# Finally there's Canadian film you can't help but like

### ty Anthony Pizzari

With all the media hype (ads, Esoundtrack, comic book, etc.), E Highway 61 is one film that should prove to be successful in Canada, even though it's Canadian. Why? Because it's fun.

Highway 61 is a journey down the road popularized by Bob Dylan. It starts in the fictional town of Pickerel Falls when Pokey (Don McKellar, who also wrote the script), the town barber, finds a dead body in the back of his house-turned-salon. Like the rest of the film, the opening sequence is unpretentious, working, if anything, like a low-key episode of Twin Peaks.

The unidentified body is claimed by Jackie Bangs (Valerie Buhagiar), an ex-roadie who sees it as an opportunity to smuggle drugs to Memphis. This is complicated by Mr. Skin, a self-styled Satan (played by Earl Pastko) who wants the body to claim the deceased's soul.

Thus, the journey begins.

Highway 61 is littered with offbeat characters that everybody can recognize, if not through direct expe-



Valerie Buhagiar and Don McKellar dance among the tombstones in Bruce McDonald's Highway 61. The film is littered with wonderful off-beat characters and hilarious comic set-pieces, including a scene where before chickens are served for dinner, they must be chased through a huge mansion with handguns. Don't try to figure it out — see the film.

rience, then from hearsay. There is American Dream and is trying to live he shuttles around rural America in a

the father who has totally bought the it through his three daughters, whom camper.

# Mississippi Masala unique interracial love story

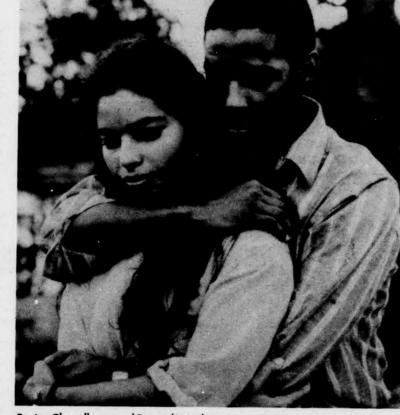
#### by Prasad Bidaye

Mira Nair's first film since 1988's critically acclaimed Salaam Bombay! is a unique interracial love story between an African-American man and an East Indian woman. Set in the southern states and drained of any archetypal romanticism, it explores the White/Black, rich/poor dialect, digging deep into the cultural psyche and unearthing the tensions between more finely separated traditions.

Newcomer Sarita Choudhury plays Mina, the only daughter of a renowned lawyer who was exiled from Uganda during Idi Amin's 1972 on Asians. Denzel Washingban ton plays her lover, Demetrius, a selfmade man, esteemed by the Black community for running his own business. The combination is a breakthrough for modern cinema.

Unfortunately, the relationship is unspeakable for the supporting characters in the film. The two families are shocked by the couple's scandalous meeting at a motel (involving intercourse, a minor fight and a series of arrests).

In American racial conflict, Asians are often glibly substituted for Whites (for instance, on Ice Cube's Black Korea). But in Mississippi Masala, Nair and scriptwriter Sooni Taraporevala portray the society ac-



Sarita Choudhury and Denzel Washington star in Mira Nair's Mississippi Masala. The movie looks at a relationship between the daughter of Asians and an American Black man.



tality, the conflict brings Mina and Demetrius to their own angry confrontation.

In a strong scene, Mina's father ues with Demetrius, shouting about the struggle he has faced as an exile and about trying to give his daughter the life he didn't have. Demetrius stops him, steadfastly replying that he's a Black man living in the south, "so don't tell me about struggle!"

Masala, the independent film currently having difficulty obtaining a wide release.

Krishna's ecstatically witty piece about Toronto's Indian community is far more intriguing. Perhaps the difference in quality is the difference between compromise and ingenuity.

# Highway 61 directed by Bruce McDonald starring Bruce McKellar and Valerie Buhagiar produced by Shadow Shows

We also encounter Claude, a stereotypical northern Ontario French Canadian. And then there's Pokey, a character who seems to embody how Canadians see themselves: humble and shy, with a lot of pent-up creative energy just dying to come out.

Two scenes in Bruce McDonald (Roadkill)'s film stand out. In one, the overzealous father takes a shotgun to poor Pokey and Jackie when they "borrow" his ex-wife's dress hanging on a clothesline. Then there is the episode where Satan runs into a small town Bingo parlour to win money to buy souls and ends up winning a toaster oven. Scenes like these are light, but critical of American culture.

