilkins notes.

Several recent films dealing with both the subversion of documentary devices and the behind-the-scenes aspect of lowbudget filmmaking certainly influenced where Kessler and Wilkins ended up with their movie. "Do we owe a lot to SPINAL TAP? Yeah, I think we do," the writer jokingly admits in reference to the popular films of comedian Christopher Guest, including A MIGHTY WIND, WAITING FOR GUFFMAN, and Rob Reiner's beloved THIS IS SPINAL TAP. "There is in fact one scene where the words are different, but it's set up exactly like in SPINAL TAP. Morty is talking about his big movie [THE WHOLE STORY OF AMERICA] and we [as the documentary filmmakers] read the reviews to him, such as, 'Two words: shit sandwich." This mirrors the outrageous moment in the older film when Reiner dictates to the past-their-prime heavy metal group Spinal Tap (played by Guest, Michael McKean, and Harry Shearer) some choice drubbing by the rock critics.

"Originally, we were going to make THE INDEPENDENT like a documentary, and voice-wise be very consistent with a true documentary ... in other words, never see characters in [dramatized] situations that you wouldn't see in a documentary," Kessler remembers. Not long after the film wrapped, he watched a certain production about a real-life idealistic auteur from Wisconsin that belatedly put his instincts into perspective. "AMERI-

CAN MOVIE is a great film and actually, when I first saw it, I did think to myself that maybe I should have gone in that direction, a straight documentary tone," pines the director. "[Also] when we were getting ready to shoot our film, some people told me, 'You know what ... you'd be much better off making



A Main Course of Awkwardness. A Side Dish of Truth

Brad Bugos on MELVIN GOES TO DINNER

In Bob Odenkirk's first feature as director, MELVIN GOES TO DINNER, the title character is a man who looks disconnected and uncomfortable with everyone else. His sense of uneasiness is curbed one evening when he opens up to a pair of strangers and a friend (who might as well be a stranger) over a casual dinner. I can see myself in Melvin—distant, lonely, and pained, unable to communicate on any level other than a superficial, knowit-all plane, speaking drivel about things that no one cares about because he is afraid not to speak.

Melvin (played wonderfully by writer/co-producer Michael Blieden) works for his sister Leslie (Maura Tierney), and "works" is a loose term for a fellow who shows up late and sleeps in the office. It's because he doesn't care about his life or most of the things in it, except for an affair with a married woman (Melora Walters) whom he

thinks he needs. However, a telltale look of boredom crosses Melvin's face every time they have sex.

Joey (Matt Price) wants to meet Melvin for dinner so they can hang out and catch up, although Melvin almost calls it off after reluctantly agreeing to it. (Gosh, how many times has that happened in my life? Too many, since I have a terrible time keeping dates or being anywhere that might require me to interact with people.) When Leslie puts him on the spot about his affair, Melvin decides to take up his friend on the invitation despite how uncomfortable he'll feel. Compounding matters are two unexpected guests at the dinner table, Alex and Sarah.

Alex (Stephanie Courtney) is a cold businesswoman who believes in ghosts, yet she only believes in ghosts because she feels guilt for hitting a little boy when she was younger. Her distant air



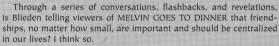
Joey (Matt Price, left) believes that a nice dinner and company will do some good for Melvin (Michael Blieden). Or, will it?

can probably be attributed to her upbringing and her time logging travel miles while alone; I get the feeling that

On the other hand, Sarah (Annabelle Gurwitch) is more down-to-earth and "nutty." She talks freely about anal sex and psychics, which makes her appear a bit light-headed but easy to like. That she and Alex are friends seems

seen each other in a while makes more sense, hinting that their

imperfect relationship has fallen by the wayside.



As for the direction and music score by, respectively, Odenkirk and Michael Penn-both favorites of mine-they work well, although I think MELVIN GOES TO DINNER is a bit more restrained than what I am used to seeing from Odenkirk's writing and acting. His contributions to THE LARRY SANDERS SHOW, GET A LIFE, THE BEN STILLER SHOW, and especially MR. SHOW didn't prepare me for the low-key nature of MELVIN.

I hardly expected jokes, laughter, and obtuse humor from this movie, but I felt that a little more characteristic Odenkirk humor could have helped in the flashback scenes (not to mention less hand-held camera in general). The best elements, outside of the solid dialogue and fine acting during the main dinner scenes, are the small turns by David Cross and Jack Black, along with a very poignant and sad scene between Gurwitch and Odenkirk that ranks as my favorite in the movie. Additionally, Penn's score is perfect for MELVIN because it is equally as sad, lonely, disconnected, and distant as Melvin himself; I wish they had used more of it because it's simply that good.

Would I suggest that people rent MELVIN GOES TO DINNER? Only if you like a movie where people talk and change over its duration. It may be subtle, but I think Melvin's interactions with his dinner party helped him realize that his life and the people he has connected with (or disconnected from) are very important. And when someone as introverted as Melvin can hit you with a so-rude-it's-funny zinger yanked out of left field (which I won't reveal here), you realize that sometimes a stranger can become more that just a dinner companion.

MELVIN GOES TO DINNER. 2003, Digital Video, Color, 83 minutes. A Phyro-Giant Partners production in association with Situation Films and Le Foole Productions/Squaresville Productions. Director: Bob Odenkirk. Producers: Naomi Odenkirk, D.J. Paul, Jeff Sussman. Co-producers: Bob Odenkirk, Michael Blieden. Writer/Editor: Michael Blieden. Music: Michael Penn. Starring: Michael Blieden, Stephanie Courtney, Annabelle Gurwitch, Matt Price, Maura Tierney. Previewed



she has engaged in many more all-nighters than meaningful relationships because of this.

unlikely, but in life you sometimes connect with people that you normally wouldn't. That she and Alex haven't

(Above) Career-minded dinner guest Alex (Stephanie Courtney) joins Joey and Melvin for food, drink, and talk. (Below) Bob Odenkirk, director of MELVIN GOES TO DINNER. (All photos: courtesy Michael Blieden)



this into a narrative." In the end, Kessler held his ground and mixed together disciplines. "I don't know if it was great for the film, but it allowed us to go someplace that we might not have gone if we just wanted it to be like a documentary."

One further element integral to understanding Morty's filmmaking sensibilities is the series of authentic-feeling film clips, purportedly drawn from the Fineman Films archives. Along with moments from BROTHERS DIVIDED, BALD JUSTICE, WORLD WAR III II, WHALE OF A COP (1981), and THE WHOLE STORY OF AMERICA, we're treated to several other speckled, faded, totally far-out treasures. A groovy three-second moment from TEENIE WEENIE BIKINI BEACH (1972) illustrates one little person's gratitude to Morty for giving him the rare chance to act, while a murky clip from the wallflower revenge opus CHEERLEADER CAMP MASSACRE (1984) demonstrates how a trashy gore film renewed Paloma's selfconfidence as a teenager. Social messages seep through the sex and violence more readily in the trailer for THE ECO-ANGELS (1972), and a scene comparison from a cheeky 1975 series that included KENT STATE NURSES and WHAT PLANET IS THIS? (OH MY GOD, IT'S EARTH!) shows Morty's ill-conceived attempt to afford women their historical due on a shoestring. And, well before Martin Scorsese and Mel Gibson modernized the story of God's only Son on celluloid, Morty Fineman created the immortal CHRIST FOR THE DEFENSE (1984).

Other so-strange-it's-true-but-really-itisn't footage crops up in THE INDEPEN-DENT, but as might be expected, even more parodies hit the proverbial cutting room floor during editing. "While he loved them as an artist, Morty thought that nobody went to see Swedish films because nothing happens and people talk, yada yada yada," bemuses Wilkins about one such omission. "So, what he did was, he bought a roll of Swedish subtitles without the film, and then put the subtitles on an old 1970s German soft-porno film. It's topless women and a guy in a bowler hat and they're talking about the mysteries of life. It was funny and it came out well; there just wasn't any room for it." Other lost clips include a prison flick and Morty's filmed last will and testament, which becomes the surprise Italian hit, ARRIVEDERCI, MORTY!

Further characterizing the man, the myth, the legend, and the fiction that is Morty Fineman is the series of crank promotional materials developed by United Lotus to push the film once it was locked and ready for festival play in 1999. Apart from self-congratulatory, full-page advertisements "written" by Morty that actually saw print in *Variety*, the most notable rouse might just be *FinemanFilms.com*, a colorful Internet melange of news briefs, Mortyisms, and the searchable Mortyplex where one can write reviews for any of the director's 427 films! If the crafty dig deep enough, of course, they'll find some legit stills and legal babble to satiate their curiosity.

Those wanting more extensive proof that THE INDEPENDENT itself is the real deal received plenty of chances the following two years. "Our first showing was in March 2000 when we played the Aspen Comedy Festival and people liked it," says Wilkins. "We figured out some things that were dragging, and we showed it again at South by Southwest later that spring in a big theater in Austin. It was packed and we got what I thought was a great audience response!" As the story of Morty



Ivan, Morty, and Julie Strain should know better than to carry a loaded "prop" gun onto the set of something called MS. KEVORKIAN. *Duh*.

Fineman brought down house after house while gathering good notices from Ain't It Cool News guru Harry Knowles and other critics, Wilkins and Kessler learned of an industry myth that caught them off guard. "I thought we were going to walk into Hollywood, the conquering heroes— 'Here's your film!'—and go distribute it. And, we got nothing because nobody cared that much," sighs Wilkins.

"We 'smiled and dialed' to a lot of people, and were rejected by a lot of people," he continues. Getting Wilkins' goat is why such outfits as Miramax, Fine Line Films, and Lions Gate Films, companies that know how to effectively spin their product and turn at least modest box-office, didn't see enough value in this property. "That Warner Brothers didn't want to do the film ... yeah, fine. I totally get it and I don't hold it against them," reasons Wilkins. "But when you get down to a Sony Pictures Classics or a Fine Line or maybe

an Artisan [now part of Lions Gate] that could put it into 200 screens in a week ... I don't understand why they weren't interested." Even armed with raves by Ebert, Richard Roeper, *The Los Angeles Times*, and *The New York Times*, not to mention festival exposure and a commitment from Arrow, the filmmakers couldn't catch a break. "[The studios] all said, 'no means no, we all said no, and we'll say it again, get out of here,'" grouses the screenwriter.

In the end, New York specialty distributor Arrow Films did manage to play THE INDEPENDENT in the major markets during 2002, which despite the struggle is still more than what's afforded most feature films today. "We're just very happy that we were able to get the film into some kind of general theatrical release," opines Kessler. "When you have a small film [playing through a small distributor] from week to week, they don't have that much money to advertise. So, when it gets to a city and not enough people know about it, it becomes frustrating, but in the cities where they did advertise, it did really well." A presale to cable's Comedy Central (which began airing the film last spring) possibly encouraged Arrow to pick up the film from United Lotus, and now that THE INDEPENDENT is finally on DVD, only time will tell how many Morty fans will emerge.

"All in all, I'm very proud of it," says Wilkins. "The humor I think works very well. The serious, tender stuff isn't overly sappy unless you're really cynical, and it looks pretty good. What I really like about any work, whether it's a film, a television project, or a book, are the layers, the details. Somebody has to take the time to set up the detail with as much care as the main action, and I think we did thatdetail so meticulous that you wonder why you bother." Kessler sums up the joys and the pains of fleshing out Morty Fineman's world in THE INDEPENDENT with tongue appropriately in cheek, now having walked the low-budget indie film walk. "Everyone who makes a movie looks at

the movie afterwards and says, 'I shouldn't have done this, I should have done that,' and eventually, you just kind of forget about it," he ponders, "and the nightmares start to go away." \$\infty\$

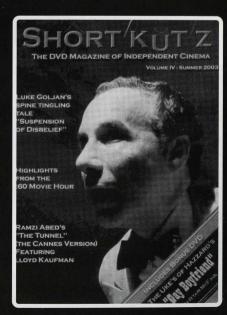
Nichole Wleklinski transcribed the interviews used in this article.





Tomorrow's Independents Today

The first 150 readers who purchased this issue directly from MICRO-FILM received a complimentary copy of the DVD magazine ShortKutz. Founded by Seattle filmmaker Ken Westermann in 2002, ShortKutz is a subscription-based quarterly that is stocked with short films, trailers, professional reels, and interview clips—a primer for unknown filmmakers wanting to get exposure for their work. Check out www.shortkutzdvd.com for more information on current and upcoming issues, and look for the review of ShortKutz IV film THE TUNNEL on p.46. We thank Westermann and ShortKutz for this special gift to our readers, and hopefully we can arrange for similar promotions down the road. However, we can't do it without your readership and patronage! - JaPan











Reflecting on the Success of Filmmaking

After you gather up the equipment and talent necessary for creating your ultimate movie, an Oklahoma professor suggests that you pack along some realistic goals and dreams.

Article by Matt Jenkins

The e-mail exchange was short and to the point. Pat Bishow of Amusement Films wanted to know what festival my documentary screened at before he entered his latest epic. He ended by saying, "I hate entering festivals. It's kind of like paying someone to tell you your movie sucks."

Wow. Pat Bishow, an icon of low-no-budget production with the likes of EL FRENETICO AND GO-GIRL and IT'S A HAUNTED HAPPENING under his belt, a shining beacon of success to the rest of us, commenting in this fashion. Actually, Bishow is to be commended for his continual battle against the dark and evil forces of festival rejection.

This article is about the idea of success. However, before we continue, we must understand what success means. As a moviemaker, I look at success in two ways. One way is financial. Through careful budgeting and spending, will I make my money back and a profit from a distribution deal? The second idea of success is this—has my movie been seen by a large group of people? Have I received exposure for my epic and myself? These two goals of success are not dependent on each

other and as a producer you must decide on goals of success for yourself before you produce any movie images.

SOLIDIFYING THE PRACTICAL IDEA

MIRROR MAN is a campy, fun, no-budget short movie shot on video. The idea for MIRROR MAN came as I was taking a long trip and had lots of time to think. Unfortunately, as I was driving I couldn't write the ideas down so the scenes were rehearsed in my head over and over. They were written down when I stopped.

I wanted to work simple themes into this fun story of an alien's landing on earth. I also included elements of *film noir*, a dark style of filmmaking generally found in old black-and-white movies starring Humphrey Bogart like THE BIG SLEEP and DARK PASSAGE. Careful framing, actor position, and movement within the scene provided MIRROR MAN a quality reminiscent of the film noir style.

As well, I wanted to show the liberation of the female character. This was

depicted by having her boyfriend in the driver's seat of the car in the beginning, followed by a later scene with the two of them arguing about her leaving the car, and then a third one with her at the wheel of the car. She finally retains her position as driver by physically pushing the boyfriend away so she can get into the car and drive.

From the scene sketches, I wrote a detailed script. As a low-budget director, I knew that more detail put on paper beforehand would greatly aid in the production phase. Remember that the one abundant resource you do have is *time*. Time to write, time to refine, time to sketch shots out, and time to put the entire creative process on paper. After all, why should Alfred Hitchcock have been the only director to utilize the creative process on paper?

The script is my road map to cost as well. From the script I can determine props, locations, actors, and time needed for production and post-production. In MIRROR MAN, I purposely kept the number of locations small. Limiting the scenes to three basic locations enabled me to shoot the entire production over a

weekend. This is a good thing, especially if you aren't paying your actors as they tend to get tired and don't want to show up. By using lots of close-ups, I was able to make it look like the actors were in many more locations. However, this takes an enormous amount of pre-planning as I couldn't use the master scene, medium shot, close-up scenario for coverage. If I was lacking a shot or had an unforeseen jump cut, I would have been in trouble.

MIRROR MAN was an easy edit. Again, I worked out everything on paper beforehand. That doesn't mean I avoided editing headaches completely, but I could spend more time on solving the unforeseen problems as my basic decisions had already been made.

RECRUITING THE PEOPLE, PLACES, AND THINGS

Friends and co-workers were enlisted to act in MIRROR MAN, more for their willingness to participate than their acting ability. As a director, it is my role to coax the performance from the actor that I desire for the part. Getting the actor to show up is half the battle. Providing for the actor's comfort is also crucial, especially when the actor isn't being paid. In one production, I worked with an actress who wanted a particular brand of cream soda. I made sure she had a cooler full of cream soda and I received a great performance from her. Be attentive to your cast and crew and you will be rewarded with loyal and hardworking people.

In MIRROR MAN we had only one mishap. While shooting in the country, a bee flew into an actor's eye, causing it to swell up and close. Needless to say, production halted for a couple of nervewracking days, waiting for the swelling to go down so we could determine that there was no damage to the eye. As the director, you must not only be aware of comforts but also try to handle any physical injuries to your cast and crew.

Selecting locations and securing props can be easy or tough. Bishow suggests using what you have around you. The key to this is taking stock of what is around you when you are writing the script and incorporating those settings and props in the pre-production stage. As for MIRROR MAN, in a scene where the weird doctor is examining some fragments the hero found, it would have been nice to show a mad scientist laboratory complete with bubbling beakers and strange machines. Since I did not have access to those kinds of props, I shot much of this scene in close-up with the doctor using an extremely large magnifying glass. This draws attention to the found fragment and adds a comical effect by showing the doctor's eye being distorted by the magnifying lens.

Most of the scenes could have been set anywhere. In one, the mad doctor establishes his sniffing fetish by smelling perfume bottles. It needed to take place in a department store at a perfume counter. However, it was actually shot in a bookstore. Really, all I needed was some counter space! With the addition of perfume bottles on a tray and the skillful use of close-ups to avoid the bookshelves, the mad doctor appears to be in a department store at a perfume counter. Use a little imagination and a lot of close-ups and you will be successful in getting the settings you desire.

CAPTURING THE STORY CREATIVELY

Deciding on equipment wasn't a hard thing to do. I had one camera and a straight cut videotape editor with a simple graphics program and a stack of blank

tapes to shoot with. However, I consider equipment to include people, finances, locations, props, and time needed for production, as well as physical equipment. Use your script to determine specific equipment requirements, especially if you need any special effects or copying of footage from one format to another.

Using a Panasonic Supercam and a straight cut editor limited how I shot MIRROR MAN. While the Supercam has a great lens, it still is only capable of S-VHS quality, so I knew I had to pay attention to lighting, microphone placement, and the avoidance of numerous long shots. The footage looked terrific and held up in editing and copying to third generation. Knowing what equipment you will be using when you write the script will help avoid many problems such as trying to get shots that the equipment is not capable of capturing.

In MIRROR MAN, I had to depict the landing of the alien spacecraft. Knowing I couldn't create a model ship that would look realistic, I decided that no actual craft would ever be seen. I splashed a moving light over my actors while they reacted to what they were supposed to be seeinga spaceship landing. Combined with a space engine sound effect, this visual got across the idea of a descending spaceship to the audience.

I notice that many first-time filmmakers want to produce a picture shot mainly at night. This may be hard to do. For your first picture, pick a topic that can be shot during the day and use the sun as your main source of light. Tricky nighttime shooting can come after you have gained experience using your equipment.

The biggest problem in lighting is contrast, defined as the difference between the darkest and brightest portions of the screen. Video, even digital video, does not handle contrast well. Everything must be evenly lit with little dark or bright areas.





In a panic, use a close up to help reduce contrast.

The beginning sequence of MIRROR MAN takes place at night. Of course I didn't have much in the way of lighting, so I used what I had: car headlights, flashlights, and one light kit. I lit actors in silhouette, lit only small areas, and framed shots using close-ups.

INTRODUCING THE FILM TO ITS AUDIENCE

After your movie is finished, what will you do with it? Are you going to enter it into film festivals? Are you going to approach distributors? Who are these people? The answer is, they are your audience. Short movies and documentaries have a tough time getting distribution. A truly independent movie-maker finds it difficult to get productions distributed. Sure, there are all sorts of movie channels, but have you tried to get something aired on them? If the producer asks the question, "Okay, the movie's finished, now what do I do with it?" then the producer is in trouble. Determine distribution prior to beginning the production.

There are a ton of film festivals out there, and new ones come and go all the time. A quick Internet search will reveal a long list of them. In the case of MIRROR MAN, I planned to enter it into festivals that cater to shorts shot on video. It made no sense to enter it into film-only festivals as they would take my entry fee and still reject my picture because it was shot on video. I entered MIRROR MAN into several film/video festivals and all of them rejected it. I actually received some of the judges' comments. One memorable one read, "This might be a lot of fun for you and your friends to make but awfully painful for the rest of us to sit through. A well-made film."

Try and figure out what that means.

I am not a big fan of festivals, mainly because most of them have a prescreening process and, generally, a single person decides whether or not the judges will see your production. However, I realize that getting into a festival is an excellent way to get your work seen and to network with others. When seeking out festivals, try and watch the winning entries from previous years, see if the competition shows similar pictures to yours, don't expect rave reviews, and by all means, make festival expenses a part of your initial production budget.

Finding a distributor is a headache as well. I have a good friend that produces ballroom dancing videos. Each episode is an hour long and he has a distributor that sends him a nice check each month. My friend was my introduction to this distributor. However, the distributor only wanted "how to" videos, not short, campy, fictional pieces. You can also research Internet distributors, many of whom will pay you for your work.

EXPERIENCING THE SUCCESS OF FILMMAKING

As stated earlier, this article is about success, and success in two ways. Financial success came when I licensed MIRROR MAN to ShortTV.com, an Internet movie shorts site. The fee I received was 25 times what I paid to make the movie. I've been told that this makes MIRROR MAN statistically more financially successful than TITANIC. I will say, though, that the amount of money paid to me by ShortTV.com would only purchase groceries for two weeks, so I haven't gone out and bought that gold Mercedes yet.

My second goal of success, exposure, came from my constant effort at submitting it to film festivals. Although it was rejected from the best and worst of festivals, The Lawton Constitution called it

"...classic..." The reviews it received at Short TV, both good and bad, are priceless.

Recently I was invited to screen MIRROR MAN at the Brooklyn Underground Film Festival. My epic had been rejected as an entry the year before, but the programmers seemed to feel that it fit in this year's "From the Vault" screening. In the invitation e-mail I received, they called MIRROR MAN a "truly unique and bizarre piece of cinema." I will take that as a compliment.

This second goal of success deals with the audience. When should the audience be considered? In the pre-production, production, and post-production phases, that's when.

In pre-production, consider who you want to see your movie. My parents and older people hated MIRROR MAN. Young, counter-culture sci-fi fans loved the movie. Know your audience and use words, props, and elements of production that appeal to them. Next, think about audience in the production phase. Shooting with consumer-grade equipment doesn't mean your production has to look low-budget. Understand basic principles of lighting, learn proper microphone usage, and always have a tripod handy! In postproduction, watch out for the jump cuts. Aim for a running time that your target distributors might want. Plan out the edits in the pre-production stage.

Remember that the creative process takes place on paper and that production itself can be overwhelming. How can you produce a successful movie? It is easy. Read and re-read this article. It is divided into three basic parts: idea, equipment, and audience. Produce your epic with these elements in mind and you will have success.

MIXING AND MATCHING IRONS IN THE FIRE

Most of my work consists of documentary production. I produce them all the time and they air on television stations all over the country. So why shoot a campy, fictional, short movie like MIRROR MAN? Maybe I want to be a movie director! Or, maybe, I just love production. I've shot many weddings. Who wants to shoot a wedding? I do. It pays well and provides money for equipment or cash to spend on other productions. The point? Some things such as content or on-screen talent may be different, but following through on the key elements to a quality production remains the same whether shooting a wedding, a documentary, or a fictional movie.





by Jason Pankoke

Part VI

I'M TIRED RUFUS. REALLY ... tired.

I've been hustling all day, for many days in a row now, sometimes wondering whether I'm coming or going or simply running in big circles chasing my tail. Like what you do every now and then, timing it just right so the neighbors can witness your act in the backyard and get a good chuckle out of it.

Problem is, I'm not working my tail off for laughs, but it sure does feel like the people out there take what I do ever so lightly. Too lightly, in fact, as if it perennially stacks up beneath all those more intensive crusades and entertaining sojourns that one might take up for the sake of society, or community, or family.

