

Hearts is a tribute to one filmmaker's ego

by Prasad Bidaye

Accompanying the re-release of *Apocalypse Now* is *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, a behind-the-scenes look at the makings of a modern war "epic" through the eyes of the director's wife. Intended originally as a 30-minute promo for television, it became a 90-minute observation of insanity in the Philippines.

In the opening sequence, director Francis Ford Coppola, at Cannes, preaches that his latest film "is not about Vietnam. It is Vietnam" and claims that "little by little, we went insane." His exaggerated introduction seems pretentious, but the remaining 90 minutes of *Hearts* manages to justify his claims and prove that his experience truly could be an apocalypse for any filmmaker.



Director Francis Ford Coppola and friend on the set of *Apocalypse Now*. Fax Bahr and George Hickenlooper's documentary *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse*, made with footage on the set filmed by Coppola's wife Eleanor, is a sobering look at how ego (and a lot of bad luck) nearly destroyed a creative genius.

It is amazing to see how many changes Coppola made to the script. As it is, he began shooting without even deciding on an ending. He also

gave the lead, Captain Willard, to Harvey Keitel, only to replace him with Martin Sheen after one week of filming. And, having been put through

the winds of a typhoon, Coppola's set was destroyed and had to be rebuilt, requiring a lot of refilming.

Eleanor Coppola describes "The Ride of The Valkyries" as the most logistically difficult scene of Francis' life. Borrowing helicopters and soldiers from Filipino President Ferdinand Marcos, he virtually creates a war on his set. But an even crazier trial has to be faced: Brando.

At a million dollars a week, Marlon shows up on the set grossly overweight, doesn't bother to read the script — let alone the book — and decides to improvise his lines. In one session, he makes up poetry about the birds, the trees and the skies, and hilariously brings them into the context of the war. He then gets bored and walks out, mumbling that he "cannot think of anything else to say today." So much for genius.

These are typical of the events described in Eleanor Coppola's film. *Apocalypse* was transformed from an 18-week project into a three-year "idiocyyssey;" with *Hearts*, Francis demonstrates how he virtually went crazy because of the ordeals.

On the other hand, he admits he goes through this in every film.

The camera's more revealing moments are with actor Martin Sheen, who accidentally smashes a mirror and cuts his thumb. With doctors ready and waiting, he refuses to stop, ending up crying, screaming and threatening to destroy the camera and crew. It turns out that it is his 36th birthday and he is absolutely drunk; a few weeks later, Sheen has a heart attack. For someone whose character is so pretentiously calm throughout "the horrors" of *Apocalypse Now*, it is wonderful to see that 'the man whose hair never moved' was actually human.

The one person who manages never to lose her cool is Eleanor Coppola. Her voice remains mo-

FILM

Apocalypse Now
directed by Francis Ford Coppola
starring Martin Sheen
Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse
directed by Fax Bahr and George Hickenlooper
produced by ZM Productions/Showtime

notoriously calm in contrast to her husband's frequent screaming. She describes herself as the stable half of their marriage. Even when he decides to put all of their multi-million dollar estate at risk, she puts faith in her husband's creativity, stating that even if Francis loses everything she knows he can bring it back with another film, or even with a job as a teacher. But how magnificent is *Apocalypse Now* thirteen years after its original release? The film's source, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, is commonly attacked for its racism in blaming Kurtz' insanity on the "savagery of Africa." The incorporation of those themes in Coppola's film cannot be denied. (Coppola once stated that *Apocalypse* is set "in the jungle, where the civilized encountered the primitive.")

I asked Eleanor Coppola about that, and she attempted to clarify that "the primitive" was an emotion within the soldiers, not an identification of the Vietnamese. She even went further to defensively state that Francis did not want any prejudices in the film, and for that reason, had both blacks and whites together.

I remain skeptical. Some of Conrad's racist allegories, whether intentionally or not, are subconsciously intertextualized in the film.

But, by the same token, *Apocalypse Now* should not be trashed. The technical work that Coppola nearly went insane for is brilliant, and a re-release to the 70 mm screen with THX sound is certainly worth the venture.

Hearts of Darkness is the perfect anticlimax. As a sister to *Apocalypse*, it brings the audience full circle. It is open and honest, appropriately exposing some of Francis Ford Coppola's most humiliating and perhaps honourable moments.

It seems like nothing could go right with *Apocalypse*; after three years of filmmaker hell, even Francis admits he wasn't completely happy with it. But at the end of *Hearts*, Coppola announces that he hopes his film will destroy Hollywood's obsession with professionalism and finally bring the film industry the sense of art it needs. Perhaps Eleanor Coppola's plotless but fascinating *Hearts* will help fulfil his wishes.

Actor Booth Savage in Heat

by Michel Hussey

From the first note from Paul Humphrey's guitar, Booth Savage's new show, *Savage Heat*, kicks.

This autobiographical one-hander recounts the trials of a Canadian actor, from his childhood beginnings to his rejection at the National Theatre School, through the acid-crazed sixties and the creation of the Theatre Passe Muraille; right up to the eighties tax shelter B-movies, television, Hollywood, CBC and a ton of other things.



Actor and York prof and student Booth Savage brings his one person show, *Savage Heat*, to the Factory Theatre.

THEATRE

Savage Heat
written and performed by Booth Savage
directed by Hrant Alianak
Factory Theatre

Now, you're probably thinking (frankly, I thought it too) "more verbal masturbation by an aging Canadian actor who wants real hard to be a playwright."

Wrong! Former *Beachcombers* star Savage has real talent. His soothing voice and natural presence keep the audience in stitches for just about all of the two-hour play.

"Acting is like sex," he says. "Everybody can do it. It's the technique that counts," says Savage. If he carries on in the bedroom like he does on stage, someone must be very happy, for onstage Booth Savage is tight. His voice is lulling and gentle; he brings you into his world as he relates stories of getting his penis caught in his trousers and producers wondering how they can get rich without using actors.

The show moves smoothly, leaving little time for yawning or quiet moments. Savage lobs one-liners into the crowd one after another like Molotov cocktails.

Savage Heat is performed without a set or elaborate lighting design. Its approach is wholesome and straightforward, with the odd obscenity thrown in. It is an endearing comedy that is intrinsically Canadian, that blows hard the notion that we live in a country of distinct people, speaking

with a sensitivity that we as Canadians hold sacred.

But as important, Savage looks at all that makes up our lives and responds with humour. Maybe directors do know more about God than the Pope, and maybe talent agents do make better lightning rods, and maybe these things will drive us crazy in the long run, but without the ability to laugh, "the heart stops beating."

The performance was broken into segments by the music of Paul Humphrey and his band, which provided a kinda techo-blues-kindamondo-a da-da-thing that rocked away with Savage bopping some bongos or blowing a bad harp.

Booth Savage, who teaches at York and is currently working on his Masters Degree in Playwriting, told me after the performance that "the whole genesis of *Savage Heat* started at York." The play was first produced here a year ago, although in a more primitive form.

"It's come a long way — he's put a lot of hard work into it," says Judith Rudakoff, author of many theatre books and York professor. This hard work is apparent. At times, the play does make reference to things that may be a little obscure, but even then the humour is not totally lost. The play works wonderfully, a testament to talent.

Savage Heat is at the Factory Theatre Studio Cafe, 125 Bathurst Street, until February 2. For more information call 864-9971.

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