

An interview with Frears

Sammy and Rosie is the second collaboration of director Stephen Frears and writer Hanif Kureishi. Their first film was the highly acclaimed *My Beautiful Laundrette*. Both films are born from Britain's innovative TV station, channel 4. Frears was in Toronto recently and *Excalibur's* Andrew Sun spoke with him when the film was still entitled *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid*.

EXCALIBUR: What is it about Hanif Kureishi that makes you want to continue collaborating with him?

FREARS: Well, he's a nice chap. He has a rather unusual perspective on things because of his background. His mother was born in England and his father came from Pakistan. Since I tend to make films about the sort of people that have an oblique view of the world, somebody with this kind of background is perfect. He's an extremely serious writer, critic of British society and he writes very good jokes!

EXCALIBUR: You also have Sashi Kapoor in the film, why did you decide to use him?

FREARS: Sashi Kapoor is a great Indian actor. He's like Robert Redford over there, and he has been for 25 years. I met him in Bombay and thought he was wonderful. We asked him if he wanted to be in (*Sammy and Rosie*) and he said yes. I don't think he even read the script, he just said yes and he was simply wonderful. He came from this life of luxury in Bombay and the next day he was standing on the road in a ghetto in North London.

EXCALIBUR: The film *Sammy and Rosie* is a really critical social commentary, but it doesn't present any solutions. Do you have any?

FREARS: That isn't really the job of filmmakers to suggest solutions. The job is to criticize at this stage, particularly in England. Obviously I'm not very happy with the state of things in England, as is Hanif. What has happened is that the left, the opposition to Mrs. Thatcher has collapsed, as the last election proved so Mrs. Thatcher has had an easy ride because throughout her government, which seems to me to be a bad government that has had no opposition. I suppose what we're trying to do is challenge her, or to stir things up and say things aren't the way they should be.

EXCALIBUR: The film is pessimistic, are you pessimistic?

FREARS: I'm pessimistic because I see no way in which Mrs. Thatcher will be replaced and I don't think it's good for the country. England is a worse country to live in now than it was 15 years ago. And the virtues

that people praise Britain for, decency, moderation, tolerance, generosity, aren't things that she aspires to! In fact, it's sort of the iconoclast who now preserve things like decency. It's interesting that now it's the opposition who have to defend those things against her fanaticism.

EXCALIBUR: I want to ask you about British films. Normally, when you think of British films, you also think of terms like conservative, decent, etc., while your films are quite radical.

FREARS: Well, this is a very provocative film and it was intended to be provocative. However, I'm quite willing to stand by it as a sort of defence of decency and tolerance. Obviously I don't like . . . well, I like a lot of those (British films) because they're well made but I'm opposed to them politically. It seemed important at the moment to stir things up and the films that are coming out of Britain now, because they come from television rather than the cinema, they come from a tradition which is radical and critical.

EXCALIBUR: Can you elaborate on English television, especially Channel 4?

FREARS: *My Beautiful Laundrette* came from Channel 4. Well, it's inconceivable to North Americans that television could produce something as outspoken and radical as that. Television has had a very distinguished tradition over the last 30 years and Channel 4 are the people who uphold that tradition. Again it's the ironic thing that one of the finest traditions of the BBC [is] radical critical drama, and it's Channel 4 who are upholding [it].

EXCALIBUR: I want to throw a quote at you which is by Francois Truffaut. He once said to Alfred Hitchcock, 'Isn't there a certain incompatibility between the terms cinema and Britain?' Obviously it has changed since then . . .

FREARS: No, it hasn't changed at all. He's right! But if he came into the room I'd strangle his corpse! It's a terrible thing to say but he's right.

EXCALIBUR: How so?

FREARS: In a way Britain is pre-occupied with other things rather than aesthetic problems. Britain is pre-occupied with class, that's the main problem! It's not a country which has the sort of grace at the cinema, or interested in the cinematic virtues. It doesn't make Westerns or anything like that. So it has always really made films about repression which is what people like David Lean, Hitchcock, and Carol Reed did. So there is a sort of sense to what he says, on the other hand it's a dreadful thing to say and it hurts



Director Stephen Frears

terribly. When you make a film in Britain you don't feel like you're doing the natural thing, you're swimming against the tide.

EXCALIBUR: Do you think that quote will ever change?

FREARS: No, not for a minute! It's so much to do with economics and the size of the market. The truth is we can only make these sort of films on very, very low budgets. It's generated a sort of vitality about people like me because we've got something to be angry about because our patron saint, Mrs. Thatcher, is driving us bonkers! You can't seriously construct a sort of aesthetic exercise, you know. You couldn't make *Jaws* in England because you haven't got the economics to support something as elaborate and graceful as that. So we fall back on our brains and our wit which we've got an abundance of.