They say that dogs reflect their owners. In that case, you sure are looking like how I feel. Why *are* you so sour today, you mutt? I haven't seen you this anti-aerobic since your chew toy got lost in the crack of the sofa and neither of us could find it for a week. It's right *there*. Fetch! Rufus? All right then, *stay*.

Might as well save up *my* energy for when I have to throw down some figurative bones at the light of dawn. That's why I decided to come home, anyway, to attend to those insidious twin threats of focus and fatigue. One you have to sharpen, the other you have to dampen, and your total self has to be in tune with the situation at hand—otherwise, it's lost on you. Only we know the entire score at stake here, Roof.

There you go, boy, some nice clean water. You know, it's my understanding after several decades living on this third stone that people want to do the right thing, from filling plastic bowls like yours to helping the millions of less fortunate all over the earth. Different people have different opinions about how things should be done and the level of importance that they hold. The problem is, when the rich and powerful toss their tainted greenbacks and itchy trigger fingers into the ring, you simply don't know what the result will be. Sadly, it's a common disaster.

I see the fallout in the eyes of the many sheep that feel they need to play their game by cementing themselves within the status quo. Many more of them wander lost in the world, not knowing how to score themselves even the slightest security blanket to sleep under at night. Thanks to an economic scheme that favors the bourgeoisie over their barely employed brothers, the average suit will wear better clothes every day than I will in my life.

Pick your tired head up and look around, Roof. What do you see? Not much, huh? It's because you sometimes have to make do with what little you can muster under these conditions. Yet, worth is what goes on inside of you and how you turn it back out and give it to others. This is why I fight for the art, Rufus. It is *real*.

I don't need to explain to you why I walk among the crowd without glittering studs or neon spikes labeling my cause. That beat up overcoat hanging by the door is a symbol of covertness that I wear like a badge. With the transaction to take place in a few hours on the outskirts of town, plain brown on my back is ideal. That way, once the boy and the dame are finished setting up or deflecting the details tonight, I should just be able to go in, get the job done, and melt back into the farmland. Maybe I'll even become a slightly better soul for it.

I used to be more ravenous when I was a younger man. My conscience has never wavered from this path that I beat, but I wonder why my self-confidence and dedication can't keep up. Is the thing that I think I am doing for all those who will listen, learn, and love really only for myself? My heart knows that's not true, but I'd be hard-pressed to witness daily confirmation that, indeed, this matters to more than one.

I'm tired, Rufus, and your rusty-colored carcass is weighing on my lap like an anvil. Time to get down. Good dog. Let me be for a couple of hours so these eyes can close and these lungs can heave quietly before the inevitable.

What's that quiver in your hind legs, Roof? Hope those dog years haven't piled up too high already. Sometimes, I wonder if I've spent too many dogged and determined years myself walking this hard-boiled walk.

FOR C-U EYES ONLY

HOT OFF THE CONFIDENTIAL TELEGRAPH: ... Filmmaker and M-F contributor Mike Trippiedi (M-F #1) of Champaign unleashed the short subject MURDER TOO MANY last January. Trippiedi plays almost every single role (minus strategic body doubles) in this giddy murder plot where everyone has a motive, from the rich cad and the drug pusher to the detectives and the shoeshine boy! ... Acclaimed documentary director Jay Rosenstein (M-F #2) of Urbana has been busy presenting his new film, THE AMASONG CHORUS: SINGING OUT, all over the world. Four years in the making, this hour-long piece chronicles the rise of Champaign-Urbana's "lesbian/feminist" choral group Amasong and its charismatic founder, Kristina Boerger. It will air nationally on PBS in June 2004 ... Dreamscape Cinema mogul Robin Peters (M-F #5) of Monticello has followed up his first feature LINK with writing and production duties on the family drama CRAB ORCHARD. Filmed on high-definition video over the summer in Monticello and C-U, the film stars Ed Asner, Judge Reinhold, and Ruby Handler, spouse of first-time director Michael Jacques Jacobs ... Chris Dowell (M-F #2), a native of nearby Tolono and graduate of Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, has been working in the post-production department of 20th Century Fox in Hollywood. His credits include both X-MEN movies and HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS ... John Chua, who wrote the very first article run in M-F #1, has returned to the University of Illinois to finish his master's degree in Cinema Studies. During his schooling hiatus,



Ruby Handler and Ed Asner on the set of CRAB ORCHARD. (Photo: courtesy Robin Peters/Dreamscape Cinema)

Chua produced Web animations, worked for genre video label York Entertainment, and directed the Seventh Art/Cordish Media release MARION'S TRIUMPH, a documentary about Holocaust survivor Marion Blumenthal-Lazan narrated by Debra Messing of WILL & GRACE fame ... Boneyard Press patriarch Hart D. Fisher (M-F #2) of Los Angeles recently completed the short film CHANCE MEETING, a co-production with DH Publishing of Japan. THE GARBAGE MAN, Fisher's 10-year-old C-U horror film, has been completed but remains in distribution limbo ... fin.

NOT-READY-FOR-BROADCAST HUES: During the past year and a half, Champaign-Urbana has regularly surfaced on national television thanks to all those Fighting Illini and Chicago Bears games played here, not to mention a Roger Ebert profile on Bravo and regular updates on 2002 Miss America Erika Harold, an Urbana native. However, none of this classy representation could possibly prepare Nielsen

families for THE RED WHITE & BLUE TELEVISION PROJECT (2002), an hour-long experimental film set to the album the carpeted room by local art-rock outfit martymitego. Band members Ralph Roether, Jeff Sanait, and Kurt Bielema conceived this series of vignettes to be projected simultaneously with their live performances at music clubs.

GOVERNMENT PREFERS "BLONDE 2": Although it lies halfway between Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., in the continental United States, the state Capitol in Springfield, Illinois earned the role of Congress alongside more than 400 human extras in LEGALLY BLONDE 2: RED, WHITE & BLONDE (2003). Nearly every state courted the film's producers and director Charles Herman-Wurmfeld to host the production of the comedy sequel's climax, during which fashion designer-cum-lawyer Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon) speaks out against the testing of cosmetics on animals. Springfield ultimately received the nod, after which Witherspoon, Sally Field, and an army of movie professional's set up shop for a week's worth of Hollywood pizzazz in December of 2002.

BONUS DIALOGUE OF THE ISSUE: Spats: "Wait a minute. Where do you think you're going?" Jerry: "Urbana? It's about a hundred miles from here...." Spats: "You're not going nowhere." Jerry: "We're not?" Joe: "We won't breathe a word!" Spats: "You won't breathe nothin" ... not even air." - Jazz musicians Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon) attempting to outwit Chicago gangster Spats Colombo (George Raft) after witnessing the St. Valentine's Day Massacre in Billy Wilder's SOME LIKE IT HOT (1959). Once in the clear, Joe and Jerry turn into Josephine and Daphne so they can make their escape amidst an allgirl band on a train bound for Miami. Here, they befriend the luscious ukulele player Sugar Kane Kowalczyk (Marilyn Monroe).

EPILOGUE: "C-U Confidential" is about "the locals" past and present, whose business and weekend activities revolve around cinema. For various reasons—income, family, education, simple preference—these folks live or lived in and around Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, located 130 miles due south of Chicago, 130 miles due west of Indianapolis. It is a comfortable little island in the middle of the Midwest where many people make a living as employees of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Beyond academia, we have a heavy concentration of computer, industrial, and agricultural vocations that dominate our marketplace, with little room for anything resembling an economically healthy arts community. However, film-related flourishes do pop up from out of nowhere, and you will get to read all about them in this novel collection of stories, curiously disguised as a novel.

Cinema

ALL ABOUT LILY CHOU-CHOU (LILY CHOU-CHOU NO SUBETE)

2002, Digital Video, Color, 142 minutes Directed and written by Shunji Iwai Produced by Koko Maeda Starring Hayato Ichihara, Shugo Oshinari, Ayumi Ito, Takao Osawa, Miwako Ichikawa, Izumi Inamori, Yu Aoi

A Cowboy Pictures release of a Rockwell Eyes production

Reviewed at the UIUC Japanese Film Series, the Virginia Theater, Champaign, IL, March 2003

Fans of the controversial youth-gone-wild dramas from Larry Clark (KEN PARK) and Harmony Korine (JULIEN DONKEY-BOY) might be interested in ALL ABOUT LILY CHOU-CHOU, a hypnotic tale about junior high-age Japanese children that treads similarly touchy ground. From his tiny bedroom in a blue-collar sector near Tokyo, Yuichi Hasumi (Hayato Ichihara), a.k.a. "Philia," logs countless hours moderating an Internet chat site devoted to Lily Chou-Chou, a recording star that is part Tori Amos, part Björk, and completely market-tested. What seems like unapologetic fan-boy musing over Lily's oblique lyrics and ethereal image is exactly that, for the lives these kids live outside their computers are indeed cruel. Building parallel with Yuichi's teasing at the hands of classmates for his Lily fixation is a rash of dehumanizing violence, rape, theft, and prostitution depicted with alarming bluntness. Even the numerous scenes of Yuichi clak-clak-claking away at his keyboard, accompanied by stark white-on-black monitor displays, become rather disquieting. The thread that ties all this together is his relationship with Shusuke Hoshino (Sugo Ochinari), a.k.a. "Blue Cat," a fellow introvert using the Web to reach out through Lily-dom. However, in the cynical logic of this film, even rays of light darken quickly. We learn that Shusuke has been drawn into a schoolyard gang, and after stealing cash from a rival group they take a summer trip to one of the smaller Japanese islands where "Blue Cat" almost drowns. Needless to say, both Shusuke and Yuichi are destined to learn many harsh lessons before this story is through.

We're certainly familiar with the trials of underage bad seeds through the news and the movies, from THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE on, but nothing can prepare viewers for director Shunji Iwai's exhausting dynamic of cliques, outcasts, and befuddled authority figures. Photographed exquisitely by Noboru Shinoda, ALL ABOUT LILLY CHOU-CHOU places its characters in a run-down rural landscape where they struggle to navigate ineffectual Japanese norms and juvenile delinquency run amok. Iwai refrains from pushing too far over the edge to make his point, balancing highly intense passages with smaller, tacit moments involving kites, bicycles, and an omnipresent rice paddy field that remind us how most of these kids are merely dreamers, not monsters. The film doesn't quite work every step of the way—the large cast is often hard to sort out, while Takeshi Koboyashi's music and Yoshiharu Nakagami's editing become too dominant at times—but Iwai's overall confidence with the material and the medium has resulted in very powerful cinema. Most people will certainly think twice about how societal forces mold today's children after experiencing ALL ABOUT LILY CHOU-CHOU. - JaPan

BLOWN

A Fine Grind Films production 1997, 16mm, Color, 10 minutes

Directed, produced, and written by Michael Cruickshank, Will O'Loughlen, Kaleo Quenzer, Rick Venable

Starring Kaleo Quenzer, Bryan Cournoyer, Stevan Lazich, Darian Corley, Justin Thompson

Reviewed on VHS

BLOWN AGAIN

A Fine Grind Films production
2001, 16mm, Color, 10 minutes
Starring Kaleo Quenzer, Kevin Bates, Anna Craft, Dee Nichols, Sandi Pipkin,

Chris Reyes, Bill Seale, Cathy Soon, Hiroshi (TB) Tanaka

Reviewed on VHS

Although they are two separate 10-minute shorts, BLOWN and BLOWN AGAIN are really one big, continuous action film. And I do mean action film. Both of them have writing and story credits, but I think there might be two minutes of dialogue total in the combined running times. This is not a bad thing. I have seen so many low budget action films where the (not very good) dialogue drags the movie to a painfully boring stop, which is a sin for a film that is supposed to have action. The Fine Grind filmmakers do not make that mistake. Instead, they take a simple plot of stolen money and turn it into 20 minutes of exciting car chases and bloody gun fights. The acting is top notch, especially the main character played by Kaleo Quenzer. He has a certain

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charm and charisma that all action stars need and he pulls it off without a hitch. Justin Thompson's original score is perfect and the editing by Rick Venable, cinematography by Michael Cruickshank, and team direction show that these people know what they are doing. In most cases, I would say that I would like to see this group make an action feature, but I think I'd rather they continue making 10-minute chase-and fight-movies. BLOWN and BLOWN AGAIN don't disappoint like so many other action films have. My hat goes off to co-directors Quenzer, Venable, Cruickshank, and Will O'Loughlen; you guys delivered the goods. — *Mike Trippiedi*

BORN TO LOSE

A Vanguard Cinema video release of an Astor Place Films production
1999, 16mm, Color, 80 minutes
Directed by Doug Cawker
Produced and written by Doug Cawker and Howard Roth
Starring Joseph Rye, Elyse Ashton, Francis Fallon, David Goldman, Alex Lange,
Wendy Latta, Matt Gallini
Reviewed on VHS

BORN TO LOSE is the anti-coming-of-age story of Stevie Monroe (Joseph Rye), songwriter and singer of the fictional band The Spoilers who is also a 30-ish man-child scared to death of growing up. While claiming he works real hard, Stevie spends most of his time on various drugs and The Spoilers rarely practice; they would be a bunch of frat boys if not for the leather jackets and different haircuts. Only the occasional reference suggests untapped musical potential. The realistic portrayal of what could be any forgettable knockoff band is laudable, as The Spoilers (played by Rye, Francis Fallon, David Goldman, and Alex Lange) provide some great method acting that stands out above the supporting performances, which often lag. The most telling scenes involve confrontational dialogue between Stevie and his girlfriend/manager Lisa (Elyse Ashton), including a bit where the two play with a Rock 'Em Sock 'Em Robots game. As the camera peers across the games and the persons working the controls, viewers and characters are coaxed to look past the game. Unfortunately, most of the movie is not as ambitious.

In the end, Stevie has to decide whether to change his shtick or go on as an irresponsible wasteoid. His situation does not entirely seem beyond his con-

Donnie Wahlberg and Robert Forster in DIAMOND MEN. (Courtesy Panorama Entertainment)



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REVIEWS Micro-Film Style

REVIEWS Micro-Film Style trol but his actions remain irrational and his life decisions irrelevant. Stevie is unsympathetic because he never comes close to understanding his situation. He has suppressed his own identity, masquerading as a vague, latter day incarnation of 1970s rock legends in a doomed act of self-delusion, and the nihilistic underpinnings seem removed and falsified. While BORN TO LOSE tries to isolate punk ideals, Stevie's inconsistent story jumps around too much to reach any firm conclusions and the basic ideas lack development. Stevie is a selfish loser far more mundane than Robert DeNiro in RAGING BULL and not nearly as acutely sensitive as a musician like Johnny Thunders was in real life. There are fascinating ideas underlying the script, but the results are too tedious. Dig up Ulli Lommel's BLANK GENERATION with Richard Hell and the Voidoids instead. - Austen Zuege

CHARLOTTE SOMETIMES

A VisionBox Pictures release of a Farm Fed Productions film 2003, Digital Video, Color, 88 minutes Directed and written by Eric Byler Produced by Marc Ambrose and Eric Byler Starring Michael Idemoto, Eugenia Yuan, Matt Westmore, Jacqueline Kim, Shizuko Hoshi, Kimberly-Rose Ann Reviewed at Roger Ebert's Overlooked Film Festival, the Virginia Theater, Champaign, IL, April 2003

It's difficult to summarize Eric Byler's compelling feature debut CHARLOTTE SOMETIMES, because what sets the film apart from the glut of Generation X tripe already out there is a realistic nuance and texture that can't be captured adequately by words. To that end, simplicity is key in this story about Asian-American auto mechanic Michael (Michael Idemoto), a soft-spoken bachelor living in Los Angeles. Lovely boarder Lori (Eugenia Yuan) rents a studio apartment in Michael's house, and when not preoccupied by salesman boyfriend Justin (Matt Westmore) she often stops over to watch late-night television or share laundry duty with her landlord. It's enough of a friendship that Lori can sense the lingering aloneness within Michael. (In a typical exchange both blunt and transcendent, Michael assures Lori that "I'm not afraid to be alone," to which she replies half-frowning, "I know.") Cue the appearance of traveling journalist Darcy (Jacqueline Kim) one night at Michael's favorite watering hole, touching off a series of encounters that gradually reveal insecurities and challenged desires amongst them all. Far be it from director Byler to conveniently dispense with details, though, for CHARLOTTE SOMETIMES thrives on understatement; what is not said is equally as important as what is said in this particular love quadrangle. The aforementioned nuance seeps into the fabric of every scene, arguably every second, with an immediacy that allows us to listen, study, and relate; we can actually feel this movie without also feeling manipulated by it. Good performances from the cast flesh out the script's uniquely clipped vernacular, especially rugged Idemoto with his idiosyncratic brooding, while production designer Robert Shinso and cinematographer Rob Humphreys resourcefully provide a sense of place that is alternately quaint, engaging, and maudlin at the appropriate points. Among all the plusses is Byler's delicate touch that draws the drama together, remarkable in an age where "style" and "voice" usually boil down to on-screen posturing for many of his contemporaries. Although some might balk at this film because it rarely posits the obvious, there's always room for an effort like CHARLOTTE SOMETIMES that develops its own cinematic shorthand,

Natar Ungalaaq in THE FAST RUNNER. (Photo: M.H. Cousineau/ courtesy Iglooik Isuma Productions)



the equivalent of a half-audible whisper understood clearly by those paying attention. Martial arts film buffs should know that Yuan is the daughter of legendary Hong Kong actress Cheng Pei-Pei (CROUCHING TIGER, HIDDEN DRAGON). - JaPan

THE CRAWLING BRAIN

A Combs Pictures International production in association with Fat Free Features 2002. Digital Video. Color. 89 minutes

Directed, produced, and written by Ron Ford

Starring Randal Malone, Mark Shady, Stephanie Beaton, Miss Anita Page, Gary Halsten, Kevin Undergaro, William Combs, Martin Dorman, Amy Hudson, Athena Demos

Reviewed on VHS

Fans of 1950s and 1960s B-movie schlock rejoice! THE CRAWLING BRAIN is the film for you. (But of course, you knew that already from the title.) Writer/ director Ron Ford (HOLLYWOOD MORTUARY, DEAD TIME TALES) has been making independent features on video for years, mixing gore, sex, and campy humor with his nostalgia for older genre classics. His films range from crappy to enjoyable, and I can happily state that this one sits firmly in the latter category.

Stefan Kroger (Ford regular Randal Malone) arrives at a lavish house in Hollywood to care for his elderly grandmother (91-year-old silent film actress Anita Page). Shortly afterwards, his shiftless brother Ken (Mark Shady) shows up to leach off Grandma Anita, much to Stefan's disgust. Their world changes forever when they learn that she was the concubine of notorious Nazi scientist Franz Kindler (Martin Dorman), whose brain and spinal cord have been kept alive all these years in a tank. Incidentally, the preserved specimen must occasionally crawl out of its tank to feed from the spinal fluid of living human beings. Kindler's consciousness soon possesses Stefan and commands the brothers to surgically put his central nervous system into a new body, resulting in unholy experiments that yield little more than a rising body count. Only one woman stands in their way, a nurse named Jillian (Stephanie Beaton), who may or may not be what she seems....

With a plot like this, your tongue had better be firmly in your cheek, and that's where Ford keeps it for the duration. The filmmaker calls THE CRAWL-ING BRAIN his "homage to the sci-fi/horror movies [that] so enthralled me as a child." I, too, grew up watching "Creature Features," where crawling eyes and fiends without faces fed on people's brains, and such fond memories came flooding back. Of course, those movies never featured a make-out session between two hookers, a private eye/AA sponsor, or an exchange where Stefan asks two Jehovah's Witnesses if they "spanked each other every night," but keeping things interesting with amusing one-liners and absurd bits is just part of Ford's charm.

Unfortunately, it's impossible to take Malone seriously as the possessed Stefan (he reminds me of the late, great Divine), but his over-the-top scene chewing does seem to fit the material. On the other hand, Shady gives an admirably straight performance (no pun intended) as the cowardly Ken, and Beaton (THE EVILMAKER) arrives late on the scene to inject some muchneeded spunk and energy en route to a satisfying conclusion.

The production values are remarkably high for a film of this type. Christopher Bergschneider's creature effects are competent and fun, and not once did I see a string or wire in use. Ford also provided his film with an authentic feel by procuring the use of fully orchestrated Ronald Stein scores from such classics of cheese as DEMENTIA 13, SPIDER BABY, IT CONQUERED THE WORLD, ATTACK OF THE CRAB MONSTERS, and NOT OF THIS EARTH. They even splurged for a gratuitous car crash! THE CRAWLING BRAIN surely delivers in that shameless guilty-pleasure sort of way. - Jeff McCoy

DIAMOND MEN

A Panorama Entertainment release of a DMC Films production 2000, 35mm, Color, 96 minutes Directed and written by Daniel M. Cohen Starring Robert Forster, Donnie Wahlberg, Bess Armstrong, Jasmine Guy Reviewed at Roger Ebert's Overlooked Film Festival, the Virginia Theater, Champaign, IL, April 2002

Robert Forster possesses a sort of hangdog sadness in his eyes. After his debut in John Huston's REFLECTIONS OF A GOLDEN EYE (1967), the need to feed a family led to decades of work in quickie television movies and exploitation schlock. That is, until a brash young filmmaker named Quentin Tarantino hired him to play the male lead in 1997's JACKIE BROWN, a film for which Forster received an Academy Award nomination. The good scripts are coming Forster's way these days, such as with Dan Cohen's film DIAMOND MEN, but what remains is that quiet dignity that got him through a lot of lowbudget productions intact.

In DIAMOND MEN, Forster plays Eddie Miller, a down-and-out traveling salesman who has been hitting the highway for 30 years, selling diamonds

wholesale. When the company refuses to insure him following a heart attack, even demanding that he train his own replacement, Eddie realizes that forced retirement and financial insecurity are close at hand. A fast-talking young man named Bobby Walker (Donnie Wahlberg) is hired to shadow Eddie on the veteran's Pennsylvania beat; of course, the two are opposites who eventually click. Sensing Eddie's loneliness following the death of his wife from cancer, Bobby begins looking for a suitable companion for his mentor whom he finds through his friend Tina (Jasmine Guy), the head madam of the Altoona Riding Club.

One of the joys of DIAMOND MEN is that it constantly throws something different at you. It's not a buddy movie or a love story or a comedy or a character study or a crime drama or a treatise on the pitfalls of aging, but it has elements of them all. The film actually works best when Cohen simply allows the characters to talk to each other; the conversations never seem forced, due to the director/writer's keen ear for how people converse. A lot of this film's success also comes out of the pleasant surprises that permeate its characters, dialogue, and locations, the likes of which have rarely been portrayed in movies.

It is Forster, he of the well-preserved features and nonchalant sense of morality, who gives DIAMOND MEN its ultimate charm. The film isn't perfect—a crime subplot is unnecessary and more than a bit jarring—but the finely nuanced characters and the performers who bring them to life are smart, likable, and definitely the kind of people we want to root for. Just as Robert Forster is an actor we want to root for. - Marty McKee

(RED GREEN'S) DUCT TAPE FOREVER

A TVA International release of an S&S Productions film 2002, 35mm, Color, 91 minutes Directed by Eric Till Produced by Sari Friedland Written by Steve Smith Starring Steve Smith, Patrick McKenna, Bob Bainborough, Wayne Robson, Jeff Schaefer, Jerry Schaefer, Graham Greene, Peter Keleghan, Richard Fitzpatrick, Darren Frost, Melissa DiMarco

Reviewed at the Virginia Theater, Champaign, IL, August 2002

According to the cult Canadian sketch comedy, THE RED GREEN SHOW, somewhere "145 beer stores north of Toronto" lies the fictional wooded burg Possum Lake, and within it a fraternal order of inept handymen called the Possum Lodge. Led by gravel-voiced Red Green (Steve Smith), a fellow decked out in plaid flannel shirts and Van Gogh-colored suspenders, the guys engage in recreational repair work that often courts disaster. Somehow, this tongue-in-cheek exercise in male bonding (minus the family-values grounding of HOME IMPROVEMENT or the boorishness of THE MAN SHOW) spawned a rabid fan base that has enjoyed its peculiar fruits since 1990, and the feature spin-off DUCT TAPE FOREVER seems to inherit the show's good humor and heart.

