

# The heck with the movie industry

by Ira Nayman

Every year, Hollywood celebrates its sense of itself as egalitarian by bestowing the mantle of "director" on one or two independent filmmakers. Spike Lee's Hollywood career took off after his independently produced film *She's Gotta Have It*; Hal Hartley and Whit Stillman are two independent filmmakers on whom mainstream judgment has yet to be cast.

*The Heck With Hollywood!* (TV Ontario, Tuesday, 10 pm) is a humorous, sometimes touching documentary on three independent filmmakers. It carries two worthwhile messages: the hardest part of making a film may be selling it and, for every independent filmmaker who is recognized, there are dozens, if not hundreds, who do not.

"If you have something to say...make a film," advises Jennifer Fox, producer of the documentary *Beirut: The Last Home Movie*. Although it garnered rave reviews in major New York publications and won awards at film festivals, it was only picked up by a minor distributor who was only able to book it in museums; an ignominious end to a film which took seven years of its creator's life.

Gerry Cook, having difficulty finding a distributor, went on the road to sell *Only A Buck* himself. He and two friends of his sold video copies of the film out of the back of a "brickmobile." Surprisingly, not only did they make back the cost of the film, but the publicity they generated got *Only a Buck* a video distribution deal.

The saddest story in the show started out with the most potential. Ted Lichtenheld convinced David Morse (*St. Elsewhere*) and Adam Arkin to star in his romance *Personal Foul*; with known actors, it should have been easier to sell.

Eventually, *Personal Foul* was picked up by Double Helix, a distributor specializing in action/adventure and softcore exploitation films for foreign markets. By the end of *The Heck With Hollywood!*, Lichtenheld had made back very little of the cost of his film, which clearly wasn't going to be distributed theatrically in the States, although a representative of Double Helix held out hope that it could make money outside the country.

What comes across is that filmmaking in the United States is a closed shop to which few are

## television

**The Human Edge: The Heck With Hollywood!**  
TV Ontario  
Tuesday, November 5, 10 pm

admitted. Those who want to succeed as independents must scale an incredibly high wall made of the arbitrary standards of distributors, hiding behind "public taste." Several distributors say *Personal Foul* would have been more marketable, for instance, if it had car chases or more explicit sex.

All the filmmakers interviewed say you have to make yourself happy making the kind of film you want. This dichotomy between personal vision and commercial viability gives *The Heck With Hollywood!* a sad flavour; we know that, despite their talent and love of filmmaking, the odds are these people will not succeed.

*The Heck With Hollywood!*'s focus on the business of filmmaking will probably put off people who aren't totally fascinated by the industry. Nonetheless, its portrait of the fringes of the American entertainment machine is highly recommended.



Ted Lichtenheld demonstrates the ancient art of camera dollying on the set of his first feature film, *Personal Foul*. How independent films like his get made, then ignored by Hollywood is the subject of the documentary *The Heck With Hollywood!*

# arts

## Lead Grape stomps the Beatles image

by Lee Romberg

Recording an album at Abbey Road Studios, where the Beatles created their masterpiece, should be the ultimate thrill. But Kevin Kane, guitarist/vocalist for the Grapes of Wrath, is "pissed off at our record company for using (our recording at) Abbey Road as a selling point."

Kane insists that the music on their latest offering, *These Days*, should stand on its own. "Like, who fucking cares where it was recorded? It could have been recorded up my asshole — as long as it sounds good."

The Grapes have been touring to promote *These Days* since August; they played the Underground on October 22.

With an even mixture of acoustic and "kicking" songs, and a multitude of catchy harmonies, Kane finds it difficult to understand why the Grapes have consistently been labelled as Beatle clones.

"Isn't that what anybody (making pop music today) would strive for?" he asks. Kane points out that it's excusable for a group to be influenced by the Ramones or sound and dress exactly like Rod Stewart, but as far as the Beatles are concerned, "you're not allowed to do it because the Beatles have done it, and we have to live the rest of our lives with it being forced back down our throats like fucking 30 year-old bile."