EXCALIBUR: My Beautiful Laundrette was quite successful and I imagine Sammy and Rosie will also be quite successful. How do you think that will open opportunities for you?

FREARS: Well, there's no point making a film above a certain budget in England. If you make these kinds of films, you have a sense of the audience. I know how much *Laundrette* made and it seems to me to be an enormous success, but it's still a limited audience. It's not like one of those huge American pictures. Now, of course making films that are successful does your career a lot of good. The alternative to that is going to America and working with larger budgets.

EXCALIBUR: Would you want to go to America one of these days?

FREARS: Yes, oh yes . . .

EXCALIBUR: Out of curiosity?

FREARS: No! It's the home! Supposedly . . . that's where it all goes on, that's what film is all about.

MUSIC

Kurt Swinghammer
The Grad Lounge, Monday Nov. 2

by Barry Sturge

When one first hears of Kurt Swinghammer, the names of old Dixie Jazz bands come to mind. But after seeing his show last Monday at the Grad Lounge, it seems more appropriate to relate Swinghammer to a tool designed for delivering repeated emotional blows.

Swinghammer's stage image falls clearly into the "victim of love" category. The changing patterns of his guitar playing, from slashing to strumming, help project musically the pain of a broken heart. In the song "She Wants to Get Married," Swinghammer sings about a woman who "watches her biological clock. It's so difficult to accept. I can't give her what she really needs, wants to marry."

Most of Swinghammer's songs strike similar lyrical chords. In "Beautiful Girl at the Fair," he sings, "Her portrait remains but I couldn't stop her from being there, that was so long ago. One day she awoke and knew she had to leave."

But overall, Swinghammer's performance was disappointing. Though his rhythm guitar work is fine, his lead work on the guitar—what little of it he does—needs some work. Indeed, Swinghammer's lavish instrument was really the prominent feature of the show. The guitar is decorated with a hand-painted Cree design, with a string of beads carved into the instrument's face.

From listening to his Grad Lounge performance, it becomes obvious that Swinghammer borrows elements from a wide variety of musical genres. The sound is based in folk music, but employs elements from blues, progressive jazz; it even features some John Fogerty-style

alligator pickin'. But Swinghammer also has a taste for pop and rock and roll, transforming the '60s hit "Ring of Fire" into an Elvis-style ballad.

Weather Permitting
Into the Grounds

by Brad Nussbaum

What do you get when you mix REM, and The Byrds? Besides a solid debut album entitled *Into the Grounds* you get a band that sounds a lot like the Montreal underground group Weather Permitting.

Weather Permitting sounds very much like early REM. Their music appears dark, introspective, and moody, yet it is not without humour. The band's material has been termed "folk rock thrash," but Weather Permitting is light on the thrash and heavy on the folk.

Weather Permitting started as a folk band doing Neil Young covers but quickly evolved to the folk rock status that they presently enjoy. The group is made up of Andrew and Peter Steinmetz (vocals and guitars), Brno Steiner (bass), and Gary McGirr (drums). These four Montreal lads have been a fixture on the Montreal underground scene for two years now. *Into the Ground* is produced by one of Montreal's underground music leaders Duncan MacTavish (director of Montreal's New Music Festival).

Undoubtedly, the albums' two best songs are "Land/Goldmine" and "Love Is Good." The former is a song about the hypocrisy of frowning upon the situation in South Africa yet taking their gold and diamonds from their mines. "Love Is Good" is a tongue-in-cheek love song, and is the only upbeat song on the album.

Apparently, Weather Permitting is attempting to fill the void in alternative music that was created when REM went commercial. With this debut effort, they easily fulfill this mandate while establishing themselves firmly in the Canadian alternative music scene.

CHRY-FM 10 MOST PLAYED RECORDINGS OCT. 26-NOV. 9



ARTIST	TITLE	LABEL	WKS.
C 13 Engines	<i>Before Our Time</i>	Nocturnal	5
Big Black	<i>Songs About Fucking</i>	Touch & Go	3
C Rheostatics	<i>Greatest Hits</i>	X	6
C Suffer Machine	<i>Deprogram</i>	Burning Buffalo	2
C Pretty Green	<i>Pretty Green</i>	Nettwerk/Capitol	2
C Grapes of Wrath	<i>Treehouse</i>	Nettwerk/Capitol	2
Leaving Trains	<i>Fuck</i>	SST	3
Celibate Rifles	<i>Roman Beach Party</i>	What Goes On	2
C Gruesomes	<i>Gruesomania</i>		
C Mourning Sickness	<i>Reaching Climax Alternatively</i>	Radical Cunts Anonymous	2

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