After the boys lose a lawsuit to rich land developer Robert Stiles (Richard Fitzpatrick), whose limousine is sucked into a sinkhole while passing through the Possum Lodge's front yard, they are given 10 days to pay \$10,000 in damages lest the city take possession of the property. In haste, the lodge brothers break out the duct tape and chicken wire at the behest of Red's nebbish nephew Harold Green (Patrick McKenna), who proposes they go for the third-place, \$10,000 prize at a duct tape sculpture contest in Minneapolis! The race is on as Red, Harold, and Dalton (Bob Bainborough) drive their creation—a VW bug-sized Canadian goose—cross country while being pursued by bought-off Sheriff Roy (Darren Frost) and Deputy Dawn (Melissa DiMarco)

Even though the tried-and-true gags have been strung across the umpteenth "gotta save the farm" scenario, we can't help but pull for the boys because the film shares their goofy camaraderie with us. Regulars Peter Keleghan and Graham Greene, as delusional Ranger Gord and pyrotechnicshappy Edgar Montrose, provide amusing asides while McKenna manages to make the neurotic Harold strangely likeable. Veteran Canuck director Eric Till unobtrusively allows the cast to "put on a show" outside their normal studio trappings while capably preserving the CBC/PBS series' feel, although certain jokes tend to trundle on too long. Surely, one may never peg DUCT TAPE FOREVER as a watershed movie comedy, but this old-fashioned ensemble piece earns points for refusing to assault audiences in the contemporary Hollywood way. For once, that's good enough, eh. - JaPan

C-U Confidential footnote: Actor Steve Smith's trademark suspenders are manufactured by Perry Products in nearby Decatur, while Champaign video store That's Rentertainment (www.rentertainment.com) is the only licensed Red Green merchant in the United States.

THE FAST RUNNER (ATANARJUAT)

A Lot 47 Films release of an Igloolik Isuma Productions/National Film Board of Canada production in conjunction with the Canadian Television Fund 2001, Digital Betacam, Color, 172 minutes

Directed by Zacharias Kunuk

Produced by Paul Apak Angilirq, Norman Cohn, and Zacharias Kunuk Written by Paul Apak Angilirq

Starring Natar Ungalaag, Sylvia Ivalu, Peter-Henry Arnatsiag, Lucy Tulugarjuk, Madeline Ivalu, Pauloosie Qulitalik, Eugene Ipkarnak, Pakkak Innukshuk Reviewed at the Route 66 Film Festival, the Esquire Theater, Springfield, IL, September 2002

Ably transplanting oral mythmaking into a 21st century platform, the filmmakers behind THE FAST RUNNER have created a gorgeous cinematic work punctuated with many subtle wonders. This feature, created by Inuit artists and actors living in the far-north Arctic Canadian village of Igloolik, Baffin Island, preserves a traditional moralistic fable as much as translates it for international consumption. When stouthearted Sauri (Eugene Ipkarbak) is chosen to lead his nomadic Inuit tribe, a mysterious shaman unleashes an evil destined to wreak havoc down the line. Two decades later, grown brothers Amaqjuaq, the Strong One (Pakkak Innukshuk) and Atanarjuat, the Fast Runner (Natar Ungalaaq) become rivals with Sauri's arrogant son Oki (Peter-Henry Arnatsiaq), who is betrothed to marry strong-willed Atuat (Sylvia Ivalu). After Atanarjuat wins Atuat's hand, Oki's jealousy fuels a series of machinations designed to divide the brothers and regain his bride. Lies, sex, betrayal, and a furious foot chase across the sea-ice force Atanarjuat's exile from the tribe, but as with all tales such as this, the noble protagonist will return home to triumph using compassion and wits instead of his cowardly foe's tusk and spear. This archetypal lesson in upholding community over personal gain is illustrated with the lovingly recreated minutiae of past Inuit life as well as the glowing Arctic expanse that dominates nearly every outdoor scene. Wise use of sparse sound effects during the slower, documentary-like segments perfectly captures that hushed lucidity which often accompanies dense snow cover, while swirling fits of drum, didgeridoo, and chant heighten the melodramatic confrontations. Speaking in Inuktitut, the language that has carried Atanarjuat's story from mouth to ear for centuries, the actors embody their roles with sincere confidence, often transcending stilted line readings with sheer presence. THE FAST RUNNER balances conventional film techniques so well that we can freely immerse ourselves in the total Inuit ambience without hesitation, although the embarrassing English-language subtitles unintentionally take away from its timelessness, filled with jarring modern idioms and vulgarity as they are. Despite such a blemish, which hopefully can be removed on the DVD release, the adventurous should plan to catch up with THE FAST RUNNER as soon as possible. - JaPan

FEAR OF THE DARK

A Light and Dark Productions film 2001, MiniDV, Color, 110 minutes Directed, produced, and written by Glen Baisley Starring Rosemary Gore, Vanessa Edwards, Mike Lane, Herb Smithline, Brianna Nichols, Michael Scarpelli, Jr., Ed Shelinky, Kirk T. Larsen Reviewed on VHS

WHEN HEAVEN COMES DOWN

A Rounds Entertainment video release of a Mind's I Productions film 2002, Digital Video, Color, 73 minutes Directed and written by Gary M. Lumpp Produced by Gary M. Lumpp and Tammy Cooper Starring Emily Albright, Joe Gordon, Dominica Wasilewska, Cory Schiffern, Anthony Sabatino, Aaron Keisner, Robert Z'Dar, Jeff Dylan Graham, Molly Fix, Audrae Stephan Reviewed on VHS

Never mind about Hollywood's creative woes, since the umpteenth serial killer opuses FEAR OF THE DARK and WHEN HEAVEN COMES DOWN indicate that ingenuity has evaporated in the no-budget moviemaking world as well. That said, familiarity shouldn't automatically breed contempt, for even though the tales spun by both these films are similar enough, the telling difference is surely in the presentation.

FEAR OF THE DARK is extremely indicative of the listless genre work that clutters the underground. Shot in New York State, the movie begins in the early 1980s as the "Black Rose Killer" senselessly slaughters numerous citizens in a streak that is halted during a bust home invasion. The survivor of that crime, young Alice Walker, grows up to become an extremely paranoid office clerk (Rosemary Gore) plagued by nightmares and visions of the Killer. As her faithful roommate Karen (Vanessa Edwards) and heartless boyfriend Michael (Mike Lane) become further distanced by her behavior, Alice begins



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BORN TO LOSE



FISH 'N CHICKS

Sniffin' Glue(Sticks)

by A.j. Michel

Another MICRO-FILM, another round of movie magazines and zines to make you forget all about those Big Glossy Rags at your local Megabookstore!

I've been waiting and waiting for the triumphant return of Cashiers du Cinemart, and I'm pleased to report that Mike White and Company really deliver with the extra-thick #13. From Nathan Kane's hot and curvy devil babe gracing the cover to the last word on the many incarnations of DUNE, CdC #13 is packed with filmy goodness from the under-, above-, and middleground. Articles discuss the never-released HACKERS 2: TAKEDOWN, the music and film career of Paul Williams (PHANTOM OF THE PARADISE), disabled actors in martial arts movies, the Dr. Seuss film THE 5,000 FINGERS OF DR. T, "humans as prey" movies, and Tim Burton's re-visioning of PLANET OF THE APES. That's just scratching the surface! Besides many other well-written features, #13 is rounded out with a good selection of book and music reviews, in case you want to take a break from watching movies. Lest you think White has been lazing about the past two years, I can assure you he hasn't-instead, he's been working to unearth what were thought to be long-lost films, such as MANSON MASSACRE, OF MISSING PERSONS, and CAPTAIN MILKSHAKE (also explored in the issue). My highest recommendations, and hopefully he won't take so long to produce CdC #14.

Steve Puchalski pleasures us with two more issues of Shock Cinema, hitting the big two-oh mark in the process. Congratulations! Per its usual format, issue #20 features in-depth interviews with Michael Moriarty, Lee Frost, Joseph Turkel, and Keith David, while #21 takes on Malcolm McDowell, Kurtwood Smith, Oscar Williams, and Vilmos Zsigmond. Of course, the hallmark of SC is its extensive review section of cult, exploitation, and long-lost films, from both the staff and readers. I always wondered if I had really seen SKATEBOARD on late night TV, or if I was just dreaming. Now I know for sure.

Catering more to the film theory student, Cinemad is a cerebral magazine from Los Angeles that has more in common with academic film journals than other glossy film rags. Narrative director John Cassavetes is profiled in issue #6, while documentarian Albert Maysles and avant-garde filmmaker Jonas Mekas are interviewed in-depth about their work and the art of film. Cinemad is not afraid to look at lighter subjects, including the actress Karen Black and director George Kuchar. Also interesting is the profile of one of the few remaining film projector repairmen. In all, it's a classy package with thoughtful, insightful analysis

On the photocopied front, there's a new issue of Dr. Squid, covering exploitation and B-level horror films. This issue's most interesting article is about making the film ODD NOGGINS, distance-style. Scream queens from around the country were sent their parts and props, filmed their scenes on their own, and then returned the raw footage. It was a challenge to combine it all together—especially considering the many different formats and varying levels of quality involved—but the result was a rather smooth film, according to the film's director (and Dr. Squid's editor) loe Sherlock

The quarter-sized Trend Pimp is the first of a series examining what I think was a really underrated and misunderstood film, 2001's JOSIE AND THE PUSSYCATS. Christopher Tracey writes insightful commentary about this fun flick, including how many reviewers (and viewers) just didn't understand that the many product placements in the film were actually serving as mockeries of product placement, consumerism, and branding.

If you've ever wanted to put on a film festival, especially one composed of shorts, it is worth your time to pick up A Companion Guide to Rooftop Films, published by NYC's Rooftop Films, a group with a lot of experience presenting films in unusual locales. Some good advice and tips in this first issue, including "How to Make a 5 Minute Film in 7 Days," about the production of THE MAN WHO SHOUTED TERESA. You can screen (and make!) films almost anywhere so why don't you give it a try in your town?

ASHIER'S

INEMAR

That's all from the stacks for now, so until next issue, keep cutting and pasting!

Cashiers du Cinemart #13 Fall 2002, 96 pages, full-sized, \$5 Published and edited by Mike White

2002, 56 pages, full-sized, \$4 Published and edited by Mike Plante

A Companion Guide to Rooftop Films #1 Fall 2002, 24 pages, digest, \$3 Published by Rooftop Films Edited by Sarah M. Palmer

Dr. Squid #11 2002, 20 pages, digest, \$1 Published and edited by Joe Sherlock

Shock Cinema #20, 21 Summer 2002/Winter 2002, 48 pages each, full-sized, \$5 each Published and edited by Steve Puchalski

Trend Pimp #1 Summer 2002, 16 pages, quarter-sized, no price given (but I'd send \$1) Published and edited by Christopher Tracey

Want your film magazine/zine reviewed? Send it to MICRO-FILM, P.O. Box 45, Champaign, IL 61824-0045. Contact information appears at the end of the Reviews section for the publications reviewed in this column. bond with the madman that she can use to prevent any more mayhem? You're likely to not care after nearly two hours of FEAR OF THE DARK, which does a wondrous job wringing the life out of itself. The producers seemingly felt the need to pad every last moment with every last bit of footage shot for this tensionless yarn, well beyond the already cumbersome asides scattered about to explore Alice's tenuous grasp on reality. With unchecked direction on Glen Baisley's part, lead actress Gore channels

experiencing fresh hallucinations of murders in the here and now. Is the

Black Rose Killer back on the streets, and if so, does Alice have a psychic

Janeane Garofalo's mugging and Ally Sheedy's moping without ever delivering a coherent performance, and you can imagine how well the rest of the cast handles the dimwit dialogue. Creative set pieces occasionally break through, such as Alice's encounter with a pseudo-Jesus apparition (Kirk T. Larsen), but nothing here truly warrants our interest in the Black Rose Killer saga ...

even though a short-film prequel is on the way.

While hardly a perfect antidote for the demerits cursing FEAR OF THE DARK, the Chicago-made effort WHEN HEAVEN COMES DOWN at least delivers the no-frills goods with tongue slightly in cheek. After surviving the ubiquitous home invasion, this one at the hands of a scripture-spouting nut case named The Savoir (Joe Gordon), pretty red-head Samantha Eckhart (Emily Albright) works through the trauma and successfully moves on with her life. We catch up with Sam in the present day, working as a bartender on the West Side and volunteering as a counselor for abused women, when inexplicable murders begin ravaging her small circle of friends. Sam's fears are quantified when The Savior reappears in the flesh, yet skeptical Detective Nash (Aaron Keisner) confirms that the original fiend is still locked up behind bars. Who could possibly be closing in on Sam after all this time?

Gary Lumpp's inaugural foray benefits greatly from the fresh-faced actors, led by Albright as Sam, Dominica Wasilewska as best friend Julie, and Cory Schiffern as Sam's beau, Josh. These sympathetic characters draw us into the story with ease, and although the payoff is ultimately predictable, there is one crafty dramatic twist in the late innings that simply works. The issues of domestic violence and obsessive behavior are handled with an appropriate touch, adding context to the whirlwind engulfing Sam without feeling forced. Technically, the film is on par with the better weekend-warrior SOV productions, although scenes often suffer from muddy audio tracks. If nothing else, WHEN HEAVEN COMES DOWN is an efficient accomplishment that puts its New York blood brother to shame. Featuring cameos by cult actors Robert Z'Dar (MANIAC COP) and Jeff Dylan Graham (DEAD AND ROTTING) as working class barflies. - JaPan

FISH 'N CHICKS

A DeLeo Productions film 2002, Digital Video, Color, 28 minutes Directed, produced, and written by Joseph E. DeLeo Starring Mike Dufays, Mark Tyler, Shelly Sereda, Justin Chatwin, Simone Mendes Reviewed on VHS

Two longtime friends, George (Mike Dufays) and Arnold (Mark Tyler), spend the day on a fishing expedition and pursuing the male art of bragging about their sexual exploits. But amidst the braggadocio and hooking of fish, there's a hidden agenda being pursued by one of the men, which could have dire consequences. This dark comedy from Canadian filmmaker Joseph DeLeo treads over the same ground that Neil LaBute has claimed as his own—namely, the psychological battleground defined as male/female relationships, and the savagery that lurks behind the most innocuous and civilized human behavior. But it's more than just "LaBute Lite." DeLeo's script is pretty sharp; there's a lot of mileage gotten out of both definitions of "fish," and he handles the humorous and the darker aspects adroitly. As a director, he gets good performances from both his male leads. Shelly Sereda also makes an impression as one of Arnold's "catches" that he relates to George. FISH 'N CHICKS is a poisonous little gem of a short that makes you squirm in your seat, even as you're laughing. And there is a twist ending, of a kind. Let's just say that in this case, cooler heads don't necessarily win every disagreement. - Robert Hubbard

FRUIT OF THE VINE

A Plexifilm video release 2002, Super8, Color, 74 minutes Directed by Coan Nichols and Rick Charnoski Produced by Gary Hustwit Reviewed on DVD

The scorching sun lounging in the West Coast sky heats the hot curving surface below. Behind the ragged fences, clad with warning signs of "No Trespassing," flies nip and swirl around the bare legs gliding through the air. The atmosphere is filled with the heavy stench of rotting garbage. There is a grimy feeling idling in the thick environment, but for Steve Alba, Tony Farmer,

Niel Heddings, and many others, lingering in places like this has become a habit. Breaking the law, enduring painful injuries, and cleaning up abandoned sites are just a part of the underground culture of poolriding that is growing among skaters. In their Super8 film FRUIT OF THE VINE, Coan Nichols and Rick Charnoski confidently bring this alternative sport out of the backyard and onto the screen. Traveling from southern California through the West Coast, the film runs like a music road tour, allowing us to witness the talent of these skaters while reminding us that this isn't the X-games. The directors refuse to glorify poolriding, emotionally exaggerating it in the manner that television broadcasts and other films have done with numerous other sports. Nichols and Charnoski depict the dedication and passion of these skaters, but leave out the slow motion and cinematography tricks that wrap too many films into a pretty packaged gift box with nothing inside. They tell it how it is. Like pool skating itself, FRUIT OF THE VINE is direct, risky, and rebellious. There are times when one may feel bored by repeatedly watching skaters round the bends of the same pool, but the film keeps its edge by moving the scene from city to city. It gives viewers not only a glimpse of the different obstacles (pools) that the skaters have to tackle, but also a raw picture show of the American West Coast that few have witnessed. Filling FRUIT OF THE VINE with tricks, falls, and punk music, Nichols and Charnoski foist upon the public a rugged documentary that peeks into a culture that stays true to its roots and has remained untouched by the rest of the world. - Diane Kung

A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY

A Vanguard Cinema video release of a Cinema Guild presentation 2002, 16mm/Digital Video, Color, 80 minutes Directed by Tariq Jalil Produced by Terry Tocantins, Biagio Messina, and Joke Finciden Written by Tariq Jalil and Terry Tocantins Reviewed on DVD

Geek Monthly #12 & #13

April/May 2002, 20 pages each, digest, photocopied, \$1 ppd each Edited and published by Jeremy Wheeler

A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY steps outside the idea of the documentary as a merely objective and detached recording of a phenomenon. Director Tariq Jalil portrays his subjects—STAR WARS fans—extremely sympathetically, delving deeply into their lives and their ideologies while allowing the audience to see their foibles and shortcomings. Peering behind the metaphoric mask of strangeness and unfamiliarity, the film benignly argues that these people are, at heart, strikingly normal individuals with diverse personalities whose passions simply turn towards George Lucas' film series. Some people watch football, other people watch STAR WARS movies; these fans may not be so different after all.

In relation to other fan-phenomenon documentaries, A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY bears more resemblance to Bruce Campbell's FANALYSIS (2001) than the better-known TREKKIES (1997), to which GALAXY has often been compared. Like FANALYSIS, GALAXY maintains an uneasy distance from those it portrays, but in the end gives them a sympathetic showing by taking an unambiguously negative view of those who would degrade or mock them. Most tellingly, Jalil and his crew visited Mann's Chinese Theater in Hollywood prior to the premiere of EPISODE I: THE PHANTOM MENACE, and found THE MAN SHOW hosts Jimmy Kimmel and Adam Carrola shooting their own segment parodying and mocking the fans camping outside for tickets. filmmakers take an aggressive stance, grilling Kimmel for several minutes behind the theater about his antics and demonstrating the serious impact THE MAN SHOW's transgressions had on the STAR WARS faithful.

The DVD release boasts several deleted scenes, culled from the 150 hours of footage shot for the documentary, as well as a commentary featuring the film's director, producer, and editor. The commentary is interesting, but rarely enlightening about the difficulties making a first-time film production.

Plugging into the culture of the fanatic seems to also be the purpose of Geek Monthly, a postmodern zine with punk sensibilities that highlights the areas most common in geek culture estimations, but also shows the breadth of interest comprising American pop culture geekdom today. It takes a look at the traditional sci-fi and horror films, but also examines television, cult films, comic books, toys, and music. Interspersed with a great deal of hand-drawn art and comics. Geek Monthly is a bit of a difficult read because of the visually dense black-and-white collage design and the heavy, jargon-laden text. Once one is able to get past the initial overload, the art is interesting and usually humorous, although often crude and somewhat insulting.

Much of Geek Monthly's coverage seems devoted to worlds of childhood fascination from a bygone era. The zine examines trends and current releases in toy lines such as the Transformers, who are seeing a revived popularity as a new generation discovers the cartoons and toy line while their older counterparts attempt to buy back some of their childhood. The content here is valuable to the specialized interests of collectors and aficionados of many

pop culture phenomena, from zombie films to John Woo. This may be the zine's largest shortcoming, though, in that it attempts a breadth of coverage impossible to achieve consistently, and in the end only covers this phenomena on a surface level, not in depth. Still, the slang-infused writing is accessible and informative about current geek culture trends, rumors, and public gatherings. All in all, this is an interesting pulp zine made by passionate people. - Jeff Sartain

THE GOSH DARN MORTGAGE

A Siren Tales Productions film 2002, Video, Color, 61 minutes Directed and produced by Pamela Sutch Written by Jack Dastardly Starring Pamela Sutch, Patrick M. O'Connor, Stephen McKay, Michael Grieco, Tina Krause, Debbie D Reviewed on VHS

Looks like it's time to revisit the days when men were men, women were women, and justice always triumphed! Blonde "maiden" Constance Fairheart (Pamela Sutch) receives a timely inheritance check which will help her erase a looming mortgage payment and open a mission for the unfortunate, but not if scheming legal counsel Solomon Snakebite (Stephen McKay) has anything to say about it! Before we can ask, "Who is that Royal Canadian mountie?," loyal law-abider Rock Manly (Patrick M. O'Connor) rides into town on his trusty steed Gumdrop to rescue the dear Miss Fairheart from Snakebite's traps, featuring dynamite, buzzsaw, and oncoming train. Such is the perilous plot of THE GOSH DARN MORTGAGE, a bare-bones ode to yesteryear's cliffhanger silents sprinkled with touches of the era's naughty nickelodeon nudies. Although head production siren Sutch could have simply wallowed in the fetish-and-bondage formula endlessly recycled by her mentor, Gary Whitson of W.A.V.E. Productions (who helped shepherd this item as well). she holds out for giggly burlesque instead and comes up with an amusing late-nite winner. Filled wall-to-wall with deliberately clunky truisms and cornball exclamations ("By Jove!", "Zounds!", and my favorite, "Perdition's Flames!"), this DUDLEY DO-RIGHT inspired pastiche gives its actors plentiful room to camp it up royally. Sutch and O'Connor play their heroes with appropriately broad, wide-eyed sincerity, and although McKay doesn't impress much as the lead villain, the slack is taken up capably by Michael Grieco as cross-eyed henchman Groggins and scene-stealer Tina Krause as get-it-on temptress Sinestra Snakebite. Also appearing is W.A.V.E. regular Debbie D in a strange turn as a bellhop/belly dancer who must've had some potent wacky weed stashed underneath that cute little cap of hers. Although its fly-by-night origins betray themselves regularly—one wonders how often the camera ran without someone looking through the eyepiece to adjust for composition, and the actors' blocking is often haphazard—THE GOSH DARN MORTGAGE brandishes enough silly charm to outweigh its rough lo-fi edges. - JaPan

HARDCORE POISONED EYES

A Profound Images Productions film 2001, MiniDV, Color, 88 minutes Directed and written by Sal Ciavarello Produced by Anthony Fariello Starring Christine Gallo, Wendy Allyn, Jessica Hester Reviewed on DVD

New York City girls Angelique (Christine Gallo), Sarah (Wendy Allyn), and Ellie (Jessica Hester) travel upstate for a getaway weekend at a snow-shrouded cabin once awned by Angelique's grandfather, recently murdered under suspicious circumstances. Growing tense as she plows through his research, Angelique claims that clues in the writings connect her grandfather to a Satanic cult named the Cloven Hoof. Of course, their response is to get bombed, and happy drunk Sarah pulls an ill-advised crank call on a phone number that appears in the research papers. What ensues is a midnight siege upon the cabin as the women barricade themselves in.

That familiar sense of solitary horror-film entrapment, wielded unmercifully from NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD (1968) to SESSION 9 (2001) and memorably inverted within the woods of THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (1999), plays out once again in Sal Ciavarello's debut feature, HARDCORE POISONED EYES. As the prey slowly gathers knowledge to outwit the hunter, their efforts disturbingly backfire; those who pick up on the script's numerous clues might foresee its obvious conclusion. However, this producer/director has broader goals at stake, as the real intrigue stems from how the dynamic regularly shifts between the main trio as they digest the situation and its heavy theological baggage.