Acknowledging musical influences is by no means a crime, but the Grapes may sometimes take things a little too far: in videos, their mannerisms are nearly identical to the Beatles. Tom Hooper plucks a Hofner violin bass with his thumb (nobody plays unconventional bass like that except Paul McCartney). Even the fact that they recorded at Abbey Road and are signed with Capitol can't be simple coincidence.

Unlike the other members of his band, Kane claims he can no longer pass judgement on his "fab" predecessors. To him, "the Beatles are like telephone poles — they're just there. If you were talking to Tom, he'd be pissing himself... I can't even listen to them anymore."

When he was younger, John, Paul, George, and Ringo were everything. Today, a sick and bus-lagged Kane listens to Beatle-influenced bands like Badfinger, Big Star, and the Raspberries when he is not on stage.



Alex Sharma

## interview

**Kevin Kane of The Grapes of Wrath**  
The Underground  
Tuesday, October 22

Despite his exhaustion from the present tour, which included a full house at Massey Hall, Kane remains pleasant, unafraid to admit he is burnt-out. The concept of touring has changed drastically for him: "I just kind of walk around like a zombie all day and hope I can get it up for the hour-and-a-half that I have to...perform."

Kane reminisces of times past, when the band drove across the country in a van, setting up their own equipment at gigs and establishing contacts in the industry. "Now we do these overnight drives, so we never get to see anything."

Kane hesitates to say the band has "made it." "What is 'making it'?" Financially? Or the fact that we get played on the radio? Big deal — I mean, I don't have enough money to pay my rent next month!"

This does not bother Kane because the sale of 92,000 albums in Canada, like the Grapes' last, *Now and Again*, can provide for quite an apartment.

*These Days* is well on its way to doing the same. It is probably their best release yet, sounds from *Revolver* and all. Working with producer John Leckie, the creative force behind a slew of classic albums (*Dark Side of the Moon*, for one), was profoundly successful for the band, according to Kane.

As if that weren't enough, the Grapes almost got John Paul Jones to do the arrangements; unfortunately there were scheduling problems. At any rate, it was "the best time we've had in the studio for sure."



Joe Mantegna plays a man caught between his duty and the religion he didn't believe in in David Mamet's intelligent thriller, *Homocide*. Although the film is theatrical in its reliance on dialogue, it is entertaining.

## Mamet's dangerous thriller

by Lee Romberg

The third film by crafty writer-director David Mamet is his best yet. *Homocide*, Mamet's first exploration of the action genre, adds thought-provoking substance to the conventions of a thriller. The result is not a Schwarzenegger cliché, but a plausible gem that will not leave the mind quickly.

Joe Mantegna, star of Mamet's previous films *House of Games* and *Things Change*, plays Bobby Gold, a Jewish cop going through an identity crisis. Gold is caught between two cases: a routine investigation into the death of an old Jewish woman and an

## film

**Homocide**  
directed by David Mamet  
starring Joe Mantegna  
produced by Triumph Releasing

attempt to bring down a murderer making headlines.

There is more to this than you might think. For Mamet, "*Homocide* is based on my experience (growing up not feeling sufficiently Jewish or American." It deals with what might be the ultimate Anti-Semitism, experienced by Gold, who is virtually devoid of any identity (let alone Jewish). He is an extreme example of the American melting pot.

*Homocide* is typical of Mamet's theatrical style, relying on dialogue to convey mood and theme rather than dazzling camerawork. In one scene, a suspect offers Mantegna help in solving the problem of "the nature of evil." Gold refuses, saying: "Then I'd be out of a job." A few scenes later, the "four-letter word meter" has hiked up beyond twenty.

Mamet has proven that a hundred million dollars is not needed to make an entertaining thriller. *Homocide* is truckloads more interesting than, say, anything Arnie has come up with; and, speaking of *The Terminator*, don't expect David Mamet to make *Homocide 2!*