

Making weird waves: on a crest

Interview by Matt Hays

In 1972 independent film maker John Waters released a film called *Pink Flamingos*. The film featured a three hundred pound star, then virtually unknown. The character was 'Divine — the most disgusting person in the world'. The film played repertory cinemas across North America and eventually Europe and Waters and Divine both gained notoriety for their work. The final scene was particularly noteworthy: in order to prove his title as the most disgusting person in the world, Divine picks up still steaming dog feces and eats it. A star is born.

Divine continued to make films with John Waters, the last one being *Polyester*, which co-starred Tab Hunter. *Polyester* was filmed using a brand new cinematic device: odorama — audience members were given scratch 'n sniff cards, allowing them to 'smell along' with the action. Divine then worked with director Paul Bartel (*Death Race 2000*, *Eating Raoul*) on *Lust in the Dust*.

In 1978 Divine began his singing career. He has since recorded such pop disco hits as *Love Reaction* and *You Think You're a Man*. His records sell well internationally, in fact he has several gold and platinum albums. He has toured virtually everywhere to sell out crowds, including Israel, and, before the end of the year, Japan. In 1984 he appeared on the British TV series *Top of the Pops*. After the program aired, the TV station was flooded with 12,000 calls all protesting his appearance. The producers of *Top of the Pops* decided Divine could not appear again on their show.

Divine's latest film is *Trouble in Mind*, directed by Alan Rudolph, in which Divine has his first male role — as a gangster. The film has received excellent reviews, as has Divine for his performance.

Divine was performing his nightclub act at 'Goose Loonies' last summer. I interviewed him in his hotel room. As I spoke to him it struck me that everything I'd ever read in a Divine interview was true. Divine was charming, witty, polite and above all, candid.

We discussed his film work and rumours of a Network TV series.

Gateway: After coming out of *Trouble in Mind* someone said to me that you'd stolen the film.

D: One reviewer from the Hollywood Reporter said that. I was quite flattered.

Gateway: In *Trouble in Mind* you play a mob leader. Did Alan Rudolph write this part with you in mind?

D: Yes. The part was written for me. I was his first choice. He came to Bernard's (Bernard Jay, Divine's personal manager) office, and sort of plopped this thing on my lap.

Gateway: He had seen your work with John Waters and Paul Bartel.

D: Yes, and was a fan of that work, and he said he thought I'd be good in this man's part. I've been looking for a man's part for about 8 years.

Gateway: You'd had a male role in *Female Trouble* though — you played a man who raped yourself, or the female character you played.

D: Yeah, but this was a few seconds. I really didn't get to do any acting or dialogue besides humping someone — a stand-in — which wasn't that enjoyable, this four hundred pound monster... she wasn't the prettiest woman.

Gateway: Will a sequel to *Pink Flamingos* ever be made? I've heard a lot about it.

D: What did you hear?

Gateway: I read John Water's article in *American Film Magazine* about his attempts to get someone to back the film financially.

D: I think the whole thing was scrapped after Edith Massey died. John said he would never try to find a replacement for her or me or for anyone. As far as he's concerned there aren't any.

Gateway: Certainly not for Edith Massey.

D: Or me. (laughs) You're talking to me! No, that's true. There aren't any other Ediths around. But really, it wasn't my favourite script. We did enough with dogshit.

Gateway: I'd heard the proposed script was full of shit. It doesn't have to be, it just appeared in the last scene of the first film.

D: I agree. We already did that. It's been hard enough to live that down.

Gateway: You've had a lot of press with that.

D: Yes. Whether it was real or not, I'm not going to say, but the scene sticks in people's minds... stuck in my throat.

Gateway: I've heard that scene estranged your parents.

D: For about nine years we didn't speak.

Gateway: And how's that now?

D: It's great.

Gateway: I was happy to hear you'd reconciled. I read that in the *New Music Express*.

D: It's real good now. They're fans. Which makes me feel so much better because I'm an only child and of course we were very close and spent a lot of time together. Then all of a sudden you don't speak, and as far as I was concerned, it was for no reason at all. I think they finally realized that too because I'm just doing what I love and do best and



The delicious ever delectable Divine.

that's being a comedian and an actor and making people laugh.

Gateway: How did you and John Waters meet and how was it that you established a professional relationship?

D: We were neighbours. We grew up in Lutherville, Maryland. John was quite a movie buff as I was too. John just always wanted to make movies. He had a Browning Super 8 camera that his parents bought him as a present, and we used to get together on Sunday afternoons, about ten or twelve of us. He would write scripts for us during the week and we would act them out on Sundays. Actually we did it out of sheer boredom. When I was a teenager we didn't have discos or anything to go to. Sounds like I came out of a covered wagon or something!

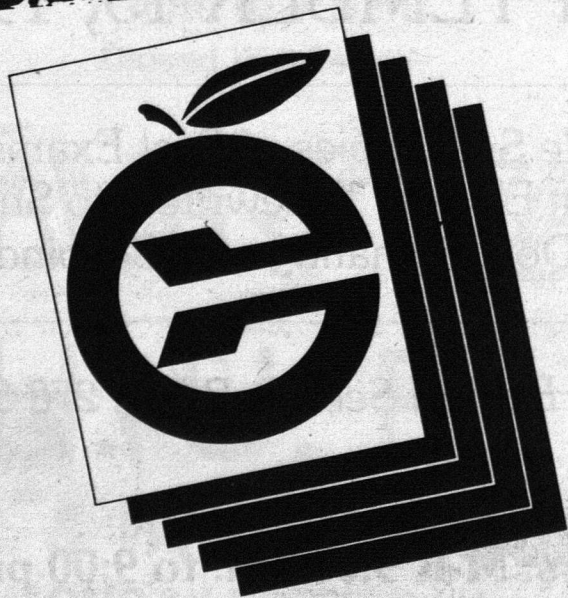
There were teen centres, but they were for the nerds, no one really wanted to go to

them. On Wednesday night we would all get together and have Coke and chips — Coca Cola that is — and watch the rushes. We thought we were the hottest thing since sliced bread. Finally, someone said 'you should show these to other people. These films are funny!'

There's a spring festival in Baltimore and John rented a hall and showed the film. It was 49¢ to get in. Some people from the University of Maryland filmmaking school saw the film and thought it was fabulous. They asked John and I if we would come to the school to show the movie and to give the kids there incentive to make movies because ours was made for about \$250.00.

I went all done up and John would come out first and he would give his long speech about movie-making and then he would introduce the most beautiful woman

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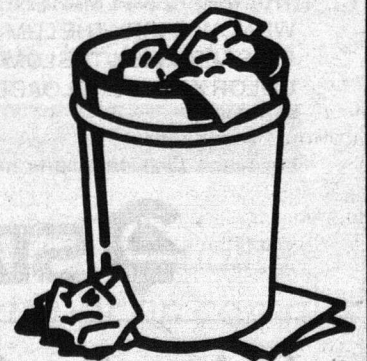
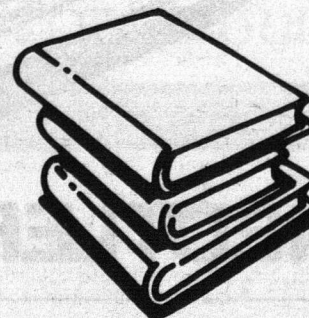
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