At various points, Angelique dispenses and rationalizes real-life history about the "peaceful" Church of Satan and its much more antagonistic brethren hell-bent on blasphemy, rape, and murder. Her inquisitive nature and knack for fact-finding suits her well as a budding freelance writer, but her REVIEWS Micro-Film Stule

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A GALAXY FAR **FAR AWAY**



HARDCORE POISONED EYES

Micro-Film #t

Artistic, Melodic, Spectral: Digging Your Scene Digitally

by Jason Pankoke

On June 2, 2003, via partisan split, the board of the Federal Communications Commission voted to ease ownership restrictions on the number of radio, television, and newspaper outlets that a media conglomerate could own in a given market. This ruling sent shock waves through the minds of international watchdogs and American citizens savvy enough to understand the worst-case implications—that these corporations would invariably shape, sanitize, and limit the content to be found on whatever independent stations and presses they could snap up. As much as filmmakers love the fantasy of reaching millions with their work, gloomy forecasts such as this one illustrate the dire trend of profit over diversity when it comes to distributing media.

What's a fella to do as our communications landscape melts into a monocultural blob? Do-it-and-distribute-it-yourself, that's what! The new consumer digital technology places in our hands a powerful platform that can help make tangible our ideas, visions, crusades, and dreams as a moving image. Sacrifice some chump change for a new/used tandem of camcorder, desktop computer, microphone, DAT machine, work lights, and other assorted amenities, and for the adventurous, filmmaking is only a few learning curves away. What's more, non-mainstream creators have been freed by digital video's portability, quality, and price tag to turn their lenses towards whatever floats their boat without conceding to consumerism, including not-ready-for-prime-time underground culture.

Well-traveled author and punk musician Michael W. Dean taught himself the DV ropes while producing D.I.Y. OR DIE: HOW TO SURVIVE AS AN INDEPENDENT ARTIST, an hour-long rumination about the trials and triumphs of, well, surviving as an independent artist. Dean's roll

call features Richard Kern, Lynn Breedlove, Dave Brockie, J.G. Thirlwell, Stephen Elliot, Mike Watt, Madigan Shive, Keith Knight, J. Mascis, Cynthia Connolly, and numerous other "icons and unknowns" discussing artist-related issues such as purpose, integrity, self-definition, and adversity. From the legendary realness of Fugazi's Ian MacKaye to the startlingly whip-smart Lydia Lunch to the jean-jacketed Mike Watt forever "jammin' econo," life anecdotes inform this modest little gem as novice director Dean eases confidently between poignant thoughts, sarcastic tales, and musical clips. Look for intellectualism, rabble rousing, and career advice elsewhere; D.I.Y. OR DIE is meant to inspire your creative spirit, especially when the bastards have gotten you down.



San Francisco artist Keith Knight in D.I.Y. OR DIE.

Raleigh, North Carolina, record label Bifocal Media has the right idea with **AUTOMATIC MAGNETIC 1.0**, a compilation DVD fashioned after the numerous "videozines" from years

past. Every technical aspect of AM 1.0 is beautifully done, from the videography and digital sound to the packaging and animated titles. Content is prime indie music territory, consisting of live performances by rock/hardcore bands The Convocation Of, Milemarker, The Faint, The Party of Helicopters, and Superchunk, along with a video by rap-rock hybrid Kerbloki, all bracketed with interviews of varying interest. Also included are segments on DIY filmmakers Andrew Dickson (GOOD GRIEF, M-F #3, p.27) and Randall Bobbitt, whose darkly comic short subject HUNG UP ON ELENA is presented intact. Yet, entertaining as it is, this DVD disappoints because of potential unrealized. The closest viewers get to experiencing the "underground/diy/music/film/politics/business/culture" cornucopia listed on the front cover is with a delightful monologue by Superchunk's Mac McCaughan. I'm guessing that Bifocal Media intended to explore independent culture a lot more profusely in AUTOMATIC MAGNETIC than they did; let's trust that greater variety will be in the cards for 2.0 while maintaining the polish established in 1.0.

Nathan Bramble of Philadelphia makes documentary featurettes that establish a regional discourse by covering protests, pop culture conventions, and near-abandoned towns in his neck of the woods. Although all of his films can be streamed through the Internet, **GHOST HUNTERS** is notable for being the only one available in a tangible form—as Quicktime and RealPlayer files on a CD-Rom. Zoinks! *Great* idea! Not sure I'd want to watch an entire feature on my desktop, but a well-compressed file is a smart, cheap way to get one's short film into people's hands. GHOST HUNTERS itself is fun if rather slight, as Bramble tags along with various Pennsylvania and New Jersey ghost-hunting societies while they attend symposiums and conduct field research. Most interviewees talk earnestly about their involvement in such groups; one chap analogizes it to seeking out answers regarding Death and the unknown. However, with little hard "evidence" on display, the film threatens to run dry visually if not for Bramble's brilliant use of the night-vision filter on his camera during the graveyard excursions. A spooky green glow bathes all, with one sleuth turned into a dead ringer for the blind woman in Lucio Fulci's THE BEYOND, down to her bleached-out eyeballs. Creepy, no-budget ingenuity at its finest!

D.I.Y. OR DIE: HOW TO SURVIVE AS AN INDEPENDENT ARTIST. 2002, Digital Video, Color, 55 minutes. Director/Producer: Michael W. Dean. Editor: Miles Montalbano. Post Production Sound: Thomas Greene. With: Dana Schlechter, Ian MacKaye, Richard Kern, John John Jesse, Ron Asheton, Lynn Breedlove, J. Mascis, Stephen Elliot, Lydia Lunch, Liza Matlack, Madigan Shive, Jim Rose, Cynthia Connolly, Eric McFadden, Beth Lisick, Mike Watt, Dave Brockie, Keith Knight, J.G. Thirlwell. Reviewed at the Independent Media Center, Urbana, IL, June 2002.

AUTOMATIC MAGNETIC 1.0. 2002, Digital Video, Color, 68 minutes. A Bifocal Media video release. Producers: Brad Scott, Jay Holmes, Charles Cardello. Additional Camera: Jeff Hutchins, Mike Ross, Mark Eaton, Randall Bobbitt. Audio: Russel Ellis. With: Milemarker, Andrew Dickson, The Faint, The Convocation Of, The Party of Helicopters, Kerbloki, Randall Bobbitt, Superchunk. Reviewed on DVD.

GHOST HUNTERS. 2001, Digital Video, Color, 20 minutes. A Digital Video Documentaries production. Director: Nathan Bramble. Production Assistant: Seva Trahktman. Music: Fred Wheeler. With: Lewis Gerew, L'Aura Muller, Rick Fisher. Reviewed on CD-Rom.

incessant revelations understandably creep out Ellie and Sarah. As the women's emotions fray upon discovering that a demon-clawed madman lurks outside, they address God's compassion in increasingly emotional conversations that efficiently shade each character. Credit fine actresses Gallo, Allyn, and Hester for embellishing Ciavarello's literate script with a warmth and chemistry that allows the religious dissection to reasonably involve audiences.

The filmmakers dare to use information as their biggest special effect, carefully pacing its dissemination to not only build characterization of the Cloven Hoof, but to pit the friends against each other and their internal convictions. It is a refreshing quality to a fault, as the women's conclusions don't particularly figure in their inevitable Darwinian dealings with the sect's token marauder lying in wait. Further, certain exposition seeks to add scope without weight, primarily when the Angelique character discovers an apocalyptic revelation late in the movie that barely lends itself to a spare climax diluted by conventional scare tactics and a scant denouement. HARDCORE POISONED EYES is mired somewhat in that middle ground between intellectual and visceral thrills but nonetheless is the rare genre film that effectively explores Big Questions while the blood flows.

Shot with a Sony MiniDV camcorder, HARDCORE POISONED EYES sounds great throughout and looks best during the numerous indoor cabin scenes, dominated with warm amber tones and glints of blue light that glow on the DVD. Less successful are the grainy exterior night shots, luckily given eerie form by the snowy ground, and the extra-bright daytime footage marred by distracting horizontal lining. Ciavarello, producer Anthony Fariello, and cinematographer Huy Truong, the film's virtual three-man crew, explain their intentions throughout the low-key commentary track. Also on the disc is a serviceable, 10-minute conversation between Ciavarello and noted journalist/filmmaker Roy Frumkes (DOCUMENT OF THE DEAD). – JaPan

HISTORY LESSONS

A First Run Features video release 2000, 35mm/16mm, Color/B&W, 66 minutes Directed and produced by Barbara Hammer Reviewed on VHS

Constructed carefully with a wide variety of television program excerpts, old photographs, art pieces, and other similar mediums, Barbara Hammer's HISTORY LESSONS is put together in an experimental style that is reminiscent of her earlier works (TENDER FICTIONS, NITRATE KISSES), and ends her trilogy of documentary film essays. In the nearly three decades that Hammer has been filmmaking, she has become a leading advocate in the art world for the lesbian community. HISTORY LESSONS continues her cause as she rediscovers lesbian history, a narrative often seen as mysterious or untouchable, with a touch of humor and with a bit of mockery. Whether we like it or not, shot after shot, the director exposes us to a world where homosexuality is a charm and sex is not secretive, but unconcealed and relished. The film is crafted in a Jackson Pollock-type manner, with splashes of ecstasy being splattered all over the screen. It is no doubt bold, daring, and quite innovative, but watching the film, it seems more geared for a homosexual audience rather than a general one. In order to redefine the lesbian image into something pervasive and shameless, Hammer uses the sequences of archival footage and graphic imagery to overwhelm viewers with lesbianism. She achieves this goal of redefinition easily and even quite gracefully in the film, but in doing so, the tone of the documentary becomes rather imperative. The numerous clips of smiling women waving to the camera and the pictures illustrating the supposed happy moments of lesbian history seem to serve as advertisement for the gay community. It is a declaration that has a tendency to glorify lesbians and tease those who are not. Yet, this tactic of empowerment is harmless, and arguably necessary, as the purpose of the film clearly goes much deeper than shallow retaliation and is targeted towards changing the mentality of lesbians who for centuries have been taught to be ashamed of their sexuality. HISTORY LESSONS has moments of inventive artistry and it can certainly be valued from an artistic standpoint. - Diane Kung

HOME MOVIE

A Cowboy Pictures release of a Blue Mark Productions/Independent Media film in association with Homestore.com

2002, 35mm, Color, 60 minutes

Directed by Chris Smith

Produced by Barbara Laffey and Susane Preissler

With Bill Tregle, Ben Skora, Darlene Satrinano, Ed Peden, Diana Peden, Bob Walker, Francis Mooney, Linda Beech

Reviewed at the Normal Theater, Normal, IL, February 2003

HOME MOVIE is director Chris Smith's most recent ode to quirky modern Americana, following AMERICAN JOB and AMERICAN MOVIE (*M-F #2*, *p.12*), the latter a documentary that made novice Wisconsin filmmaker Mark

Borchardt a Letterman fixture as well as a bona fide cult star. This outing, originally conceived as a series of mini-movies for Internet streaming, takes a look at the lives of eight individuals who have fashioned five rather peculiar domiciles for themselves. Burly southerner Bill Tregle lives alone in a fortified shack on stilts in the middle of a bayou river near his family's alligator farm. Bookish couple Ed and Diana Peden persist with the lifelong task of renovating an abandoned missile silo near Topeka, Kansas, to reflect their earthspiritual ways. Affable partners Bob Walker and Francis Mooney share their California home with an armada of kitty cats, kitty toys, kitty castles, and kitty catwalks that extend through almost every room. Retired septuagenarian Linda Beech, once the lone Caucasian actress on a hit Japanese television show in the 1960s, explains with dry wit the joys of inhabiting a massive (and literal) tree house on one of the islands of Hawai'i. Finally, hobbyist inventor Ben Skora (whose humanoid robot Arok amazed me as a kid when it appeared in National Geographic World) and apparent girlfriend Darlene Satrinano demonstrate the many custom-built gizmos installed in his ersatz Chicagoland "house of the future." Unlike the patient, fly-on-the-wall investment Smith and sometimes partner Sarah Price needed to capture AMERICAN MOVIE's gonzo guignol, the director uses a more immediate interview-andtour approach here that still shows his affinity for eliciting the small, humorous, and quite human moments that count. To that end, with help from the leisurely editing by Jun Diaz and the surprisingly lush cinematography by Hubert Taczanowski, Smith charms us with the winsome inhabitants and oddball habitats of HOME MOVIE.

Strange that Cowboy Films would pair HOME MOVIE with John Heyn and Jeff Krulik's cable-access classic HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT (1986), other than to fill out the running time to make theatrical booking easier. It could be argued that both films document human eccentricities, yet when taken in back-to-back, said eccentricities still fall at opposite ends of the spectrum. Regardless, it's interesting to see the much-bootlegged HMPL projected onto the big screen with a video-to-film transfer that is about as fuzzy as can be expected. Just remember that 15 minutes of mild eyestrain can hardly detract from the amazing underground retro-rush of pre-concert Judas Priest fans chugging cheap beer and strutting their stuff on the titular chunk of Maryland asphalt. Zebraman is still a sight to behold after all these years. Long live rock-n-roll! - JaPan

HORNS AND HALOS

A RumuR, Inc. production in association with 184 and HBO/Cinemax Documentaries 2002, Digital Video, Color, 79 minutes

Directed and produced by Suki Hawley and Michael Galinsky

With J.H. Hatfield, Sander Hicks, Jim Fitzgerald, Pete Slover, Pam Colloff,

Mark Crispin Miller, Zack Exley, Amy Goodman

Reviewed at the Underground Publishing Conference, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH, June 2002.

As an ultra-independent publisher in a world of media giants, I sometimes wonder what sacrifices it would take to even rise to the level of visibleyet resiliently pesky—flea on their hairy backsides. Then I wonder which false move would be the one to kick my ass right back down to citizen peon level, possibly risking the future of my endeavors in the process. Will I miss paying that one fateful bill? Will I ask for one favor too many? Will one stray opinion backfire by rubbing the wrong person in absolutely the worst way? At what price does one stand by one's convictions in an increasingly contentious world? Exhibit A in the case of Consumerist Media Industry vs. Idealistic Anarchist Publishing is HORNS AND HALOS, a humbling cautionary tale from the veteran underground filmmakers Suki Hawley and Michael Galinsky (HALF-COCKED, RADIATION).

Proving that truth is stranger than non-fiction, this documentary follows the thorny path tread by author Jim Hatfield after his controversial George W. Bush "tell-all" book Fortunate Son is dumped by its original publisher, St. Martin's Press, amidst brewing criticism over the book's content and the author's dubious background. With the infamous 2000 presidential election just over a year away and the Shrub's involvement inevitable, Fortunate Son is rescued by one Sander Hicks, the enigmatic head of basement-dwelling progressive imprint Soft Skull Press in New York City. While the hot-potato match-up of Soft Skull and Fortunate Son would seem like an ideal pairing where anti-Dubya sentiments are concerned, HORNS AND HALOS reveals the incredulous nightmare that would eventually engulf the more important pairing at stake: Hatfield and Hicks.

It's an atypical sort of buddy movie, really, one in which a Hollywood-style bonding never materializes yet we're still compelled to watch closely because we wonder exactly what tie binds these two men beyond the book. As an efficient montage timeline depicts Bush's ascension of the Republican political ladder, gangly punker Hicks becomes drawn into a subtle kind of chaos as the national press subverts his scheme in unexpected ways. Not only do inquisitive journalists draw attention to, if not outright sensationalize, shaky factual claims in the text—including Bush's apparent arrest for cocaine possession and draft-dodging attempts—but they also unearth the questionable past of

Arkansas native Hatfield in the process. Of course, this becomes the conspiracy as reported in the news, not the transgressions and hypocrisies detailed within the covers of Fortunate Son.

Indicative of an unforced empathy present throughout HORNS AND HALOS, Hawley and Galinsky gracefully handle a denouement rife with disillusionment, rejection, and death. Their camera takes in this small tragedy with relative directness; in fact, both Hicks and Hatfield open up to their lens early and often, even when hesitation seems to exude from their pores like a feverish sweat. This film ably captures the virtues and faults of human beings aiming to achieve what they feel is right using media, but these publishing underdogs' delusions of left-wing grandeur becomes their ultimate undoing. You can only imagine how chilling this is to me. - JaPan

HOT AND BOTHERED: FEMINIST PORNOGRAPHY

2002, Video, Color, 37 minutes Directed and edited by Becky Goldberg Produced by Becky Goldberg and Leah Sinrich With Nina Hartley, Shar Rednour, Jackie Strano, Jen Loy, Paige Penland, Jeff Johnson, Greta Christina, Tristan Taormino, Sharon Mitchell, Jane Hamilton Reviewed on VHS

Films about the sex industry, particularly porno-making, have emerged in legion as of late, from dramas (BOOGIE NIGHTS) to comedies (ORGAZMO) to pseudo-biographies (AUTO FOCUS) to an entire documentary subset (PORNSTAR, WADD, THE GIRL NEXT DOOR, RATED X). Joining the foray is Becky Goldberg's HOT AND BOTHERED, a micro-budget snapshot of hardworking women who have staked their claim in the business by producing, directing, manufacturing, retailing, or authoring pornography that aims to give female consumers respect and self-confidence. As a first-time filmmaker, Goldberg keeps her focus reasonably clear, opting to characterize a small, well-chosen group whose unapologetic intelligence and humor help define "feminist pornography" as well as the male-chauvinist fantasia that colors much of the industry's product.

HOT AND BOTHERED maintains an upbeat tempo from beginning to end, mixing interviews with an agreeable amount of randy film clips guaranteed to scare off the prudish. Jane Hamilton, who directs hardcore porn as "Veronica Hart," provides candid observations about busting her butt in the studio while leading a normal life outside of it. Shar Rednour and Jackie Strano muse about producing lesbian erotica that has garnered unexpected rewards. Greta Christina, the general manager for Blowfish.com, describes the growing market for women-friendly sex products. Noted pundits Nina Hartley and Tristan Taormino gab with tongues slightly in cheek (their own, not each other's) about sex as a positive outlet, and how they translated their ideas to video. Sharon Mitchell talks proudly about Adult Industry Medical Care, an organization she co-founded after a brief stint as a porn actress. Finally, Fabula magazine editors Jen Loy, Paige Penland, and Jeff Johnson attempt to put female-created porn in a modern feminist light, and while their input is sincere they often sound reluctant to truly give the movers-and-shakers their due because of the industry involved.

On the whole, HOT AND BOTHERED doesn't exhibit such a hesitation, yet it feels like Goldberg and producer Leah Sinrich possibly orphaned a number of provocative thought bombs while in editing to preserve their positive agenda. For instance, they curiously work around any deep-seeded discussion regarding feminism as a personal doctrine for these ladies beyond mere terminology. Another topic receiving short shift is the inevitably compromised dealings with companies and distributors that normally cater to testosterone, although Taormino gleefully jabs at that Goliath in a scene from one of her video productions. Late in the film, Hamilton evokes a defensive stance when she says, "I'm responsible for my own movies," implying that if women making porn can establish clout and carve out their own niche, then the male moguls can litter the remaining marketplace as they see fit. To these ears, it sounds like tunnel vision, not proactive feminism. I hate to rag on HOT AND BOTHERED for lack of depth, but I wonder if a longer cut or follow-up-DOWN AND DIRTY, perhaps?—might be necessary to better complete this otherwise amiable portrait. - JaPan

HUNTING HUMANS

An MTI Home Video/Redrum Entertainment video release of a Marauder Productions film 2002, Digital Video, Color, 89 minutes Directed and written by Kevin Kangas Produced by Rick Ganz and Kevin Kangas Starring Rick Ganz, Bubby Lewis, Lisa Michele, Trent Previewed on VHS

Give HUNTING HUMANS writer/director Kevin Kangas credit for a brilliant story idea. It's just too bad that his amateur cast and digital cinematography deflect the verisimilitude needed to ratchet up the suspense. Aric Blue



KEVIEWS Micro-Film Style

CEVIEWS

REVIEWS Micro-Film Stule

CEVIEWS

REVIEWS



AUTOMATIC MAGNETIC



HISTORY LESSONS

Magic Bullet Suite 1.5

by Chad Fahs

How can I make my video look more like film? For anyone creating movies using a digital video camera and a home computer, this question inevitably comes up. And, while there are many ways to improve the quality of your video's picture through the use of proper lighting, camera movements, and other cinematic devices, there is only so much that you can do to improve the formal qualities of video, digital or otherwise. Of course, choosing a suitable camera, such as Canon's XL-1S or Sony's PD-150 doesn't hurt. Using special lenses and filtration to reduce depth of field can help as well. Still, it takes much more to approach the look of film, whose characteristic frame rate and complex photochemical processes are notoriously difficult to emulate. Fortunately, there is a software package called Magic Bullet Suite that solves many of these problems by giving you the tools to tailor the look of your video while in postproduction.

Created by The Orphanage and marketed by Red Giant Software, Magic Bullet Suite is a collection of plug-ins for After Effects that perform a variety of functions intended to bring the look and feel of big-budget movies to the DIY masses. While its price may be prohibitive for some users-the standard definition version sells for \$995 and the high definition version for



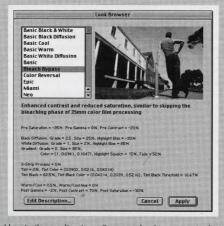
\$1,995—its long-term gains can be immediately appreciable. This is if you consider it an extension of the production process (i.e. your camera), rather than simply another series of "effects" plug-ins.

Magic Bullet Suite consists of five different plug-ins, including "Magic Bullet," "Look "Opticals," "Letterboxer," "Broadcast Spec." Although plug-ins like "Opticals" and "Broadcast Spec" are infinitely useful, providing film-style transitions and color-safe video (without affecting image quality), it is the capabilities of the "Magic Bullet" plug-in and the "Look Suite" that are worth the price of admission.

Perhaps the most significant feature of Magic Bullet is the ability to create a 24p master from your digital video. What this means is that Magic Bullet takes your interlaced video input of approximately 30 frames per second (NTSC) and creates a progressive frame output to match film's 24 frames per second, which is perfect for transferring video to film or to simply reproduce cinematic motion. In addition to creating a flawless frame rate conversion, Magic Bullet removes artifacts associated with digital video while interlacing your frames. The image optimization features make this plug-in truly unique, by actually removing jagged edges and other problems that are signatures of video. In fact, Magic Bullet can dramatically sharpen and improve slightly fuzzy or out-of-focus video, better than any stock After Effects filter can accomplish

Perhaps the coolest plug-in this package offers is the "Look Suite," which supplies several practical presets to mimic the look of specific film aesthetics. For instance, an effect called "bleach

bypass" simulates a skip bleach process used in movies like SAVING PRIVATE RYAN, while another recreates a cold Fincher-esque mood reminiscent of THE GAME or FIGHT CLUB and "Neo" comes close to bringing your video into the world of THE MATRIX. There are other presets for creating more standard film looks, such as "Basic Black Diffusion," "Basic Warm," 'Punchy," "Color Reversal," "Epic," and "Miami," some of which do an incredible job of conjuring a classic three-strip film process or film stock shot with graduated filters. Each of the 16 presets can be used as-is or customized to meet the needs of your project. You can also create completely new presets by experimenting with the various effect parameters, which are labeled with names like "Tint" and "Warm/Cool,"



rather than with tech-heavy jargon utilized by similar applications. Fortunately, the presets in the "Look Suite" have been so carefully chosen and designed that you may find the settings that shipped with the software are already exactly what you need.

Overall, Magic Bullet Suite is an amazing set of plug-ins that any studio working with DV footage should seriously consider purchasing, particularly if you are planning to transfer your next video to film, or if you want to gain an edge when placing your masterpiece on the festival circuit. The only requirements to run the software are Adobe After Effects 5.5 and a suitable computer (a Macintosh G4 or Pentium 4 and higher is recommended). This entry in the small film-look arena clearly outshines the competition. Although you do not get to choose from a list of film stocks, like those provided with DigiEffects Cinelook, what you do get is the largest number of practical and readily usable effects, in addition to special optical tools and the best 24p output of any software product on the market. Magic Bullet Suite fits the bill with unmatched style, speed, and relative ease of use.

The Orphanage is a San Francisco-based company whose founding members deserted their "Rebel Unit" posts at George Lucas' Industrial Light & Magic, where they used off-the-shelf hardware and software to create visual effects for blockbuster movies like STAR WARS EPISODE I. Visit www.theorphanage.com or download the Magic Bullet Suite demo at www.redgiantsoftware.com.

