

## Meat Eater: so bad it's good

By IAN CLARKE

**B**ig *Meat Eater* (opening tomorrow at the Ritz and Carlton Theatres) has aspirations of becoming a cult film. Cult films are mysterious things, arriving out of nowhere and existing for years like some kind of caged circus spectacle, in all-night movies houses. The youthful intelligentsia who populate the audience often recite word for word, raising their voices together in strange cinematic chants. They are the true movie aficionados who recognize artistic awfulness and applaud brilliant ineptitude.

Yet it is not necessary for a film to be incredibly bad in order to attract a cult following. *Eraserhead* and *Harold and Maude* owe their appeal to well-crafted filmmaking along with a heavy dose of black humor.

The cult genre avoids definition, having acquired a myriad of styles and formats. *Big Meat Eater* is loosely fashioned after such science fiction "classics" as *The Horror of Party Beach* and *Robot Monster*. There are the obligatory horrible special effects. Plot inconsistencies run rampant (the son of the immigrant Wzinski family speaks with a pronounced English accent). *Big Meat Eater* is so bad that it undergoes that most paradoxical of transformations and becomes "good." It is entertaining in a truly masochistic way.

Edmonton jazz/blues singer Big Miller plays Abdulla, the part-time janitor-murderer, commanding attention by virtue of his girth alone. George Dawson as the small-town butcher Bob Anderson, is innocuous to excess. Vancouver composer J. Douglas Dodd has written a small group of clever songs which easily rate with *Rocky Horror*.

Although there are segments in the film which lack momentum, the overall effect of watching a gratuitously lousy movie is never lost.

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Chris Windsor and Laurence Keale, the director and producer of *Big Meat Eater* have worked together for the last 10 years. They met while attending Simon Fraser University where their films won best student film awards in 1973 and '74. Currently the pair are working together and separately on developing Canadian stories for television and film. They spoke with *Excalibur* about the making of *Big Meat Eater*.

**Q.** How did the idea for the film originate?

**A. Windsor:** The main characters were written, more or less, for student actors we had worked with. When we were writing it in '74, we seemed to be about the only two people around who enjoyed Hollywood schlock from the 50s' monster and beach party films. Now they've come back into style. Back then we thought we were complete maniacs.

**Q.** How did you finance the film?

**A. Keale:** The film was too unusual for any government agency to get involved with, so we decided to start knocking on doors.



**He eats meat:** Canadian jazz/blues singer Big Miller stars in a movie you'll wish you missed.

**Windsor:** One of the main reasons we made it was because Canadian movies, during the tax shelter of 1980, were so bad. We wanted to make a film that was so absolutely different from that, that no one could accuse us of making a cynical tax shelter film.

**Q.** Did you set out to make a "cult" movie, exploiting elements we have come to associate with such films?

**A. Keale:** Not really. It was written in '74, long before any of these cult movies started. In fact, I've never seen the Edward Wood [Master of the Bad Movie—ed.] movies or *Rocky Horror Picture Show*. It was more a satire on things uniquely Canadian.

**Windsor:** You definitely can't plan to have a cult potential. To give you an example of that is the sequel to *Rocky Horror*, a film called *Shock Treatment*. I don't like the term "a cult following." I prefer "a repeat audience." We knew the only way this film was going to survive and make money to compete was if it had a group of fans who liked it enough to come back and see it again. People either love or hate the movie.

**Q.** The special effects in the film radiate cheapness. Was this done in accordance with the off-beat humor?

**A. Windsor:** Knowing that we had little money for the film (\$150,000), instead of making a great artistic statement and trying to achieve special effects, we took our drawbacks and used them to our advantage. We emphasized the cheapness of it which people really respond to. There's a bit of a reaction to the *Star Wars* style of effects. With our film we're saying, "this movie is fake." There's an element of fun which people recognize. It's sort of like a mental holiday.

## records

The Alarm  
*The Alarm*  
(IRS)  
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This debut EP is refreshing evidence that not every young musician these days is locked in the basement with a drum machine trying to sound like the Human League. The Alarm is a no-nonsense modern rock band—their music is dominated by acoustic rather than electric guitars, and they use absolutely no synthesizers or drum machines. Like Aztec Camera or Dexy's Midnight Runners, the Alarm has shied away from the over-produced slickness of the Euro-pop crowd. Dressed in fringed jackets, bandanas, and Mexican hats, the group presents a completely different visual image as well.

The music is loud, raw, and fast-paced. Mike Peter's vocals have obvious Joe Strummer/Mick Jones influences; indeed, the band sounds a lot like The Clash did on their earlier, more honest offerings. In their lyrics, the Alarm shares themes with groups like U2: their message is passionate and angry, but ultimately pro-life and apolitical.

The group has done support work for U2 in Britain, where they have earned a reputation as excellent live performers. "For Freedom," the record's single live track, would seem to bear this out. Peter's voice transfers perfectly into a live setting, while the band is as tight, and the pace as relentless. All five songs on the EP are strong, with "the Stand" as the most likely candidate for airplay. Country rhythms, layered vocals, and harmonica solos prevent the songs from sounding overly derivative, and invite comparisons with California-based bands like Rank and File experimenting with "country-punk" sounds. Synthesizers and drum machines are no match for the energy of this foursome. —KEVIN CONNOLLY

Lords of the New Church  
*Is Nothing Sacred?*  
(IRS)  
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Do you fancy Teenage Head or The Ramones? Then you might consider *Is Nothing Sacred?* a worthwhile purchase. It's that simple to describe.

The band includes ex-members of The Damned, Sham '69 and the Dead Boys, but you'd never know it. The band's only foundation is energy, but even that is contained—

the album is vinyl proof of the regression of punk.

The album just reeks of mediocrity—it lacks decisiveness, it leaves no impression. Lords of the New Church are a bland band and the sinister image they try to evoke on the album and its cover is every bit as terrifying as a Scooby-Doo cartoon.

The album's highlight, the opening "Dance With Me," would make most content CFNY listeners happy. It's danceable and has an apparently synthesized snare drum that seems to serve no other purpose than to orient people easily lost on the dance floor.

The Guano Award goes to "Don't Worry Children," which can only be described as an upbeat campfire song.

Any of the lyrics I could make out provided no revelations. So, this is music strictly to drink to, not to think to. *Is Nothing Sacred?* is, to say the least, nothing sacred.

—MARK SINGER

Images in Vogue  
*Images in Vogue*  
(WEA)  
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One look at the band, their spiked haircuts, haute couture get-ups, and cosmetic faces and you don't have to ask what type of music they play. Images in Vogue, a six-man outfit from Vancouver, are yet another in a string of Euro-pop spinoffs; but unlike the best of their influences, their music is bland and uninteresting.

All five tracks are monstrously overproduced, and the group plays what could be catchy tunes in the dullest possible manner. All the ingredients for success are here, but the band members' collective coma produces an EP which is appallingly average. With six musicians, and three synthesizers you would expect at least a marginal amount of power, but, unhappily, none is to be found.

Joe Vizvary's allegedly "classically-trained" piano is invisible, Kevin Crompton's percussion is flat and unimaginative, and Dale Martindale's vocal qualities are lost in a monotonous lyrical wasteland. The EP's mandatory instrumental, "For Germans" is a pale Orchestral Maneuvers in the Dark ripoff. The end result of all this wasted potential is a collection of Flock of Seagulls B-sides that simply don't measure up to what is coming out of Europe on a steady basis. A good cure for insomnia.

—K.C.

