

ARTS

Spheeris' *Metal Years*: sex, drugs, rock and roll

By ADAM KARDASH

Gazzari's is much the same every night. Androgynous males and sleazy-looking women pack the Sunset Boulevard club to watch some heavy metal quintet scream about their favourite pastimes—sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll.

But outside the club is where it happens. Dozens of Los Angeles' metal bands converge on a crowd of about 100 metalheads, to pass out promotion leaflets and tell awestruck teenage girls the time and place of their next gigs.

Back inside, the 68 year-old "Godfather of Rock-n-Roll" Bill Gazzari stands quietly at the back of his club with two scantily dressed 18 year-old blondes. In front of him, about 300 headbangers rhythmically fire their fists into the air for Odin, an LA based band that Gazzari predicts will "make it big." At least 20 drooling groupies are aligned in front of Odin lead singer Randy "O", vying for the attention from the man Gazzari calls "the next David Lee Roth."

Gazzari's is just one of over a dozen rock clubs in Los Angeles where the burgeoning heavy metal scene can be viewed. Hundreds of bands are competing for fame and, more importantly, a stake in the multi-million dollar heavy metal industry. As in the rest of the music industry, only a fraction of metal groups succeed.

The rest fade into obscurity.

Director Penelope Spheeris has documented the LA heavy metal scene in her latest movie, *The Decline of Western Civilization Part II: The Metal Years*. The film was shown on Saturday as part of the Midnight Madness segment of the Festival of Festivals.

Metal Years includes live footage and a series of interviews with contemporary metal bands—Megadeth, Faster Pussycat, Seduce, Odin, Chris Holmes (of WASP), and London—in addition to metal legends Ozzy Osbourne, Motorhead front man Lemmy, Alice Cooper, Aerosmith's Steven Tyler and Joe Perry, and Gene Simmons and Paul Stanley (of KISS). About a dozen

unknown metal outfits are also interviewed.

Spheeris probes the musicians with pointed questions about the money, music, drugs, women, and success. Their responses are candid and often humorous.

Asked to compare his band to more successful hard rock bands, one unknown musician says, "You hear about those bands who destroy hotel rooms on their tours. Well, the only time we stayed in a motel we destroyed the room, and it felt completely natural."

On the topic of drugs, Steve Tyler referred to Joe Perry and himself as the "toxic twins."

Asked about their lyrics, Megadeth lead singer/guitarist Dave Mustaine replies, "We don't write about the cliché things most bands sing about. We sing about death. Because without death, life is really meaningless."

Another amusing scene has Paul Stanley in bed surrounded by adoring groupies ready to satisfy his



The "toxic twins," Steve Tyler and Joe Perry, crack up in *Metal Years*.

cont'd on p. 14



Antics and awards

By MICHAEL REDHILL

Like some cumbersome aircraft, the Festival of Festivals dropped its landing gears and, with a mixture of faith and good piloting, put down smoothly at the Inn On The Park on Sunday. At this final luncheon, Festival head Helga Stephenson said it had drawn extravagant praise from critics, and although this young cynic shuns such glamorisms, one has to admit it was a good showing.

In its barmitzvah year, the Festival did prove its mettle with a strong mix of international and domestic cinema. It also had its yearly share of odd moments—like the French subtitles on the Kaurismaki short films (bilinguals laughed their heads off), the 30-year-old LA screenwriter who

told me he had been divorced twice and now "moved five women a week," and the *really* odd and continuing phenomenon of Heidi Von Palleske who, with the aid of mirrors and mass hypnosis, was seen by this viewer twice a day. (Honest.)

The big winner this year was Pedro Almodovar's *Women On The Verge Of A Nervous Breakdown*, capturing the Labatt's prize for most popular film and taking second in the Critic's Choice Awards.

First prize in the Critic's Choice went to Terrence Davies' *Distant Voices/Still Lives*. The CityTV Award for Excellence in Canadian Production was given to *The Outside Chance of Maximillian Glick*, directed by Allen Goldstein.

As for me, it's salads and sunlight for a month. Thanks for keeping up.

Film shorts: good, bad and ugly

By MICHAEL REDHILL

Canadian shorts must be on the decline. Out of eight shorts I viewed, only two were competent, and three were genuinely awful.

Among the former is Lori Spring's *Inside/Out*, a story about a woman who decides to stay inside her apartment, writing about and filming the outside world, but not entering it. She is challenged by some friends and supported by others. A small but shining performance by Jackie Burroughs distinguishes this film, as does its intelligently written script and its insights into the pleasures and pitfalls of solitude.

Also interesting was *I Want To Be Alone*, a funny, colourful film about feminine identity.

Among the disappointing films was Rudy Buttignol's *Space Pioneers*, a tiresome documentary about a Canadian "achievement," the Alouette satellite, which sadly seems even less significant after Buttignol's treatment of it. Supposedly about the men who pioneered Canada's space engineering industry,

Space Pioneers deteriorates into Buttignol's private recollections. Some of what he says is interesting, but by the end, one would like to tweak Buttignol for reminding us where he fits into all of this.



Canada's ailment may lie not in a want for better production values, but in a need for some real artistic values. *Networks*, shot on expensive 35mm, looks stunning, but its meaning is lost for the most part on the audience. A didactic and obtuse examination of a lesbian relationship, it features two grim performances, one by Heidi Von Palleske who has proven she can act in *Dead Ringers*, but here is as interesting as shepherd's pie.

In watching some of these slow amblings in mediocrity, I wonder why our Canadian artists can't learn

something from their international counterparts and stop spending agency money at the expense of script, editing and performance. Is our fear of cultural ambiguity so great that we must forego all subtlety to be heard?

Cane Toads, an Australian short, takes a rather arid subject—the assimilation into Australian ecology of an Hawaiian toad meant to treat a grub infestation—and turns it into a hilarious extravaganza of characters and information. From farmers who compare the toad to Mussolini, to elderly shut-ins who like to feed them dog food and watch them mate, *Cane Toads* takes an idea and runs with it, developing it far past its humble beginnings.

How far are we from our humble beginnings? Like the Alouette, the tiny headstrong satellite, are Canadian independent films just so much junk orbiting the real thing?

And you thought the Festival was over! Look next week for further coverage.

STUDENT, GO HOME. CHEAP. (You'll never believe who just moved in next door!)

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