(played by producer Rick Ganz) is a serial-killing sociopath who feels absolutely no remorse for his victims. He has managed to stay plenty of steps ahead of the law by refusing to settle into a pattern and always choosing his victims randomly. Working for a mortgage company gives him plenty of access to the addresses and bank records of potential victims, and even though he has no feelings of his own, he's clever enough to project the right emotions around the office to keep his co-workers from becoming suspicious. One night, while on his way to murder a movie theater projectionist, Aric discovers his prey is already dead—the victim of a second serial killer who leaves a taunting note for Aric. "I've got your pattern," it says. Who is Aric's mysterious rival, and how did the competitor discover his identity?

Unfortunately, the answers aren't as clever as the concept, thanks to a shortage of red herrings and a running time Kangas isn't quite able to sustain. HUNTING HUMANS is a genuine homemade production filmed in Maryland, and as such, doesn't have the actors or the production value it needs to turn Kangas' story into something with balls. Ganz appears in every scene, and while he looks the part of an arrogant salesman, his line delivery and screen presence leave much to be desired. He comes off as more professional than the rest of the cast, however, who often seem like they're repeating lines they learned just a few minutes before. Kangas is aware of his film's shortcomings, and attempts several post-production tricks to spice up the visuals, but they weren't enough to keep me interested to the end. I think Kangas might have a few more tricks up his sleeve, however, and if he can manage to wrangle together Jeff Fahey and several thousand more dollars for his next feature, it should be an improvement over this flawed but not worthless debut. - Marty McKee

THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE PEOPLE SHOW

A Powercage Films production 2001, BetacamSP, B&W/Color, 74 minutes Directed and written by Jason Christoph De L'orme Produced by Jason Christoph De L'orme and Simon Faulkner Starring Kevin Neil, Max Day, Paul Baker, Susie Benton, Billy Chainsaw, Nina De Cosimo,

Nick Ewans, Simon Faulkner, Emily Grogan, Llewellyn Harris, Mark Katz, Jamie Martin, John O'Connor, Hannah Roberts, Claude Starling

Reviewed on VHS

Remember NIGHT FLIGHT, that late-nite television extravaganza of cult flicks, New Wave music videos, and bizarre international snippets? Imagine flipping through an array of cable channels programmed to the hilt with similar offerings, and you'll invoke the schlock aesthetic of THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE PEOPLE SHOW, a quirky British patchwork that might actually be too smart for general consumption. Shot almost entirely in the London flat of partners Jason De L'orme and Simon Faulkner, this ambitious micro-production finds slackers Max (Kevin Neil) and Moritz (Max Day) exposing themselves to cheeseball sci-fi programs, lurid pulp dramas, obnoxious infomercials, "breaking news" inserts, pretentious letterboxed art cinema, and even profanity-laden propaganda films! People ingrained in offbeat film history will find much to enjoy here, especially considering how the filmmakers squeezed production value out of very meager resources. Versatile set designer Derek Lee does wonders in transforming the flat into everything from a forensics lab to a hoity-toity bistro, while the videography, graphic design, and blue screen effects are rife with bold, swanky colors. Frankly, certain segments drag needlessly, while fits of overacting reach a decibel level heretofore uncharted, yet the generally good-natured tone helps usher us through these rough spots. Fun passages feature Nick Ewans as a stuck-up scientist with extremely bad teeth, Hannah Roberts as a lightningrod Bad Girl holed up in prison, and John O'Connor as a droll incarnation of Jonathan Ross, the former host of the classic Channel Four B-movie program, THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILM SHOW. My favorite parts are the increasingly ludicrous exchanges between Max and Moritz, gently aping the nonsensical conversations one would expect from friends strung out in front of the idiot box at one in the morning. Certainly an acquired taste, THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE PEOPLE SHOW provides exploitation junkies with a modern-day equivalent to omnibus spooferies like THE GROOVE TUBE, mixed with a distinctly surreal English flavour. Good show! - JaPan

A Sub Rosa Studios video release of a Sub Rosa Extreme/Bullet Pen Productions film 2002, Digital Video, Color, 82 minutes Directed and produced by John Specht

Written by Robin Garrels

Starring Robin Garrels, Chris Grega, John Specht, Derek Simmons, Chris Martin, Eric Whitman, David Burnett, Dennis Garrels, Jeff Schoenfeld Reviewed on VHS

Hidden amidst the first wave of Sub Rosa Extreme exploitation flicks released early last year, including THE CHRISTMAS SEASON MASSACRE, BIZARRE LUST OF A SEXUAL DEVIANT, and the much-debated I SPIT ON YOUR CORPSE, I PISS ON YOUR GRAVE, is a little number called INSANIAC. Do yourself a favor by ignoring the grindhouse title and blood-red box cover, for behind them lies a strangely passionate crime-horror meld that reaches a plateau well above its perverse label mates.

Jumbled snippets of past memories haunt redheaded Autumn (Robin Garrels), who has been admitted into a hospital for reasons unexplained. As portly Dr. Lumen (John Specht) carefully guides Autumn through her shielding subconscious, moments both surreal and somber sort themselves out en route to a shattering flashback that tips the poor girl over the edge. We anticipate reaching this breaking point by film's end, so credit the filmmakers as they littered INSANIAC with numerous episodes interesting enough to keep our attention until the inevitable. In fact, they possibly try to do too much with limited means.

Some set pieces feel superfluous, such as an odd mock-comedic encounter with a sparring sitcom couple in their kitchen, seemingly thrown in to fill out Autumn's seven-step ascent up Lumen's hypnosis-induced "building." As well, the symbolic "dream" sequences lend as much of a found-object visual scheme as do the "reality" sequences, recounting Autumn's disastrous attempt to deliver drugs for low-rung whiner Forrest (Chris Martin) and his toadie Kelley (Derek Simmons), that blurs their distinction. To compensate, stretches of dialogue seem over-dependent on explaining what's happening

Maybe this approach is more valid when considering that Autumn is a struggling poetess yearning to escape the blue-collar Midwest for California—hence, her ill-fated move to score cash—and that amplifying the mundane with words is simply a defense mechanism to help cloud that unspeakable act. The more natural conversations occur between Autumn and Hart (Chris Grega), her bespectacled, straight-laced beau who is attempting to finish grad school. It is the moments between these two that the film is strongest, as we can connect with their individual yearnings but also receive a gage via Hart that Autumn runs with a dubious crowd that might bring her harm.

Lead actress Garrels, who also wrote the screenplay and sings over the end credits, brings a nice range to her performance as Autumn and certainly illuminates the screen every time she smiles. Her sincerity and mystery only makes the ending calamity cut deeper when we realize how much of a pointless tragedy it really was. Shooting in an abandoned St. Louis high rise, director Specht and camera man Jeff Atwater take advantage of office space to enclose Autumn in her various worlds, and David Burnett contributes a minimalist music score rife with reciprocating tones that get underneath the skin. All the supporting actors do fine in their perfunctory roles.

Although this effort is only somewhat better than average as a slice of entertainment, INSANIAC offers more than enough to sort out on retrospect, which can't be said for most ultra-indie genre junk made today. It's clear that Garrels is a talent to watch for and that she put some elbow grease into formulating this story, even when it feels compromised at times by the miniscule budget. It will be interesting to see how her future projects turn out under the tutelage of Specht and this film's editor, Eric Stanze (SCRAPBOOK), for how often does a woman with guts and originality infiltrate the underground willingly? - JaPan

JESUS CHRIST VAMPIRE HUNTER

Reviewed on DVD

An Eclectic video release of an Odessa Filmworks production 2001, 16mm, Color, 85 minutes Directed and produced by Lee Gordon Demarbre Written by Ian Driscoll Starring Phil Caracas, Murielle Varhelyi, Maria Moulton, Ian Driscoll, Josh Grace, Tim Devries, Jeff Moffet

JESUS CHRIST VAMPIRE HUNTER, the first feature-length production from the creators of HARRY KNUCKLES AND THE TREASURE OF THE AZTEC MUMMY, is an awesome, whacked-out cinematic experience featuring the ultimate action hero. In this Canadian concoction, Jesus H. Christ (Phil Caracas) interrupts his Second Coming to help combat a plague of sunlightproof vampires and solve the mysterious disappearances of lesbians in Toronto. With the aid of church mercenary Mary Magnum (Maria Moulton) and Mexican wrestling legend El Santos (Jeff Moffat), Jesus eventually gets to

the bottom of things with quite a bit of ass-kicking.

Lee Gordon DeMarbre's opus is a bit rough around the edges in the technical areas, but you have to admire the chutzpah of everyone involved to make this work as well as it does. The film wears its exploitation badge proudly, from the slightly faded look of 1970s television cop shows and early chopsocky flicks to the intentionally out-of-synch dialogue to the techno/disco score by Graham Collins and the choreographed fights. There's even room for a musical production number! Ian Driscoll's script is tops, mixing elements as diverse as Biblical scripture, Kung Fu, and modern sexual politics into a coherent smorgasbord for all of the actors to chew on. Most amazingly,

the film actually maintains a high level of respect to the "source" material, and there's very little that could be considered blasphemous. In fact, it'd be just the thing to perk up those dry Sunday school lessons.

The DVD is packed with a slew of extras. In addition to a running commentary by DeMarbre, Caracas, Driscoll, Moffat, and Josh Grace, there's an extended musical sequence, numerous outtakes, interviews with the crew and cast, the original HARRY KNUCKLES trailer, and a sizeable photo gallery. The absence of any female cast members in the extras is the main drawback here, making for a visually painful experience during the interview segment with the male actors on the set of the next HARRY KNUCKLES movie, all dressed in Speedos. Other than that, the disc overall is A-1. - Robert Hubbard

MANIACTS

An MTI Home Video/Redrum Entertainment video release of a Meat and Potatoes Productions film 2001, Digital Video, Color, 93 minutes Directed and written by C.W. Cressler Produced by Jenny Hinkey Starring Jeff Fahey, Kellie Waymire, Leslie Easterbrook, Mel Winkler, John Furlong, Bob Bancroft, Vincent Guastaferro, James "JR" Pollard Reviewed on DVD

Serial killers aren't evil. They're just wacky, misunderstood misfits who have trouble fitting in. That seems to be the premise of MANIACTS, a wildly uneven black comedy that stars independent film regular Jeff Fahey (DARK-MAN III) and television actress Kellie Waymire (Fox's THE PITTS). Joe (Fahey) and Beth (Waymire) are serial killers who meet while incarcerated in a mental hospital, where they are routinely tortured through beatings, electrocution, and isolation. Joe manages to escape, but finds he can't adjust to "normal" life on the outside, and breaks back into the institution to bust Beth out. The two manage to settle on a farm owned by crazy old psychic Boley (John Furlong), but soon realize that cool country air and hard physical labor won't allow them to escape their pasts or their sicknesses.

It's difficult to say what sort of tone Cressler was aiming for. The scenes that take place inside the hospital are so broadly cartoonish, it's impossible to take seriously any statement Cressler may be making about the inmates' living conditions. When the second half bogs down in over-the-top action sequences and a downbeat finale, you wonder whether you're supposed to be laughing or not. The stars, bless their little hearts, seem to be trying to keep up with Cressler's schizophrenic script and manage to acquit themselves pretty well. Fahey, a genuinely fine actor entrenched in direct-to-video action films, is too old for his role but proves he can handle the film's comedic and dramatic moments equally well. Waymire is well cast as a woman with an odd fantasy life, and almost manages to convince us she's a killer.

Filmed in New Mexico in 2001, MANIACTS is now receiving its domestic video release from MTI. The screener we received was in full-frame mode only with a soundtrack that was usually mixed too low to pick up all the whispered dialogue. It's also adorned with atrocious cover art that has nothing to do with the movie, seemingly designed to remind potential renters of THE LAWNMOWER MAN. - Marty McKee

MY BROTHER'S LIGHT

A Jerusalem Films production 2002, Video, Color, 90 minutes Directed by Michael Wolinski and Rocco Pucillo Written by Michael Wolinski, Rocco Pucillo, and Jeffrey Wolinski Executive produced by Rocco Pucillo, Michael Wolinski, Ti Kenneth Hays Starring Michael E. Wolinski, Rocco Pucillo, Jeffrey Wolinski, Jesus De Santiago, Michael Sode, R. Thomas Bierach, Heidi Popp, Adam Boor, Lawrence August, Bryan Irzyk, Sarah E. Dyer, Michael Pavlisan, Suzette J. Lippard, Scott Underwood Reviewed on VHS

When in doubt, spoof yourselves! This adage just might have been the impetus for MY BROTHER'S LIGHT, the new offering from the gang behind THE AFTER SCHOOL SPECIAL (M-F #3, p.20) that functions like a belated companion piece rather than a true sequel. Modeled in jest after the numerous "behind-the-scenes" puff pieces that litter television airwaves, MY BROTHER'S LIGHT concerns the efforts of deadpan host Zeus Arxidia Papagianakopoulos (Rocco Pucillo) to reconstruct apparent fallings-out between SPECIAL masterminds Michael and Jeff Wolinski. A gradual process of discovery unearths red herrings, dark secrets, reconciliation, and a parade of non-PC humor that only Mr. Wolinski and Jeff (as the other interviewees refer to them) could spawn. As with that SPECIAL movie, MY BROTHER'S LIGHT abounds with hit-or-miss material that careens between the sophisticated and sophomoric, and oftentimes the pacing becomes rather cumbersome at the expense of affording screen time for no less than a dozen real-life Wolinski colleagues. Certain ideas translate well and warrant the attention: the John-and-Yoko subplot involving Winona Ryder and Jeff, the lifestyle



REVIEWS Micro-Film Style

EVIEWS

EVIEWS

KEVIEWS Micro-Film Style

EVIEWS



HORNS AND HALOS



BOTHERED

...A Tangled Web

by L. Rob Hubbard

In which we (re)learn Sturgeon's Law, and examine some exceptions to the rule.

Most of the Internet is pure, utter crap.

"Heresy!"

Not at all. As one who has a consistent working relationship with that particular material, it's just a statement of a very clear fact. Though we all attempt to break it, we all follow Sturgeon's Law, derived from the late science-fiction author Theodore Sturgeon's oft quoted maxim that "90% of everything is crap." When he made the statement he was originally talking about literature, but it has proven extremely adaptable. We're barely a decade into the Internet Frontier and things have already become old hat. Its promise has devolved into spam-filled "junk mail" folders on e-mail accounts and sites that are little more than shopping malls.

There are many specific offenders I could list, but let's focus on movie Web sites. At one point, these pages were mainly extended ads-a bit flashier than the typical ad, with full-motion video, sound, and animation—but were still a boon to independent filmmakers without bushels of cash for promotion. If you could think up a creative and clever campaign, a Web site allowed for more niche marketing than might have been previously possible. Looking back a mere four years, probably the most noticeable example trumpeted the "documentary" about three vanished filmmakers and their quarry—the Blair Witch. "Actual" footage shot by the trio was posted alongside bios and physical traits, interviews with friends of the victims, quotes from law enforcement, and press clippings.

Whatever you may think about THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT, there's no denying that the Web site played a key role in stoking the imaginations of its core audience—computer-savvy kids that liked a good campfire story (and who apparently had little camping experience). It was perfectly primed for all the Internet hype of "synergy" and "interactivity" that had producers throwing money at people who could code a site. However, in the frenzy, "clever" and "creative" tended to

Rather than pillory the negative aspects any more, it might be refreshing to take a look at some sites that actually work as complementary experiences to the indie films they're pushing

Glass Eye Pix (www.glasseyepix.com) features the work of Larry Fessenden, the NYC filmmaker who has drawn attention for films such as HABIT and WENDIGO. It's a pretty thorough collection of all things Fessenden—from his recent "Trilogy of Terror" to early video work to roles

in other films and films produced under the Glass Eye umbrella. There's plenty of press about the films and Fessenden himself, copious production notes about the trilogy, and viewer feedback both good and bad. If you haven't seen any of Fessenden's work yet, skimming this site for 10 minutes will be enough to encourage you to seek it out at the video store.

LIVING IN MISSOURI (www.livinginmissouri.com) is a small indie that has been gathering critical notice at festivals for the past couple of years. The site serves as a good introduction. It's very detailed about the genesis and production of the film, including how the filmmakers used their own chat site to help develop the story and characters. A festival diary can be seen, along with scenes from the film and deleted footage. This comedy of dysfunction is one of the best "hidden" films not in commercial release; if you can't see it at a festival near you, consider e-mailing the director about arranging

You have most likely read about THE INDEPENDENT earlier in this issue, so it's entirely appropriate that the site gets a mention. Actually, it's a site for Fineman Films (www.finemanfilms.com) and Morty Fineman, the subject of THE INDE-

PENDENT. The main feature here is a comprehensive database of all Morty's 427 films (such as the classics TO HELL IN A PICNIC BASKET, I AM CURIOUS ... YOU ARE YELLOW, and THE MAN WITH TWO THINGS). There's also a link with information about THE INDEPENDENT itself,

surely one of the best docudramas since THE ADVENTURES OF BUCKAROO BANZAI Two more sites worthy of mention are for Odessa Filmworks (www.odessafilmworks.com), the home of Canadian director Lee DeMarbre (IESUS CHRIST VAMPIRE HUNTER: see p.43). and GuerrillaMonster (www.guerrillamonster.com), the lair of Memphis wünderkind John Michael McCarthy (SUPERSTARLET A.D.; M-F #4, p.8), both of whom share comparable sensibilities. Their respective sites are packed with info on their films (although McCarthy could benefit by linking to outside press), odd nuggets just waiting to be found (an academic paper about JESUS CHRIST presented at a religious conference; demo songs for a proposed JMM animation, PSYCHEDELVIS, under "In Development"), and an overt fondness for the North American exploitation film. However, I did notice a much higher population of scantily clad babes on GuerrillaMonster, which has been recently upgraded and now features merchandise for sale as well as information on his upcoming feature, BROAD DAYLIGHT.

Living In Missouri



switch to backwoods folkie for SPECIAL co-star Adam Boor, and Mr. Wolinski's inexplicable sequel to the 1975 Joe Don Baker potboiler MITCHELL as a vanity project for another SPECIAL co-star, Kurt Bierach. On the other hand, set pieces are also squandered, such as a nod to Sir Alec Guinness and STAR WARS featuring SPECIAL scene-stealer Jesus de Santiago, or tipped way too early, such as the dubious nature of the film set where SPECIAL hottie Heidi Popp is interviewed. I also wish the film could have pushed further the melodramatic mess that engulfs the Wolinski brothers, going so far as to depict their rift on-screen in a near cataclysm. Ultimately, one can't help but give these goofballs props for working overtime to entertain us non-SPECIAL people while in effect assembling a video scrapbook for themselves, and certainly some thought went into devising the satiric role-playing, lowbrow one-liners, and pop culture nods on display here. We'll call it two-and-a-half arena rock lighters raised high for MY BROTHER'S LIGHT and dredge up some hooch to binge-drink in honor of Mr. Wolinski and Jeff. - JaPan

MYSTERIOUS OBJECT AT NOON (DOGFAHR NAI MEUMAN)

A Plexifilm video release of a Hubert Bals Fund/ 9/6 Cinema Factory/ Firecracker Film Co., Ltd. production 2000, 16mm, B&W, 85 minutes Directed by Apichatpong Weerasethakul Starring Somsri Pinyopol, Kannikar Narong, Chakree Duangklap, To Handudomlap,

Dunagjai Hiransri

Reviewed on DVD

"And the cinema, by making reality disgorge, reminds us that one must attempt to live." - Jean-Luc Godard, October 1965

In a vagabond journey through various locales in Thailand, MYSTERIOUS OBJECT AT NOON presents a disgorged reality as aching as it is enigmatic. The film encounters some obstacles in its path but it is still a success.

Filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul found inspiration in the old Surrealist technique of Cadavre Exquis, or Exquisite Corpse, which he discovered at an Art Institute of Chicago exhibition. Exquisite Corpse evolved from a parlor game of writing a poem or story from words or sentences contributed by a series of persons largely unaware of what was already written. The Surrealists (André Breton, Man Ray, etc.) expanded this automatic writing technique to drawing, where a person drew on one section of a folded piece of paper so that only small portions of the lines extend into the next section for continuation by the next artist. The artist then passes the paper on to the next person who applies the same process until the drawing is finished.

MYSTERIOUS OBJECT AT NOON is an experiment in creating a film collectively using Exquisite Corpse. People from small, often remote, villages in Thailand contribute fragments to an evolving story. Humor, drama, and sci-fi all enter the plot, involving a teacher named Dogfahr and her crippled student. The film alternates between the storytellers explaining the plot and different groups acting out conceptions of the story sections, resulting in a manipulated documentary partly like a cinema-vérité exposition but also recalling aspects of films by Andy Warhol and Roberto Rossellini.

A risk in applying Exquisite Corpse to the cinema is that a director could dominate the proceeding—intentionally or unintentionally—if the job of directing is not shared with the storytellers. Here, there is always a filmmaker deciding what enters the film, and Weerasethakul does admit to helping some of the storytellers along at points. To his credit, he only gives the storytellers a place to begin. MYSTERIOUS OBJECT AT NOON is like a platform from which we can glimpse a variety of conventions that permeate the small villages of Thailand. Few of the story fragments appear entirely spontaneous or instinctual. Some seem like explanations of real-life events. Others seem like familiar pop or folk tales bent to fit into sections of the continuing Exquisite Corpse story. More than anything, though, the film does originate from the people encountered and the different circumstances that make them each unique.

Weerasethakul often drifts from solely presenting storytelling, venturing outside the Surrealists' formula. This allows the more human aspects to shine. There is the presence of a filmmaker's game but also of lives in curious places. Pure narratives are only part of this film, which also depicts the process of the storytellers suggesting, rejecting, and reformulating their contributions. Weerasethakul's film is more than the construction of a story; it is a document of real people placing the very notion of "fiction" in

An interview with the filmmaker on the DVD explains how MYSTERIOUS OBJECT AT NOON ended at the point when the camera broke. A largely random event answers the imposing question of when to stop. This caps a great little film. Where the roguish tendencies of the premise give way to genuine moments, such as a woman explaining how her father sold her to her uncle, a sly old woman playing to the camera, or children tying a toy car to a dog, we are watching something marvelous that reminds us to attempt to restore life in ourselves. - Austen Zuege

ODD NOGGINS

An F&C Productions film 2002, Video, Color, 68 minutes

Directed and written by Joe Sherlock

Starring Kimberly Lynn Cole, Holly Bernabe, Tamsin Atkinson, John Bowker, Shannon, Amira Lynn, Terra Shamblin, Aimee Masters, Tough Tom Stedham, Jeff Dylan Graham Reviewed on VHS

"I saw this movie the other night ... one long, weird, trippy movie. It didn't have much of a story, just a bunch of people doing a bunch of things." "Sounds like one of those artsy films."

"Yeah. You see one character, and then they're gone, and you're watching another one, and you never find out what happened to the first one. I mean, who the hell would want to watch something like that?"

"I don't know. Maybe if it had big breasts in it, it might be more watchable." (Gratuitous cleavage close-up.)

With this random exchange, writer/director Joe Sherlock sums up perfectly his feature film ODD NOGGINS. Unfortunately, all the breasts on display (with nary a nekkid one in sight) still don't make this turkey watchable.

Things start out promisingly enough, as the film is introduced by Miracalla the Velvet Vampiress (southern scream queen Kimberly Lynn Cole), setting a tone of campy fun. We then follow ubiquitous Sherlock muse Shannon as a young woman suffering from strange nightmares, where a hooded figure performs mysterious experiments on her in eerie photo negative black-andwhite. Awakening, she phones a U.F.O. hotline, then discovers patches of dry skin on her body. Before you can say "cellular meltdown," she begins to cough up lemon pudding and dissolves into a puddle of goo. It turns out this is all a movie someone is watching on television.

Up until this point, I was engrossed (so to speak). Then all that went out the window as the film began to meander from character to character, scene to scene, without rhyme or reason. This approach might work for a film like PULP FICTION, where the individual scenes and characters hold your attention, but here it only works as a cure for insomnia. Sherlock's ominous soundtrack carries us along in lieu of suspense, promising a creepy payoff that the film never quite delivers. When things finally limp to a climax—some nonsense about alien-possessed women ripping off the heads of various males and reanimating them, hence the title—it's too little, too late.