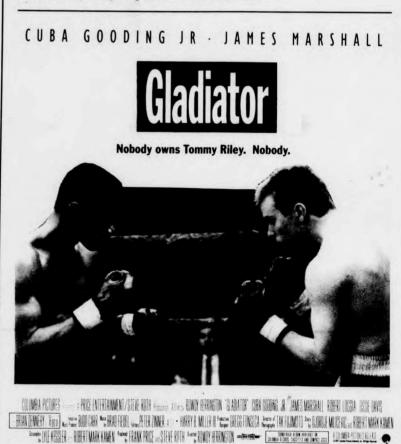
Highway 61's charm is that it retains a b-movie quality. This makes it different from most Canadian films, which tend to take themselves very seriously (Patricia Rozema's overlyintellectual White Room, for example). It is also a Canadian film you can watch without being reminded of our alleged problems developing a 'national identity.'

So, beware all you Canadian film haters. Highway 61 is a film you may not help liking.

#### NEXT ISSUE: **Bruce Macdonald interview**

# ntest contest ntest contest contest

At the rate the Excalibur arts section has been giving away free stuff you could be forgiven for mistaking us for eye WEEKLY. Have no fear! Excalibur has no intention of publishing anything by William Burrill in the future. However, in conjunction with the folks at Columbia, we'd like to offer you a package o' prizes based on the film:



curately, without resorting to weak liberal explanations.

her family name, bringing outrage to his people. As a consequence, his all East Indians. Demetrius is simi- business falters. Without sentimen-

## produced by Mirabai Films

Mina is ostracized for disgracing larly made to feel guilty for shaming

# Fine Arts Festival perfectly normal by Francesca Accinelli

"They came ... they saw ... they left on the 106 ... a pretty normal fine arts festival" is drawing nigh, and so the publicity bombardment begins. The Fine Arts Festival is an annual smorgasbord of events organized by the Creative Arts Students' Association during which we unleash our talents on the York community.

The events, which range from an art installation in Osgoode to a comedy troupe performing in York Lanes, occur in and around almost every building on campus. We cater to the masses, offering jazz, dance, film, visual arts and guerilla theatre. Best of all, the majority of these events are free! Ah, what a sweet sounding word in these recessionary times

The Festival starts on Wednesday, March 11 and runs until March 13, culminating at the Underground in a Cabaret, another Fine Arts tradition. Schedules of events will be available in the Centre for Fine Arts (the building with all the windows) or in York Lanes starting Monday, March 9. You can also call the CASA office at extension 20205.

Don't miss the bus! Come join the excitement. Events are happening day and night, and if you don't find us, we'll be sure to find you. So, sit back, relax and enjoy the ride.

Racism is so alive in America, it even exists among non-White, but racially distinct peoples. Nair's portrayal of this society sensibly examines the brewing social tensions, preserving a symmetrical anger.

Nair's cast is obviously an attempt to fit into Hollywood's clique. Denzel Washington appearing alongside veteran actor Roshan Seth may seem mainstream on the billboard lights. Fortunately, his acting is smooth, not overpowering the other performers.

Sarita Choudhury is appropriately angst-ridden, but at times amateurish - though that could be more an effect of working with hot-shot actors than her own inability.

Mississippi Masala is promising. But with the production's compromises, does it deserve the attention it has recieved? It hardly compares with Toronto director Srivas Krishna's

Intrigued? There are 20 prize packages to be won. Each package will consist of passes to the movie, a poster, and a pair of sweatshorts. Special grand prizes will include the movie's soundtrack. Interested? In 50 words or less, answer the following question: If you were a gladiator, who would you want to be in a ring fighting against, and why? Write your name and a phone number where you can be reached below your answer, and drop it off at the Excalibur office, 420 Student Student Centre any time until 6 pm, Monday, March 9. Please put "Gladiator Contest" on the front of the envelop so we know it isn't from somebody who hates us. The 20 most interesting answers as judged by Excalibur's panel of experts (including Ira Nayman, Lee Romberg, Eric Alper, Harry Rudolfs and Lilac Cana) will win a prize package. All decisions by the judges are final.

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