This is especially disappointing since I'm a fan of Sherlock's fanzine. Dr. Squid, and he and buddy John Bowker's entertaining horror flick, THE EVILMAKER. (Bowker is on hand here as John, the big, dumb guy.) Much of the blame can be placed on the experimental nature of the film; Sherlock had folks from across the country shoot scenes off a "master script" which he later edited together. The result is a cross between Ed Wood and amateur porn, with bargain basement special effects, plenty of bubble baths, and gallons of lemon pudding.

ODD NOGGINS appears to have been more fun to make than it is to watch. In fact, I suspect that Sherlock & Co.'s true motive for making their films is to ogle women. Performances range from decent to embarrassing, as do the looks of the performers, with statuesque Cole faring the best in multiple roles. (Somebody give her a better vehicle!) This video release is padded out with bloopers and a bit where Sherlock, sporting Bubba teeth and a quasi-English accent, interviews himself decked out like a whiskey-slurping professional wrestler. In fact, the funniest bit comes at the very end in a two-minute short called MONSTER IN MY CAR, featuring the three female leads of THE EVIL-MAKER beating the crap out of Bowker in a Halloween mask.

I'd recommend using your \$20 to score a subscription to Dr. Squid or a copy of THE EVILMAKER. As Sherlock himself states in the end credits crawl of ODD NOGGINS, "What the hell?!" - Jeff McCoy

A Vanguard Cinema/The Asylum video release of a Holtz/Rice Productions film 1997, 16mm, Color, 81 minutes Directed by and starring Spencer Rice and Kenny Holz Produced by Raymond Massey Reviewed on DVD

CANNES MAN

An Eclectic/Cult DVD video release of a Rocket Pictures production 1996, 35mm, Color, 87 minutes Directed by Richard Martini Produced by Tom Coleman and Holly MacConkey Written by Irwin Rappaport, Deric Haddad, Susan Shapiro, Richard Martini Starring Seymour Cassel, Francesco Quinn, Rebecca Broussard Reviewed on DVD

The explosion of the independent film scene in the early 1990s also saw the creation of a new subgenre of film—the Festival movie. This type of film is usually a documentary, or has documentary aspects, and is set around

some major film festival as illustrated by these two examples.

PITCH is a documentary about two Canadian comedy writers, Kenny Holz and Spencer Rice, who have finished a comedy script about a Mob boss that accidentally receives a sex change. After an attempt to sell their script to Hollywood, they hit upon the idea of pitching it at the 1996 Toronto Film Festival in the hopes that a major star or executive will take interest. The film unfolds ROGER & ME style as the duo accosts practically anyone they can in the hopes of handing off a copy: Roger Ebert, Al Pacino, Eric Stoltz, Illeana Douglas. Their efforts do lead to a trip to Hollywood and a visit to an agent, but Holz and Rice soon find themselves way out of their league.

PITCH attempts to do for Hollywood what ROGER & ME did for General Motors. There is some humor in the ambushing of celebrities, but it quickly wears thin, and a huge problem is that the script that Holz and Rice are peddling simply isn't funny. In fact, the funniest scenes consist of the two writers bickering about how to become a Hollywood success, and neither one of them has a single clue.

CANNES MAN (pronounced "Con Man") is another "comedy" intending to expose the shallowness of Hollywood. Set at the Cannes Film Festival in France, this effort details the exploits of Sy Lerner (Seymour Cassel), a legendary producer who bets a friend that he can turn any loser into the Next Big* Thing—a challenge copped from TRADING PLACES, which in turn swiped the idea from Mark Twain. That loser is Frank Rhinoslavski (Francesco Quinn), whom Lerner rechristens Frank Rhino and hypes as a hot new screenwriter, despite the fact that Rhino has never written a script in his life. The bulk of the movie entails Sy's attempts at building up the project—and Rhino—by convincing real-life stars to commit to a project that doesn't exist.

This is a train wreck of a movie. As with PITCH, the main problem plaguing CANNES MAN is that it's not very funny. What is funny is that it's quite evident the filmmakers lacked a script, and most of the encounters with stars such as actors Johnny Depp, John Malkovich, James Brolin, Jon Cryer, Treat Williams, and filmmaker Jim Jarmusch are pretty much improvised. Cassel manages to acquit himself well, but most of the other actors are rather useless without a script to help them focus.

The best parts of CANNES MAN are the two interviews with producer Tom Coleman and writer/director Richard Martini included on the DVD. Coleman's interview is quite lengthy, as he details the history of the project. Basically, one Susan Shapiro directed the Cannes-set footage without a script and found herself with material deemed unusable, but then Martini—who met up with the crew at the festival and appears in the finished film—was eventually hired to cobble a coherent film out of the mess. Martini gives a slightly tongue-in-cheek interview regarding his own contributions, which apparently amounted to the opening and closing scenes as well as the film's interview segments regarding the Sy Lerner character, as told by personalities like Robert Evans, Lloyd Kaufman, Ann Cusack, and Gary W. Goldstein. As an example of an attempt to salvage a motion picture, CANNES MAN is interesting and painful to watch.

Both PITCH and CANNES MAN are pretty limited in their audiences. Anyone who is not in the film industry or hasn't the slightest interest in the workings of the film industry will fail to get into either of them. Those that meet either criterion will find them merely mediocre. – Robert Hubbard

REFLECTIONS OF EVIL

2001, 16mm/Super8/Digital8, Color, 138 minutes Directed, produced, and written by Damon Packard Starring Damon Packard, Beverly Miller, Nicole Vanderhoff, Chad Nelson Reviewed on DVD

Drudging through all 138 minutes of REFLECTIONS OF EVIL is an excruciating exercise in patience. The film takes Bob (director Damon Packard), a slom-like byproduct of his wretched environment, through his hopeless and doomed wanderings. Packard completely assumes his protagonist's point of view and the film itself takes on the grotesque qualities of Bob's world, one that denies him any means of understanding, dealing with, or escaping his vaguely defined situation. The film is consequently without means to explain itself, resulting in a cockeyed portrayal of modern decay that only haphazardly displays some of its corresponding evils. The fallout is sometimes satirical and sometimes objective, depending on which is the easier approach, but REFLECTIONS OF EVIL hardly tries to resolve its imbalances; it ends with "To Be Continued." This places an enormous burden on the viewer to sort out a purpose the film fails to provide with its smattering of incomplete episodes, most of it redundant or superfluous. Seemingly every piece of raw footage made the final cut. This has me convinced any positives I saw in the film were sheer accident, or else I simultaneously read into things to escape utter boredom. Still, as much as I wanted to hate this film in its entirety, I must admit laughing once or twice. Those momentary "highlights" were of course beaten down by the sheer frustration of sitting and sitting and sitting though the entire thing (I won't go into the hair pulling). I analogize the experience to watching a high jumper set the bar to nearly world record height while barely leaving the



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MY BROTHER'S LIGHT

Reviews Micro-Film Style

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REVIEWS Micro-Film Style

ground upon his jump. This film too, despite its ambitions, is oblivious to its many shortcomings. At best, REFLECTIONS OF EVIL is annoying, pretentious, and slight. - Austen Zuege

SERIAL KILLER

A 4th Floor Pictures production 2002, Digital Video, Color, 71 minutes Directed, produced, and written by Ryan Cavalline Starring Adam Berasi, Vic Badger, Pamela Sutch, Rebecca Anderson

SERIAL KILLER. The title pretty much says it all. I won't give away the ending of this film, but I must say that after I read the promotional material I figured out how the movie would end—and I was right. If I hadn't read the attached material I'm pretty sure I would have figured it out anyway, since most no-budget slasher films usually follow the same pattern. What little that separates these clones from each other is the quantity and quality of the actual on-screen murders, and SERIAL KILLER fails in both areas with special effects that are amateurish at best. I really hate to rag on a no-budget film, but with this title and premise, audiences will be expecting a lot more than they get. It is the kind of film that thinks it's smart, but unsuccessfully imitates other films instead. It's not that the movie is bad, it just doesn't know that movie it wants to be. It's part thriller, part slasher film, and part fetish movie, but never really does anything notable for any genre it resembles at any given time.

Things start promisingly with a quote by the grandfather of all serial killers, Ted Bundy, but from there it goes downhill quickly when a pregnant woman is stabbed in the stomach and has her baby ripped out of her. This is sick stuff that even seems sicker because the murder is so obviously fake. A disturbing image is one thing, but if it's not done right it only makes the filmmaker look perverted. (Unless, of course, you're Lloyd Kaufman and purposely stage a similar bit for perverse laughs in Troma's TERROR FIRMER. - ed.) The best elements in this movie are the cameo appearances by some of the legends of no-budget genre filmmaking, including Joel Wynkoop (DIRTY COP NO DONUT), Ron Ford (THE CRAWLING BRAIN), Phil Herman (TALES TILL THE END), and Ron Bonk (THE VICIOUS SWEET). These guys have been at this for so long that they know how to make a scene work, and if SERIAL KILLER had focused on their characters instead, it would have been an entirely different film. Let's face it. Only certain audiences will be interested in watching something called SERIAL KILLER, and with hordes of similar and better movies available to that audience, this effort just doesn't make the cut.

The video includes a short "making-of" piece after the end credits roll, and it does absolutely no justice to the movie at all. The actor Adam Berasi. mildly effective in the lead role of extremely troubled writer Michael, comes across in real life as a detestable jerk whose only vocabulary consists of one four-letter word that begins with "f." - Mike Trippiedi



PITCH

THIS SIDE OF BLUEWATER

An Oak Road Multimedia production 2001, Video, Color, 72 minutes Directed, produced, and written by Randy DeFord Starring Eric Hutsell, Jill McDowell, Gary McDowell, Gary Stein, Pam Welsh, Martin Welsh, Kevin Page, Paul Howell, Nikki Price

Many budget-friendly genres become unfairly sandblasted into the ground by indie filmmakers, such as the serial killer flick, the disgruntled twentysomething comedy, and the "reality" raw-footage thriller. Add murderin-a-small-town whodunits to the list, under which one would file Randy DeFord's THIS SIDE OF BLUEWATER, a timid attempt in mustering down-home suspense. Veteran police officer Sonny Huffman (Eric Hutsell) puts his vacation on hold to investigate the death of a New Jersey man whose body is found full of bullet holes in a remote Indiana field "this side of Bluewater." At the murder scene, former Federal agent Tom Garrison (Gary Stein) shows up to lay down the incredible backstory on the stiff, apparently silenced by a local sniper for hire. Not wanting to prematurely flush the perpetrator by snooping around Bluewater himself, Garrison entrusts Huffman with seeking out the unidentified killer. We meet the usual assortment of small-town personalities—the retired cop/mentor (Gary McDowell), the girlfriend/court reporter (Pam Welsh), the reformed ex-drug runner (Kevin Page), the feisty fellow officer (Jill McDowell)—in a twisted path that invariably leads Huffman to the truth.

Told in a straightforward manner, the story becomes leaden under DeFord's direction while the cast strips his so-so dialogue of any punch with clumsy delivery. Lead actor Hutsell is the lone exception, brandishing a smirk-laden cynicism that is fun to watch. In fact, his performance epitomizes what is sorely lacking in the film: rambunctious fun! We want to be led on a wild goose chase, and while THIS SIDE OF BLUEWATER obliges with police

raids, foot pursuits, unearthed secrets, and red herrings—including an irresponsible cheat that ends the movie dead in its tracks—it lacks definitive personality that would separate it from the pack. "Edge" does not have to mean "depraved," and doses of Hitchcockian black humor or a betterintegrated conspiracy worthy of Oliver Stone (not to mention a shorn Lynchian ear or two, speaking of red herrings) might have made this film pop immeasurably. With very little blood and nary a swear word in sight, DeFord and crew consciously went the all-ages route which in and of itself is not a bad decision, but then again, look how a master like Walt Disney evoked devastating pathos from G-rated fare like BAMBI and FANTASIA. As it stands, THIS SIDE OF BLUEWATER commits the petty crime of invoking a community players "murder mystery." - JaPan

THE TUNNEL (Cannes cut)

A Bloodshot Pictures film 2001, 16mm, Color, 15 minutes Directed by Ramzi Abed Written and produced by Ramzi Abed and Casey Wickson Starring Casey Wickson, Lloyd Kaufman, Mark Borchardt, Patricia Campbell, Jerry Don Clark, Eric Fleming, Masuimi Max Reviewed on VHS

Any number of filmmakers less determined than Dallas artist Ramzi Abed would have probably avoided a project like THE TUNNEL. Not quite inaccessible, yet far from linear, this conceptual fever dream is hardly the typical film one thinks up to demonstrate one's prowess. Abed apparently felt confident enough to take his chances, resulting in an exploration of working stiff ennui that will baffle most and enthrall an ecstatic minority. After plunging his razornicked face into the flooded bathroom sink, youngish suicide Paul (Casey Wickson) shuffles through numerous episodes in his subconscious, listlessly tooling around an office, sheepishly handing his girlfriend (Patricia Campbell) an engagement ring, and helplessly watching hospital staff push corpses past his doorway. The lad also encounters googly-eyed Deacon (Troma patriarch Lloyd Kaufman) in a literal tunnel, through which they enter a room where they play cards with a motley crew. It all inevitably crashes as Paul loses the game in more ways than one, his skewed trip down Memory Lane capped by a ride on his own gurney.

A textbook description hardly does justice to experimental pieces like this one, as their vocabulary is often visual. Indeed, the filmmakers have provided THE TUNNEL with an appropriate dream-like haziness, using dramatic key lighting and cross-fades to accentuate Paul's mental slippage while a minimalist electronic score compounds the dread. However, the elements combine to distance us rather than involve, as the numerous intimations function on planes too well worn (the inevitability of death, time slipping away) or obscure (blood-red playing cards, Deacon's French-language riddles). Loading the film with fab favorites like Kaufman, Mark Borchardt (AMERICAN MOVIE), Jerry Don Clark (ROCK OPERA), and Japanese-American pin-up Masuimi Max neither hurts nor helps significantly; we're just amazed at how Abed keeps their real-life craziness in check. The title's obvious allusion is to "the light at the end of the tunnel," that metaphoric chestnut providing closure to those concluding a long hard journey, and THE TUNNEL follows suit by depicting one man's last-minute resolution over fate and mortality. This is an extremely personal vision that proves to be rather insulated at first glance, but its effect may truly be dictated by what viewers bring to the card table themselves. - JaPan

TUVALU

Reviewed on DVD

A First Run Features/Indican Pictures video release of a Bavarian Film International presentation of a Veit Helmer-Filmproduktion 1999, 35mm, B&W tinted, 86 minutes Directed and produced by Veit Helmer Written by Michaela Beck and Veit Helmer Starring Denis Lavant, Chulpan Hamatova, EJ Callahan, Phillipe Clay, Terrence Gillespie, Catalina Murgea, Djoko Rossich

1 TUVALU is a little fable told almost completely in pantomime, about the seriocomic battle to keep an ancient bathhouse from being destroyed. This is definitely a throwback to the silent era, but that only makes the experience marginally interesting or distinctive. TUVALU differs from that era's movies because it is much darker; comparisons to Jean-Pierre Jenuet (AMELIE) are quite appropriate. The touch and feel of this film vaguely recall noir and surrealism, but such elements feel like cheap window dressings. There is no dazzling choreography as can be found in Keaton or Chaplin routines. The wispy nature of the settings lacks visual balance with the bulkiness of the straightforward characters.

Some parts of the movie call for attention, such as Chulpan Hamatova, perfect for the brashly alluring part of Eva. The actress is sure to leave all the



TUVALU

New York-based production company Ghost Limb Films is the brainchild of filmmaker Christopher Frieri. A native of New Jersey, the home of the drive-in theater, Frieri was raised on a steady diet of rock music and movies; his first loves were the Universal horror films and gritty Warner Brothers crime dramas of Hollywood's Golden Age. His fertile imagination developed while leading a young life plagued by juvenile delinquency and academic failure, not to mention the consumption of every slasher, horror, and exploitation flick he could lay his eyes on. After a brief stint in the Navy in the early 1980s, he went AWOL and drifted into the hardcore music scene, spending the next six years working with a fledgling indie music label, BUY OUR Records.

He also began making films in earnest, first in Super8 and then 16mm. Since launching Ghost Limb in 1988, he has completed several short films and is currently at work on his first feature. As with most auteurs, Frieri has a semi-regular cast of friends and acquaintances to help with his films, but primarily he's a one-man show: writer, director, cinematographer, editor, and sometimes protagonist. Frieri lists a wide variety of literary and cinematic influences in his press notes. They range from Hollywood classics like Charlie

Chaplin and Buster Keaton to schlock directors like Ed Wood, Jr. and Herschell Gordon Lewis to the French New Wave to eccentric originals like Luis Buñuel, John Waters, and David Lynch. His films show all of these influences, along with his own very personal touch of weirdness—clearly the work of a daring, innovative, and defiantly original artist.

THE ORBITRONS 2000 (1990, B&W, 47 min.) was Frieri's first film, shot in Newark, New Jersey, over the course of two years. Costing a mere \$10,000, it's a loving homage to Wood, replete with fetishism and quasi-religious references. The director plays the lead, Tom Kubash, a guy on a motorcycle a la Marlon Brando in THE WILD ONE. Besides riding around and looking cool, Tom's main preoccupation seems to be masturbation. Every year, he returns to a cemetery to "celebrate" the anniversary of his first ejaculation. However, this year Tom's evening of self-gratification is interrupted by the evil space goddess Starleatha (Diva Hasse). With her fetish wardrobe and UFO full of space zombies, the Goddess has serious plans for the planet Earth. It seems that the males of her species are sexually viable for only eight years before their seed dries up, leaving the platinum blonde Amazon sexually frustrated and in a mood for conquest!

Those of us who spent their formative years watching PLAN 9 FROM OUTER SPACE on late-night television will find a lot here to enjoy. More than any other film I've seen. THE ORBITRONS 2000 captures the loopy, dream-like absurdity of Wood's films (with acting, sets, and special effects to match), while also gleefully plunging to realms of perversity with its porno-movie plot line that even Wood dared not enter. (Although, he may have liked to.) Frieri also takes a swipe at the juvenile delinquent filmand perhaps his own ill-spent youth—as he and his buddy Zen (Zenon Kuziw) tool around town in their choppers to a cover of Blue Oyster Cult's "Cities on Flame with Rock and Roll." Tom gets pushed around and roughed up by a couple of requisite Neanderthal cops, who are in turn eaten by the zombies, a loving tribute to NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD and proof once again that grainy black-and-white can make the cheesiest make-up look scary.

The dialogue is frequently laugh-out-loud funny, especially the Woodian exchanges between Tom, Starleatha, and her effete partner/underling/second banana Bizwad (Dave Lancet). However, Frieri has a sly, ironic wit that Wood never possessed, as when daylight shots abruptly switch to a night scene, leading Zen to comment, "Man, it sure gets dark fast around here!" There's also plenty of cheap gore and rude behavior, although some may feel that Frieri goes a little overboard with the toilet humor, especially in a scene where Starleatha crucifies Bizwad.

I WAS A TEENAGE MUMMY (1992, B&W, 48 min.) walks a fine line between camp and surreal strangeness as it also spoofs 1950s B-movies. Opening in a scummy restroom in High School, U.S.A., the film cuts to the chase as three grotesque greasers beat the crap out of an Egyptian exchange student, dunking his head in a toilet for good measure. Bad move! The student, who believes himself an incarnation of an Egyptian god, kidnaps a teen-

age girl (Joan Devitt) and uses black magic to transform her into a "living mummy," an incarnation of the goddess Isis (or something like that). Before long, mutilated bodies are popping up all over town. Can sleazy private detective Jack Boyle (Chris Tsakis) stop the carnage?

This simple plot gives Frieri and company room to spoof not only "mummy movies," but also J.D. pictures and private eye films. This they do to good effect, with touches ranging from the campy to the bizarre. (My favorite example is when the severed head of a greaser with a Brando fixation calls out, "Stella! Stella!") Frieri keeps things interesting visually with stop-motion tricks and a disorienting kaleidoscope effect during the mummy attacks. The grainy, black-and-white photography sets the perfect mood, as does the snarling rockand-roll soundtrack by the A Bones. However, what really sets this one apart from countless other spoofs is its wit and style. Diane Reinhardt's script is brilliant and hilarious, with characters speaking a near incomprehensible mishmash of slang, cliché, and pseudophilosophy. It reminds me of the works of Barry Gifford (Wild at Heart), where workingclass characters espouse their lifestyles with a lyricism that doesn't exist in real life.

The actors acquaint themselves quite well to the hammy overacting this kind of material requires. Standouts include Ghost Limb regulars Mark Fucile as a vowel-mangling greaser, and Tsakis as the grubbiest private eye this side of M. Emmet Walsh in BLOOD SIMPLE. Even the eye-rolling scene chewing of "Leo" Kalib as Rhada Mahat, which would be embarrassing in another film, seems to suit the film's dream-like atmosphere

Imagine a long-form heavy metal music video made by John Waters on a bad acid trip, and you have HOT ROD HEARSE (1996, Color, 39 min.). On his Web site, Frieri claims

that this film is a send-up of his all-time favorite movie, A HARD DAY'S NIGHT. I suspect that Frieri's tongue is in cheek as usual, for if anything, it shares the rude-and-crude punk aesthetics of directors like Alex Cox (REPO MAN) and Danny (TRAINSPOTTING). Whereas the films of the Beatles are like running with giddy (and mildly psychedelic) schoolboys, HOT ROD HEARSE is more like being pummeled in a mosh pit by a gang of thugs.

The film follows the "adventures" of the heavy metal band Hearse, as they careen from gigs in cheap dives to dead-end jobs to nasty confrontations with their "loved ones." Along the way, they're haunted by the frequent appearances of a ghostly hearse, which apparently symbolizes the looming spectre of Death. Things come to a head during the climactic concert, as their souls leave their bodies to seek grisly revenge against those who have wronged or annoyed them ... or is it all just fantasy?

Frieri could have a successful career directing music videos, as he assaults us with visceral vignettes and snarling musical numbers elaborating on the boys' antisocial behavior. These range from the almost charming (a man frolics with a nymph in a marijuana haze) to the bizarre (a man turns his sister into a pizza) to the repulsive (repeated shots of worms devouring a skeleton). A little of this goes a long way, and what might work in a five-minute video can quickly wear out its welcome at this length. I suspect that Frieri made HOT ROD HEARSE as an excuse to goof off with his buddies, and their manic creative energy is apparent on the screen. Unfortunately, the characters are all so obnoxious, lecherous, and/or pretentious, that when an angry housewife sprays pesticide on one lout's ham sandwich, I couldn't help but feel that he deserved it.

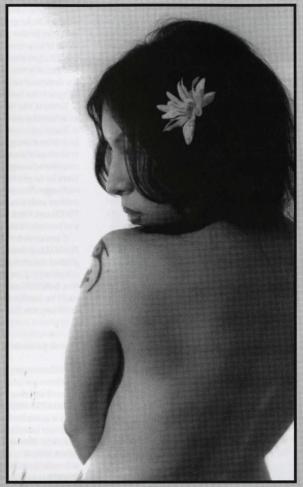
It's hard to know what to make of THE WINDOW (1999, B&W, 17 min.) because not much happens, at least on the surface. A nameless, silent protagonist (Joseph James) struggles with insomnia in his tiny apartment. The view from his only window consists of the brick wall of a neighboring building, and a small courtyard where pigeons congregate and stunted trees struggle to survive. As the long night passes, wild dogs howl in the concrete canyons, and the constant roar of the A-trains gives him no peace. Something begins to rattle and growl beneath his sink, and he attacks it with a plunger. Finally, he encounters a black rat the size of a small cat and beats it to death with a club. He then tosses it into the courtyard, where flies rapidly devour it.

With the deadpan quality of a dream, THE WIN-DOW is possibly Frieri's meditation on the persistence of life in the urban desert, and the degraded, unhealthy quality of this life. He uses stop-motion have faded.

photography, exaggerated sound effects, and lowangle camera shots of looming buildings to capture the claustrophobic monotony of urban existence. Even the lack of music on the soundtrack helps to emphasize the protagonist's lonely isolation. Ultimately, one will be intrigued or bored with this; I found it mildly compelling, if a little perplexing, and the image of flies swarming over a rat's body will linger in my memory long after other movies

THE STRANGER (2001, B&W, 31 min.) is perhaps the weakest Ghost Limb film, but also the most disturbing. It tells the sorry tale of "the stranger" (referred to as "Eddie" by the other characters), a working-class loser who descends into homicidal madness—or maybe it's all in his head.

THE STRANGER has a lot going for it. Mark Fucile is positively icky as Eddie; I never doubted for a moment that he was a raving psycho. Diane Reinhardt's script has her trademark bizarre/clever dialogue. Frieri's visual compositions are fairly engaging and



From GOLLIWOG'S CAKE-WALK. (Photo: Christopher Frieri)

Out on a **Ghost Limb**

The work of Ghost Limb Films' Christopher Frieri

by Jeff McCoy

GHOSTIUM

GHOST continued from previous page

elaborate, as when he superimposes images of a field of flowers over concrete and steel cityscapes, or a scene where Eddie imagines himself an old man in a coffin, being carried through a carnival-esque cemetery. A dissonant soundtrack puts viewers on edge, along with odd touches like pornographic knick-knacks and bellowing Orson Welles-style narration for

But it's also a frustrating film that left a bad taste in my mouth, all sound and fury that ultimately signifies nothing. In Martin Scorsese's TAXI DRIVER, Travis Bickle repulses us but we grow to emphasize with his viewpoint because Robert DeNiro, et al give us glimpses of his tortured soul. What signals we get here only serve to confuse or repel us further, compounded by numerous unanswered questions regarding Eddie's child, a woman in the cellar, and a chimpanzee, among other things. The ending leaves us with the sick fever dreams of a monster and pity for his victims, especially Eddie's brutalized wife, and that's just a little too close to real life to be "entertaining." THE STRANGER is worth a look for those with a stomach for such things.

Imagine scraps of Super8 footage from a lifetime of trips around the world compressed into a breathless montage, and you have THE TRAVELOGUE (2001, Color/B&W, 13 min.). Frieri rockets from Amsterdam to San Francisco to Alaska to Las Vegas and many other points in between, pausing here and there for a second or two before racing on to the next location. The soundtrack propels things along nicely with an energetic Latin beat that gradually makes way for jazz riffs and a pastoral classical piece. This kaleidoscopic rollercoaster will leave you dizzy and drained, but fans of experimental filmmaking will find it worth the trip.

All too often, a promising filmmaker will begin his career making daring, intensely personal films, then gradually slip in more and more commercial elements, until finally he's churning out typical Hollywood product. Thus, it's worth noting that Frieri seems to buck that trend with GOLLIWOG'S CAKE-WALK (2001, B&W, 53 min.), his most mature film to date. Gone is the campy crudeness that marked his earlier films, replaced by a sureness of technique and a willingness to show a more whimsical, introspective side to his art.

The film follows the day-to-day life of an unnamed photographer, played by Frieri, as he supports himself through erotic photo sessions of women in various states of undress and by filming music videos. In between, he passes the time by walking the streets of New York City and riding his bicycle through Central Park. One day he encounters a fellow bicyclist (Claudia Sisti) who strikes his fancy and pursues her to Cleopatra's Needle, an Egyptian obelisk built in 1600 BC by Thutmose III and transported from the Nile to Manhattan in the late 1800s.

This begins an up-and-down romance that plays out through the rest of the film.

All of Frieri's films are extremely personal, and the autobiographical element is at its strongest here, even down to real-life girlfriend Sisti playing the mystery woman. On his Web site, Frieri claims that the plot is derived from "real life," the love story giving him a kind of foil to work off, as well as a metaphor for the twists and turns of romance. But GOLLIWOG'S CAKE-WALK is also concerned with the illusions men create for themselves, and the extremes they'll go through to make the illusions real, as it subtly blurs the boundaries between the "outside world" and the photographer's "inner world" of hopes, desires, and fantasies. This recalls Deren, Buñuel, and Ferderico Fellini, the latter especially when Frieri encounters circus performers in the park, and in a later scene where a supposed suicide attempt reveals itself to be something quite different. Frieri also throws in a hint of the supernatural, as Sisti's voice emanating from the obelisk suggests a love affair that has spanned many lifetimes

Frieri's black-and-white photography and editing are as sharp as ever, capturing the chilly feel of New York City in winter, and later the promise of Central Park in spring. His use of stop-motion photography creates a sense of greater forces at work, forces of time and nature that dwarf mere human lives and desires. Frieri also understands the value of silence and ambient sound, telling his story primarily through images while limiting his dialogue to about a dozen words. At times, GOLLIWOG'S CAKE-WALK reminded me of the experimental films from the French New Wave, especially Frieri's use of an energetic jazz score and his willingness to break through the invisible "fourth wall" and reveal "the man behind the curtain." Some scenes run a little too long for their own good and there is some gratuitous imagery, but these are minor quibbles.

NE FEET BELLEVIEW

'NET continued from page 44

Here are three slightly older examples that are still worth a look:

The MEMENTO (www.otnemem.com) main page is a newspaper article regarding the discovery of a body; certain words (foul, suspicious, Leonard, photographs, forgetful, revenge) will bring up a sound bite, Polaroid photographs, medical reports, or possibly a post-it note. There's a lot of information to sort through and one needs to pay attention in order to get anywhere, for like the movie, the MEMENTO site doesn't really give anything away once you provide answers to the numerous questions and word games. If you do make it through, you're sort of left in a state not unlike Leonard himself...

The DONNIE DARKO site (www.donniedarko.com) is almost exactly like the film—extremely dense. I'd also say that it's a bit over-designed. You have to have the Macromedia Flash Photo 5 plug-in to even be able to enter this thing, but once you're in, watch where you're going since navigation can be tricky and you will be rewarded. Instead of the usual cast, credits, and play dates (which are taken care of elsewhere), this three-tiered site continues on from DONNIE DARKO itself, making a viewing of the film (and a listen to the DVD commentary for secret passwords) mandatory to understand what's going on.

Finally, the WAKING LIFE site (www.wakinglifemovie.com) strikes a nice balance in terms of promoting the film and extending the ideas behind the film. There's plenty of info in terms of its subject matter and techniques, as well as scenes and stills from the film and a coloring-book feature that roughly approximates the animation process developed by director Richard Linklater and his artists. The best elements of this site deal with the philosophical aspects of WAKING LIFE, such as a dream oracle game in which you are asked specific questions about your dreams that are worked into a "dream collage," an interpretation of various symbols which may appear in one's dreams. There is also a "question of the day" and a message board.

Until we tangle again...

boys watching this just as gaga as Anton (Denis Lavant) in the movie. Does Eva's dream of shipping off to Tuvalu (the real Pacific island best known for owning the ".tv" domain name) come true? Happy ending, ahoy! This is a fable, after all. Director Veit Helmer does manage to give the conclusion a nice trace of dark ambiguity, though.

A lot has happened in film since the silents, yet TUVALU tries to get by with dressing its rather bland story in superficial neo/retro ornaments, if only that ever worked. Keeping the proceedings in imitative pantomime throws off the pacing, and cutting dialogue means everyone is paying that much more attention to its slavishness. TUVALU doesn't stand up to that kind of scrutiny. It's somewhat entertaining, not that interesting, and simply just another obscure little film. - Austen Zuege

2 Set primarily within a dilapidated bathhouse in an unspecified European country, the story of TUVALU is an old-fashioned love triangle. Anton (Denis Lavant) helps keep up the bathhouse with his blind father, although he longs to be sailing the sea. Gregor (Terrence Gillespie), Anton's evil older brother, is a real estate developer and lover of progress who wants to tear down the bathhouse, making way for his modern housing. Eva (Chulpan Hamatova) is a newcomer to the bathhouse who brings adventure and affection that easily draws the attention of both brothers. Like Anton, Eva dreams of sailing on, but her boat engine needs a part, a part that is also integral to the bathhouse's steam engine.

TUVALU, like its artistic counterpart BRAZIL, is more of a state of mind than an actual physical location. Technically, it's an island in the South Pacific, just as Brazil is a country in South America, but in terms of motion pictures they're both titles of imaginative films. TUVALU owes a considerable debt to BRAZIL in its visual style and also hearkens back to the era of silent films (as with its color-tinted imagery); although there is sound and music (courtesy of a nice score by Jurgen Knieper), most of the film is dialogue-free except for certain exchanges. This makes it very accessible for any audience. In terms of acting method and story, it's very reminiscent of work by Charlie Chaplin (MODERN TIMES) and Fritz Lang (METROPOLIS) as well as contemporary films like Caro and Jenuet's DELICATESSEN and THE CITY OF LOST CHILDREN.

If you scratch the surface, there's nothing really new to be found in TUVALU, but director Veit Helmer proves himself to be an extremely accomplished visualist who can tell a story in a way that's refreshing to watch and refreshingly good natured. The DVD also includes his award-winning short film, SURPRISE, which is a good introduction to his style—a gathering of what could be construed as "dark" elements and their utilization into something that's very emotional and heartwarming. - Robert Hubbard

Cinema Addendum

With the major delay in releasing this issue of MICRO-FILM, several of the aforementioned films that we first viewed in public screenings or on advance screeners have since been released to the home video market. CHARLOTTE SOMETIMES is available from Hart Sharp Video. DIAMOND MEN is available from Lions Gate Home Entertainment. D.I.Y. OR DIE is available from Eclectic/MVD. DUCT TAPE FOREVER is available from Acorn Media. THE FAST RUNNER is available from Columbia/TriStar Home Video. HOME MOVIE is available from Home Vision Cinema. HORNS AND HALOS will make its cable debut on Cinemax in Februrary. MELVIN GOES TO **DINNER** is available from Sundance Channel Home Entertainment. Finally, for the phonetically impaired, CANNES MAN has been re-released by Vanguard Cinema as CON MAN - ed.

Print

Ain't It Cool?: Hollywood's Redheaded Stepchild Speaks Out 2002, 319 pages, hardcover, \$23.95 Written by Harry Knowles with Paul Cullum and Mark Ebner

Published by Warner Books

Not particularly a fan of Harry Knowles' Austin-based Web site, Ain't It Cool News, I came to this book hoping to find out more about the cybercinema guru who seemingly had all of Hollywood in his grasp. Surely, much of the author's personal tastes can be gleaned from his rambling on-line reviews and commentaries, but the more refined Ain't It Cool? dispenses needed perspective on our unflappable jolly Geek giant. The son of hippie memorabilia merchants, Knowles grew up surrounded by pop culture ephemera—books, magazines, posters, comics, lobby cards, and maybe most importantly, 16mm prints of classic movies which he watched endlessly. His unmitigated love for such wondrous things would eventually lead him to establish Ain't It Cool News in 1996 during the Internet's infancy. This clearing house for movie rumors, spec scripts, production photos, and advance reviews leaked by his network of "spies"—industry folks and fans reporting under assumed mantles—would soon bunch vainglorious Hollywood's panties, as we know how

much the entertainment world likes control over public spin. The book's non-biographical quota uses sprightly anecdotes to illustrate the industry's rampant pettiness and machinations, such as the infamous public "feud" between Knowles and Joel Schumacher over BATMAN & ROBIN that purportedly diluted the blockbuster's box-office take. Rather insistent upon a constructive agenda, Knowles takes the industry to task for cranking out formulaic flotsam instead of allowing the talented souls fuelling production to run free with creativity, pointing out what he feels are the industry's Achilles' heels in need of repair. Knowles is no expert, and it's too convenient to simply label him obsessive. He simply cares a lot and is perceptive enough to see that the ills of modern moviemaking know no boundary, infecting Hollywood and the indies just the same. With Ain't It Cool? he boldly throws down (on Time-Warner's dime!) one big request that we'd all love to drill into the heads of every player ensconced in "the biz" who thinks they know best: Please make better movies. Your audience will thank you for them. Easier said than done, so let's hope Knowles' determination to keep Hollywood honest will yield results. Give 'em hell, Harry! - JaPan

Chicago Review 47:4/48:1

Winter 2001/Spring 2002, 277 pages, digest, offset, \$8.00 Edited by Eirik Steinhoff Published by the University of Chicago, Humanities Division

Stan Brakhage (1933-2003) was perhaps the best-known avant-garde filmmaker. Indeed, with the possible exception of the late Maya Deren, he was arguably the greatest filmmaker ever working within the non-narrative independent cinema. It is thus certainly suitable that a double-issue of the prestigious literary journal Chicago Review be dedicated to Brakhage's supremely prolific career spanning five decades and more than 300 films. Like Brakhage's work itself, the compilation Stan Brakhage—Correspondences presents a remarkably eclectic and fascinating collection of material.

The issue includes, as the title would indicate, a number of Brakhage's letters from the 1950s through the 1990s to a variety of correspondents, including poets Robert Duncan, Charles Olson, and Ronald Johnson. Like a number of other literary and cultural figures, though somewhat uniquely for a filmmaker, Brakhage uses his postal correspondence to explore substantive issues of aesthetics and artistic practice. As Brakhage is a notoriously difficult, challenging filmmaker, the letters offer a directness that gives the reader a glimpse into his sensibility, covering material from classical music to Hollywood films with remarkable erudition and wit. The issue also includes a number of excerpts from Brakhage's critical writing; in this genre, Brakhage tends toward a forceful, "manifesto" style that contrasts with the sometimes elusive nature of his films, but again both share a sophistication and philosophical depth prized by many of his admirers.

There are also four extended critical essays on Brakhage by noted avantgarde film scholars, including the eminent film critic P. Adams Sitney. Sitney's essay is quite interesting, but pieces by Fred Camper and John Pruitt offer particularly interesting angles on Brakhage's cinematic significance, with Camper taking a highly internal look at Brakhage's massive catalog in light of its apparent aesthetic contradictions among varying "streams" in this oeuvre. Pruitt, contrarily, examines the profound and sometimes overlooked importance of the aforementioned Deren on the development of Brakhage's unique approach. Along with these longer and more typically academic examinations of Brakhage, the issue also includes a set of shorter responses to Brakhage from a wide array of fellow artistic figures, including well-known poets Michael McClure and Robert Kelly, as well as filmmakers Jennifer Reeves and Nathan Dorsky. Taken together, these critical pieces do a nice job of reflecting both the scholarly and more conventionally artistic components within the independent film culture.

Intriguingly, the issue also includes a short story and several poems by Brakhage's artistic colleagues, including work by the aforementioned Johnson, Lee Ann Brown, and Spencer Selby. The connection between this work and Brakhage's films is less explicit, although Brown's poem is dedicated to Brakhage (among others) and Selby has a long association with avantgarde cinema. However loose the connection, though, the best of the fiction and poetic work provides a nice counterpoint to the critical material and letters by reminding readers of the ultimate power of Stan Brakhage's films: their relentless innovation and visionary artistic sensibility. - Steve Bailey

essential brakhage: Selected Writings on Filmmaking by Stan Brakhage

2001, 232 pages, paperback, \$18.00 Edited and with a foreword by Bruce R. McPherson Published by Documentext/McPherson & Company

With well over 300 completed projects to his credit, Stan Brakhage is one of the most prolific filmmakers in the history of American cinema. A contem-Porary of such luminaries of the New American Cinema as Kenneth Anger and Maya Deren, Brakhage first began making films at the age of 19. He quickly distinguished himself from other experimentalists by moving away from the representative—for example, the "trance" film—and toward a more abstract or "lyrical" (to use P. Adams Sitney's terms) form of filmmaking. In the late 1950s, Brakhage's work shifted toward the domestic. His films recorded the experiences and events of his life with wife Jane and their children. In works such as the Scenes From Under Childhood series (1967-1970), Brakhage borrowed the subject matter of home movies (family life, children, and the everyday) and radically refashioned it into films that interrogated the very process of seeing.

In addition to his many accomplishments as a filmmaker, Brakhage is also an inexhaustible author whose writings include everything from poems and scripts to manifestos and critical essays. Brakhage's earlier Metaphors on Vision and The Brakhage Scrapbook became instant classics, bought up by underground film fans and scholars alike. Both went out of print long ago and have since taken on the status of hidden treasures to be uncovered by the occasional lucky collector. Brakhage's Film at Wit's End (reprinted in 1989) contains what might very well be Brakhage's most celebrated essay: his unforgettable account of when petite dancer and filmmaker Maya Deren, possessed by the Haitian god Papa Loco, threw a standard-sized refrigerator all the way across a room in her rage.

Bruce McPherson of McPherson & Company (always a leader in publishing titles associated with alternative and underground film) has put together a wonderfully diverse collection of Brakhage's most influential writings and now offers them in a single volume, entitled essential brakhage. This collection brings together material from throughout Brakhage's lengthy career, and truly illustrates the wide spectrum of literary and critical work that the artist has created over the years. Most notable among these pieces are "Metaphors on Vision," "Notes of Anticipation," and "A Moving Picture Giving and Taking Book." The intriguing "Angels" very nearly captures the shimmering, shifting images that characterize Brakhage's films, while "The Seen," a documentation of interactions following a 1974 screening at the San Francisco Art Institute, is one of the book's most engaging works, sketching out Brakhage's unique approach to seeing/recording with remarkable clarity. - Robert Cagle

Hollywood Is Burning #1

Spring 2002, 32 pages, magazine, photocopy, \$4.95 ppd Published and Edited by Mike Watt and Charlie Fleming

Hollywood Is Burning #1 was actually supposed to be SCAN #9. Unfortunately, due to poor sales, Draculina Publishing decided to pull the plug on SCAN, a helpful guide for the no-budget filmmaker. What is Draculina's loss will hopefully be the gain of Mike Watt and Charlie Fleming, the new publishers and editors. I liked SCAN, but I love Hollywood Is Burning. This is must reading for anyone who is thinking about making a movie or for anyone that has made one. Instead of simply trashing Hollywood's mindless dreck, this zine's main mission is to help filmmakers actually make a movie. Watt and Fleming know that most of us will probably never get the opportunity to work on a celebrity-filled, big budget fiasco, so instead of aimlessly wishing upon an out-of-reach star, the magazine focuses on what the first time, no-budget filmmaker can do with minimal resources.

Issue #1 has many helpful articles that cover a broad range, from acting as a producer to finding distribution, written by filmmakers for filmmakers with an "anyone with a dream" attitude towards making movies. The best article is by B-movie star Debbie Rochon (AMERICAN NIGHTMARE) on trying to save relationships while making a movie. It's funny, helpful, and thought provoking. If I have any complaints, it would be on the actual look of the magazine. The pictures look like bad photocopies, and the type size and font are different with each article. Those are minor complaints considering what Hollywood Is Burning has going for it. After all, most of us buy magazines fread, which is what you will do with HIB #1 from cover to cover. - Mike Trippiedi

Japanese Movie Posters: Yakuza, Monster, Pink and Horror

2002, 96 pages, standard, \$30.00 Written by Chuck Stephens, Tetsuya Masuda, and Kairakutei Black Published by Coroco Books/DH Publishing, Inc.

Always a sucker for one-sheets steeped in startling illustration and vibrant design, I can happily report that Japanese Movie Posters not only collects together a wide array of quality ad art, but also serves as a decent introduction to classic and contemporary genre cinema from across the Pacific. You know how I dig those giant monster movies—my editorial in MICRO-FILM #3 explains it all—yet not until the DVD revolution have Western audiences been able to sample the much broader canon of Japanese pop filmmaking. So, akin to the smattering of articles in cult and underground magazines over the years that have touched upon these films, Japanese Movie Posters teases in the best way possible and leaves you longing to search out the releases associated with these images. This book's title makes



KEVIEWS Micro-Film Style

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Ain't It Cool?



Tapanese Movie Posters

KEVIEWS Micro-Film Styl€

KEVIEWS Micro-Film Style

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REVIEWS Micro-Film Style

REVIEWS Micro-Film Style REVIEWS

Micro-Film Style REVIEWS Micro-Film Style no bones that it covers the fun stuff; what is surprising is the overall breadth on display. Complementing the expected kaiju eiga section are chapters on samurai cinema, yakuza (gangster) epics, horror films, pink (adult) movies, and animation, ending with a potpourri of posters from the past decade or so that push well past the stoic costume-drama poses featured in the oldest examples. Fine full-color reproduction brings out both the vibrant spectrum of the animé characters and the beautiful pastel shadings of the samurai, demonstrating how this material arguably approaches "art" in many instances. Fans will find many of their favorite series and personalities accounted for: Godzilla, Gamera, Ultraman, Mothra, Doraemon the cat, Zatoichi the blind swordsman, "Beat" Takeshi (BROTHER), Hayao Miyazaki (SPIRITED AWAY), Takashi Ishii (A NIGHT IN NUDE), and Shinya Tsukamoto (HIRUKO THE GOBLIN), to name a few. One particular disappointment, despite the fact that the posters are the main attraction, is the rather perfunctory text that tell readers little about the films represented here and rarely mention any others for the sake of context. Regardless, the savvy know their hard information is available elsewhere, and when all is said and done—and sexed up and slashed through and stomped upon—lovers of esoteric lobby adornments can't go wrong with Japanese Movie Posters. - JaPan

Contact Information

Ain't It Cool?: www.twbookmark.com or www.aintitcoolnews.com

ALL ABOUT LILY CHOU-CHOU: www.lily-chou-chou.com

AUTOMATIC MAGNETIC: Bifocal Media, P.O. Box 50106, Raleigh, NC 27650-0106; www.bifocalmedia.com

BLOWN, BLOWN AGAIN: Fine Grind Films c/o Will O'Loughlen, 201 N. Avalon St., Memphis, TN 38112; www.finegrindfilms.com

BORN TO LOSE, A GALAXY FAR FAR AWAY, PITCH: Vanguard Cinema, Newport Plaza, 1901 Newport Blvd., Ste. 225, Costa Mesa, CA 92627, (800) 218.7888; www.vanguard-cinema.com. Also, BORN TO LOSE: www.borntolose.com

CANNES MAN, D.I.Y. OR DIE, JESUS CHRIST VAMPIRE HUNTER: Eclectic DVD, P.O. Box 280, Oaks, PA 19456, (800) 888.0486; www.eclecticdvd.com. Also, JESUS CHRIST: www.odessafilmworks.com. Also, D.I.Y OR DIE: www.kittyfeet.com/diy.htm

Cashiers du Cinemart: Cashiers du Cinemart, P.O. Box 2401, Riverview, MI 48192; www.cashiersducinemart.com

CHARLOTTE SOMETIMES: Visionbox Pictures, 3272 Motor Ave., 2nd Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90034; www.visionboxmedia.com or www.charlottesometimesthemovie.com

Chicago Review: Chicago Review, 5801 S. Kenwood Ave., Chicago, IL 60637; www.humanities.uchicago.edu/review

Cinemad: Cinemad, P.O. Box 360695, Los Angeles, CA 90036; www.cinemadmag.com

A Companion Guide to Rooftop Films: Rooftop Films, P.O. Box 482, New York, NY 10276; www.rooftopfilms.com

THE CRAWLING BRAIN: Combs Pictures International, 1316 W. Robin, Visalia, CA 93291, (559) 739.1293; www.combspictures.com or www.geocities.com/ron_ford_page/

Ed Peden in HOME MOVIE. (Courtesv Cowboy Films)



DIAMOND MEN: Panorama Entertainment, 125 N. Main St., Suite 201, Port Chester, NY 10573, (914) 937.1603; panent@aol.com

Dr. Squid, ODD NOGGINS: F&C Productions, P.O. Box 856, Corvallis, OR 97339;

DUCT TAPE FOREVER: TVA International Inc., 101 Bloor St. W., Ste. 400, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 2Z7, (416) 968.0002; www.ducttapeforever.com

essential brakhage: Documentext/McPherson & Company, P.O. Box 1126, Kingston, NY 12402, (800) 613.8219; www.mcphersonco.com

THE FAST RUNNER: Lot 47 Films, 116 West 23rd St., Ste. 500, New York, NY 10011, (646) 375,2189; www.lot47.com

FEAR OF THE DARK: Light and Dark Productions, P.O. Box 21, Lake Peekskill, NY 10537, (845) 526.6118; www.lightanddark.net

FISH 'N CHICKS: DeLeo Productions, Inc., 57 Glenhaven St., Toronto, Ontario, M6M 3M4, Canada; www.deleoproductions.com

FRUIT OF THE VINE, MYSERIOUS OBJECT AT NOON: Plexifilm, 580 Broadway, Suite 1004, New York, NY 10012, (212) 965.9220; www.plexifilm.com

Geek Monthly: Geek Monthly, attn: Jeremy Wheeler, 1043 Island Dr. Ct., Apt. 104, Ann Arbor, MI 48105; geekmonthly@hotmail.com

GHOST HUNTERS: Digital Video Documentaries, c/o Nathan Bramble, 202 Holly Ct., Bensalem, PA 19020; www.dvdocumentaries.com or www.digitalvideodocumentaries.com

GOLLIWOG'S CAKE-WALK, HOT ROD HEARSE, I WAS A TEENAGE MUMMY, THE ORBITRONS 2000, THE STRANGER, THE TRAVELOGUE, THE WINDOW: Ghost Limb Films, 200 East 10th St., #502, New York, NY 10003, (212) 533.1326; www.ghostlimbfilms.com

THE GOSH DARNED MORGTAGE: Siren Tales Productions, P.O. Box 32, East Rutherford, NJ 07073; www.sirentales.com

HARDCORE POISONED EYES: Profound Images, c/o Sal Ciavarello, 2460 Arthur Ave., Bronx, NY 10458; www.profoundimages.com

HISTORY LESSONS, TUVALU: First Run Features, 153 Waverly Place, New York, NY 10014, (800) 229.8575; www.firstrunfeatures.com

Hollywood is Burning: www.hollywoodisburning.com

HOME MOVIE: Bluemark Productions, 301 N. Water St., Milwaukee, WI 53202, (414) 291.0345; www.homevision.com

HORNS AND HALOS: RumuR, Inc, c/o Michael Galinsky, 164 Hall St., Brooklyn, NY 11205, (718) 636.0949; www.hornsandhalos.com

HOT AND BOTHERED: Becky Goldberg, 152 Meserole St., Brooklyn, NY 11206; www.feministpornography.com

HUNTING HUMANS, MANIACTS: MTI Home Video, 14216 SW 136th St., Miami, FL 33186, (305) 255.8684; www.mtivideo.com

THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE PEOPLE SHOW: Jason De L'orme, 61 Loraine Mansions, Widdenham Rd., London N7 9SE, United Kingdom; www.theincrediblystrangepeopleshow.co.uk

INSANIAC: Sub Rosa Studios, P.O. Box 5515, Syracuse, NY 13220; www.b-movie.com

Japanese Movie Posters: DH Publishing, Inc., 2-3-3F Kanda Jimbocho, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan 101-0051, 81.3.3515.2201; www.dhp-online.com

MELVIN GOES TO DINNER: www.melvingoestodinner.com

MY BROTHER'S LIGHT: Tripod Films, LLC, 1821 S. Washington, #A304, Naperville, IL 60565, (630) 778.6495; michaelwolinski@hotmail.com

REFLECTIONS OF EVIL: Pookie Films, (323) 969.1527; www.reflectionsofevil.com

Shock Cinema: Shock Cinema, c/o Steve Puchalski, P.O. Box 518, Peter Stuyvesant Station, New York, NY 10009; http://members.aol.com/shockcin/main.html

SERIAL KILLER: 4th Floor Pictures, P.O. Box 25, Dagus Mines, PA 15831; http://www.angelfire.com/pa2/4thFloorPictures

THIS SIDE OF BLUEWATER: Randy DeFord, Oak Road Multimedia, P.O. Box 1161, Monticello, IN 47960, (574) 965.4854; www.sugardog.com/~randyd

Trend Pimp: Trend Pimp, c/o Christopher Tracey, 206 Crim St., Bowling Green,

THE TUNNEL: Bloodshot Pictures, 858 Westbourne Dr., Suite 5, W. Hollywood, CA 90069, (310) 289.4932; www.bloodshotpictures.com

WHEN HEAVEN COMES DOWN: Mind's I Productions, 1518 Rhett Place, Woodstock, IL 60098; www.mindsiprods.com or www.roundsent.com

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cast & crew

BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE (p.18) - Writer/Director: Michael Moore: Producers: Michael Moore, Kathleen Glynn, Jim Czarnecki, Charles Bishop, Michael Donovan; Co-producer/Editor: Kurt Engfehr; Camera: Brian Danitz, Michael McDonough, Ed Kukla; Sound: Francisco LaTorre, James Demer; Original Music: Jeff Gibbs; Chief Archivist: Carl Deal: Animation Director: Harold Moss. A United Artists/Alliance Atlantis release of a Dog Eat Dog Films production in association with Salter Street Films and VIF 2 Productions.

With - Michael Moore, James Nichols, Evan McCollum, Charlton Heston, Richard Costalldo, Mark Taylor, Barry Glassner, Matt Stone, Marilyn Manson, Dick Clark.

Specs - 2002, Digital Video, Color, 120 minutes Contact Information - Web pages: www.michaelmoore.com, www.bowlingforcolumbine.com.

D.P. Carlson (p.13) -

Recent Filmography - JOHNNY DODGEBALL (2004, in post-production); THE BEARS: OUT OF HIBERNATION (2004, in post-production); CHICAGO FILMMAKERS ON THE CHICAGO RIVER (2003/1998), Digital Video, Color, 77 minutes; SAILORMAN (2000), 35mm, Color, 16 minutes; HOMELESS '99 (1998), Digital Video, Color, 4 minutes; I WAS THERE WHEN THE BLUES WAS RED HOT (1995), 16mm, B&W, 60 minutes.

Contact Information - Film Foetus, Inc., 4043 N. Kenneth Ave., Chicago, IL 60641. Telephone: (773) 545.0741. E-mail: dpcarlson@prodigy.net. Web page: www.filmfoetus.com.

I AM TRYING TO BREAK YOUR HEART (p.10) - Director: Sam Jones; Producers: Peter Abraham, Sam Jones; Director of Photography: Sam Jones; Editor: Erin Nordstrom; Music Supervisor: Tracy McKnight: Post-Production Supervisor: Ross Guidici; Sound Editor: Chris Philip. A Cowboy Pictures release of a Fusion Films/Plexifilm production in association with Experience Music Project.

With – Jeff Tweedy, John Stirratt, Leroy Bach, Glenn Kotche, Jay Bennett, Tony Margherita, Jim O'Rourke, Greg Kot, David Fricke

Specs - 2002, 16mm, B&W, 92 minutes

Contact Information - Web pages: www.wilcofilm.com, www.plexifilm.com.

THE INDEPENDENT (p.24) - Director: Stephen Kessler; Producer: Mike Wilkins; Writers: Mike Wilkins, Stephen Kessler; Executive Producer: Jerry Weintraub; Co-Executive Producer: Lesa Lakin Richardson; Co-producer: Jack Ziga; Director of Photography: Amir Hamed; Editor: Chris Franklin; Production Designer: Russell Christian; Costume Designer: Yoona Kwak; Original Music: Ben Vaughn. An Arrow Films release of a United Lotus Group production.

Cast - Jerry Stiller, Janeane Garofalo, Max Perlich, Julie Strain, Stephen Kessler, Mike Wilkins, Louisa Moritz, Jonathan Katz, Billy Burke, Larry Hankin, Anne Meara, Ted Demme, Roger Corman, Ron Howard, Karen Black, Peter Bogdanovich, Fred Williamson, Nick Cassavetes.

Specs - 2001, 35mm, Color, 85 minutes

Contact Information - The United Lotus Group, P.O. Box 48738, Los Angeles, CA 90048. E-mail: yip@finemanfilms.com. Web page: www.finemanfilms.com.

KWIK STOP (p.12) - Director/Writer: Michael Gilio; Producer: Rachel Tenner; Director of Photography: David H. Blood; Editor: Chris McKay; Production Designers: Tricia O'Connell, Rebekah Wiest; Casting Directors: Mickie Paskal, Rachel Tenner; Line Producer: Christina Varotsis; Costume Designer: Stacy Ellen Rich; Make-up/Hair Stylist: James Boehmer; Post-Production Supervisor: Chris McKay; Sound Engineer: Robert McNaughton. A Kwik Stop LLC production.

Cast - Lara Phillips, Michael Gilio, Karin Anglin, Rich Komenich.

Specs - 2001, 16mm, Color, 111 minutes

Contact Information - Rachel Tenner, Kwik Stop LLC. 20 W. Hubbard, Chicago, IL 60610. Telephone: (312) 527.0665. Fax: (312) 527.9085. E-mail: rtenner@onebox.com.

Jeff Krulik (p.7) -

Select Filmography - HITLER'S HAT (2003), Video, 50 minutes; KING OF PORN 2: THE RETIREMENT (2000), Video, 6 minutes: HARRY POTTER PARKING LOT (2000), Video, 7 minutes; OBSESSED WITH JEWS (2000), Video, 8 minutes; I CREATED

LANCELOT LINK (1999), Video, 16 minutes; FOLLOW THAT @#*! TORCH (1998), Video, 26 minutes; NEIL DIAMOND PARKING LOT (1998), Video, 9 minutes; GO-GO GIRLS DON'T CRY (1997), Video, 25 minutes; ERNEST BORGNINE ON THE BUS (1997), Video, 45 minutes; KING OF PORN (1996), Video, 7 minutes; MR. BLASSIE GOES TO WASHINGTON (1995), Video, 25 minutes; MEMORIES OF ELVIS (1987), Video, 50 minutes; HEAVY METAL PARKING LOT (1986), Video, 15 minutes.

Contact Information (HMPL) - John Heyn, P.O. Box 83025, Gaithersburg, MD 20883. Web: www.heavymetalparkinglot.net. Contact Information (all others) - Jeff Krulik, 3221 Connecticut Ave., NW #308, Washington, D.C. 20008. Web page: www.planetkrulik.com.



Model: Liz Biondi Photographer: JaPan

MIRROR MAN (p.30) - Director/Producer/Writer: Matt Jenkins; Assistant Director: Steve Bentley; Lighting Director: Dan Perrin; Production Assistance: Ron Morton, A JBP Co. presentation of a Dented Head production.

Cast - Dan Perrin, Micaela Stites, Steve Bentley, Steve Adams, Gary Beatty, Christian Price.

Specs - 2000, S-VHS/DVCam, Color, 14 minutes Contact Information - JBP Co., P.O. Box 7191, Lawton, OK 73506. E-mail: mattj@cameron.edu.

OUR LADY OF SORROW (p.15) - Writers/Directors: Dennis Widmyer, Kevin Kölsch. A Kinky Mule Films production. Contact Information - Web: www.ourladyofsorrow.com.

UNTITLED FEATURE 2 (p.15) - Director/Producer/Writer/ Editor: Tyler Tharpe; Co-producer: Deb White; Director of Photography: Tony Hettinger. Cast: J.J. Huckin, Amy Paliganoff, Keelan Rushing, Linda McCormick, Becky Niccum, Michael Ray Reed, David Tess, Michael Young, Mary Atkins. An Innerworld Pictures production.

Contact Information - Telephone: (317) 205.9146. E-mail: tylertharpe@yahoo.com. Web: www.innerworldpictures.com.

Erin Anadkat lives in Chicago and is taking filmmaking courses at Columbia College.

Steve Bailey teaches in the Humanities Division and the Program in Communication and Culture at York University in Toronto while writing on film, television, and popular culture for various academic journals.

Brad Bugos is a self-centered weirdo who writes stories that entertain himself. He has been publishing his zine about music and humor, Silly Little Trouser Monkees, for eight years and will

Robert Cagle writes about film and popular culture.

Holly Day lives in Minnesota with her husband, Sherman, and two children, Astrid and Wolfegang. She is a frequent contributor to Brutarian Magazine and Film Festival Today, and has a weekly music column in Minneapolis' Skyway News.

Chad Fahs writes, produces, and consults for a variety of projects and clients. He has co-authored several books including MacWorld DVD Studio Pro Bible, Final Cut Pro 4 for Dummies, and Flash MX Design for TV and Video. You can contact him at chadfahs@aol.com or visit www.chadfahs.com.

L. Rob Hubbard continues to run his Project for World Domination(tm) from his Midwestern bunker/HO and can be contacted at Irobhubb@yahoo.com. Currently, he is in preproduction on a short film to be produced in 2004. For World Domination news and stuff, visit him at http://www.geocities.com/lrobhubb/index.

Matt Jenkins recently screened his documentary on the U.S.S. Nautilus as the Greenwich International Film Festival and also screened MIRROR MAN at the Brooklyn Underground Film Festival. An Associate Professor of Communication at Cameron University in Lawton, OK, he is currently in production on a documentary covering automobile manufacturer Glenn Pray and is in the script process for a new fictional epic.

Diane Kung is a senior in Comparative Literature at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Currently applying for MFA programs in film production, she plans to pursue a career in writing/directing. There are several projects she is working on now. For those who are curious, write dkung@uiuc.edu.

Jeff McCoy recently had his screenplay "Crazy Gunderman" produced as a segment of Silver Moon Productions' upcoming anthology horror film, TALES FROM THE GRAVE. He is currently working on an H.P. Lovecraft-inspired script.

Marty McKee believes Lance Henriksen would be the perfect choice to star in a new film adaptation of Richard Matheson's I Am Legend. Feel free to disagree with him at mmckee@mhvf.net.

A.j. Michel is the editrix of Low Hug zine. Her weapon of choice is a Stanley Bostitch Long Reach Stapler, Model B440LR. Information about Low Hug Productions, as well as assorted ranting, can be found at http://lowhug.blogspot.com.

Believe it or not, Jason Pankoke is still publishing MICRO-FILM irregardless of how little exists in his bank account. To get his mind off of that predicament, he is currently developing his second short film project while planning to resume work on his comic book opus, The M.I.C. Agency, in the fall. He also designed the DVD packaging for the Synapse Films releases BACCHANALES SEXUELLES and NIGHT TRAIN

Robin Peters owns and operates the multimedia company Dreamscape Design in Champaign, Illinois. He has produced two feature-length films, two short subjects, and one documentary that makes no bones about the fact that he loves The Beatles. Test his knowledge of the lads from Liverpool at rpeters@dreamscapedesign.com.

Jeff Sartain is a Ph.D. candidate at Indiana University. He was recently the Film Editor for Bloomington's new alternative weekly paper, The Free Press. He can be reached through his Web site, www.jeffsartain.com.

Mike Trippiedi is a no-budget filmmaker who will almost always watch a no-budget movie over a mainstream one. You can e-mail him at miketrip@soltec.net.

Anthony Zoubek is a film critic and investigative reporter based in central Illinois.

Austen Zuege graduated from the law school of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in May 2003. He currently resides in Minneapolis.

nner cinema

visions and ruminations from the filmmaker inside you

I had the pleasure of attending the 2003 American Film Market (AFM) in Santa Monica last February. Held in the Lowe's Hotel on Santa Monica Boulevard, this event attracts more of the wheelhouse people on the movie ship because it is one of the biggest venues for buying and selling movies, along with Cannes and Italy. Within walking distance of the hotel are several multiplex theaters, including three on the Third Street Promenade alone, and many of the movies for sale were being shown at these theaters throughout each day.

The Lowe's Hotel is a perfect venue for AFM, with many of its floors opening into a center atrium and easy access from suite to suite. Unlike the typical convention, there aren't many "booths," per se. In fact, it's not really a hotel since it has no beds during the event. Movie companies and distributors rent the suites on each of the eight floors, lining the hallways with movie posters touting their top movies for sale. Glamour does emerge at the private parties and nightly events, but during the day it's all business. Companies hustle each other in a very business-like fashion, talking about stars and movies like they're trading commodities.

Each day I would walk down the halls and hear a different movie playing on the televisions in each suite. It's hard to explain the experience of hearing explosions from an action movie in my right ear and dialogue from a comedy on my left. Walk a few more feet, and the moaning of a hot love scene fights with the explosions instead. At the end of the hall, I'd hear a French movie in one room while across the hall the actors were speaking Chinese. If ever there was a melting pot, this convention was it! Distributors came from all over the world, with some knowing little or no English.

At the bottom of the atrium was an incredible networking event. Several bars stayed open long after the suites had closed. I understand that a lot of deals were conducted right there, and some people never even made it up to the top levels. While relaxing in the atrium myself, I spotted numerous actors mingling with the buyers and sellers. As a boy from Illinois, it takes a little getting used to when walking by Carl Weathers ("Apollo Creed" from the ROCKY movies) and Richard Roundtree (the original "Shaft"), or seeing Jennifer Gareis (THE 6TH DAY) do a press conference in a see-through blouse. Do all guys from California have to take testosterone-reducing shots?

At a hotel next door, there were conferences for attendees and filmmakers alike. Some of the panels discussed topics such as "The Filmmaker as Entrepreneur," "Acting in the Digital Age," and Reaching Your Audience with Your Indie Film." These were very modern topics and regardless of what "level" you were at, you could walk away having learned something new.

There's also nothing quite like listening to Mike Farrell ("B.J. Hunnicut" from M.A.S.H.), Wes Craven (SCREAM), or Roger Corman (FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUND) discuss a topic while sitting next to you in the audience is the beautiful Sean Young (BLADERUNNER). After each event, all the celebrity panelists took the time to talk to attendees one-on-one, with Farrell sporting a piece of duct tape with "No War" scribbled on it.

AFM really opened my eyes as to the business side of filmmaking. You could learn a lot just by hearing what the buyers were looking for, what the trends were, which movie genre was hot, and what's not. I learned that high definition video is definitely as acceptable as 16mm or 35mm to most movie buyers. Even if an indie film loses money at the box office, as did the Christian apocalyptic film LEFT BEHIND, it can recoup at the video stores—in this case, to the tune of \$8 million. Last year, MY BIG FAT GREEK WEDDING was for sale here before it took off. Who knows what the big movie from this year's AFM will be?

I had the opportunity to go to some of the after hours events, and I could see how some people burn out in the movie business, as there are so many cool things going on just about every night at events like these. The highlight for me occurred on the last evening when I was invited to a private party at a nightclub. Playing at the club was none other than Dennis Quaid (FAR FROM HEAVEN). doing guitar and lead vocals while several pros from the Joe Cocker band backed him up.

As a former pro music man, I am skeptical of actors starting their own rock bands, but I must say I was duly impressed with this one. From the moment he hit the "stage" (a dance area five feet in front of the tables), Quaid rocked the joint, playing for over an hour and a half as if he was doing one long song from the movie GREAT BALLS OF FIRE where he played Jerry Lee Lewis. Quaid danced on tables, strummed like Pete Townshend, and shook so much that I swore several times he wasn't really playing.

He was, and when it was over, I felt I had experienced a special treat that few others would ever see. However, "he plays here all the time" was all I heard when I told others about the private concert. People who lived there were actually bored with seeing a movie star play a rock star.

I made good friends and had good experiences at the American Film Market. At the same time, I'm glad that I live in the "flyover zone," a nickname for the Midwest used by Hollywood people who frequent New York. It enables me to enjoy the "boring" task of movie making without the excesses that living in Los Angeles would provide.

"Hobnobbing in Santa Monica" by Robin Peters

.... the sidelong glance I circled back like a film shark picking up that old celluloid scent, parking close and walking across the street to the hulking dumpster. A pair of artists who run a hipster restaurant up the

We could only reasonably pilfer from the artifacts up top because of the heavier debris underneath it like planks and broken furniture. After shaking off the moisture from the little that Ubiquitous C-U townie Preston Wright collects discarded 16mm educational films and gives them new life by projecting to the eclectic spins of one DJ Spinnerty. I sat down outside with I claimed, I stashed the bounty in my car and ducked around some corners to grab a drink. There, my pal Alex sat just inside the front door collecting cover for the evening. "It's a dollar," he said. "Did you come to see the movies?" I double-took. "Movies?" Alex sept up the tease. "Yeah, out in the beer garden. Preston is showing movies with music." A-ha. "Thanks," I said.

n mind this fall when both MICRO-FILM #7 and Backyard Cinema mark our fifth anniversary. Don't let this happen to your favorite small press for indie film reporting! - Jason Pankoke

In this small way, the Gleismann footage can continue with its flickering ways even if its function has changed. Keep that haunting image of a receptacle overflowing with a lifetime's work beer in hand to take in this aged eye candy emerging from the reels of two tank-like machines to cover a big white rectangle on the brick wall. I saw experimental racecars, volleyball hotties, bighorn sheep, and quantum physics. Most excellent Preston told me later that he scavenged a few Gleismann reels on the way to this gig and had already worked them into the flow.

The former Gleismann Studios mentioned in my editorial not only provided myself and my friends with a brief portal into tools and techniques of the past, but also some needless stress as

the time came ever so close for the new owners to gut the space. Late one drizzling Sunday night at the end of the summer, while driving through all six blocks of downtown Champaign,

finally spotted the squat monolith that would finally mark the end of an era.

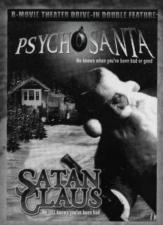
Gleismann Studios logo, its dull luster glowing under the streetlight.

street joined me in diving for historical collateral. Curled proofs of intertitles, animation cells, and numerous movie rolls dotted the surface. I even yanked a sheet sporting the forgotten

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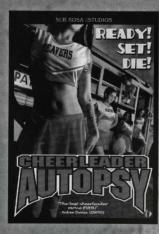
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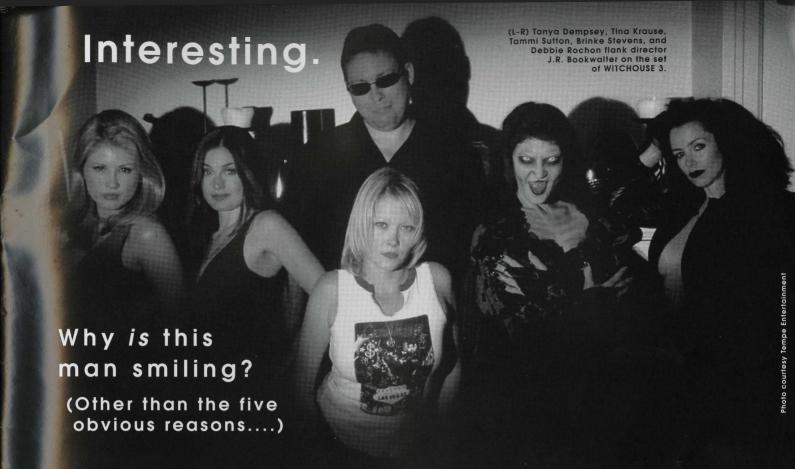
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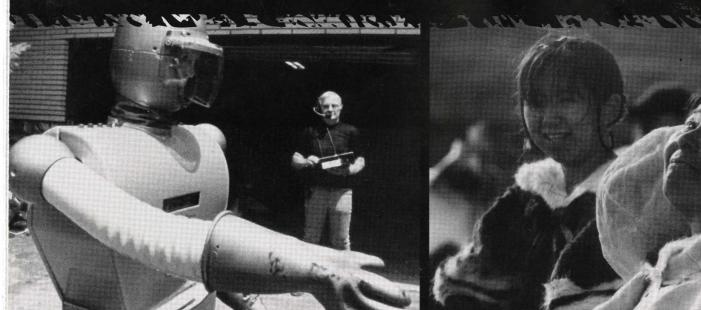
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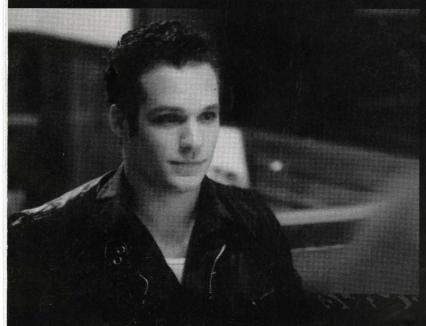


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