

The limits of Paula Abdul's creativity and pregnancy as a smart career move

by Simon Chung

Let's face it: the real issue concerning the Demi Moore magazine cover is not whether it's offensive (an aside: I wonder what percentage of those who find Demi's swollen belly obscene are also anti-abortion?), but why exactly she's doing it in the first place. Could it have something to do with the imminent release of her new movie, *The Butcher's Wife*?

This wouldn't be the first time Mrs. Willis has made a career move out of her own pregnancy. You may remember the forgettable 1988 film *The Seventh Sign*, a pseudo-apocalyptic hocus-pocus flick about a woman about to give birth to the anti-Christ, starring a very pregnant Moore. (Another aside: shouldn't there be a law prohibiting pregnant women from casting their unborn in roles detrimental to their self-image?) Despite her belly baring on screen, *The Seventh Sign* was a dismal flop.

With the mega-success of that other hocus-pocus melodrama last year, Moore has managed to garner a lot more attention for her efforts this time around. But, whether this can, umm, swell up box office receipts for *The Butcher's Wife* remains to be seen.

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Has anyone heard the recent radio commercial for Klondike ice cream bars? It goes like this: a man, supposedly an interviewer of some sort, approaches a "man on the street" to ask what he would do for a Klondike bar.

analysis

Simon Chung looks at Paula Abdul, Demi Moore and the connection between Klondike bars and sheep

Before the person can answer, the authoritative interviewer absurdly demands, "Would you make monkey sounds?"

Naturally, the man is reluctant, but this is instantly overcome by the interviewer's tempting hard sell: "Rich vanilla ice cream... thick chocolaty coating..."

As if spellbound, the man lets out a series of primate sounds. "No," critiques the exacting interviewer, "that sounds more like a baboon... now you're drifting into gorilla, if you don't mind my saying so." At last, after such humiliations, the man finally succeeds in making the requisite monkey noise, and is duly rewarded with a Klondike bar.

The interviewer then goes on to challenge his next victim: "Would you moo like a cow?" "Guernsey or Holstein?" comes the ready reply. "Moo!"

On the surface, this little episode is played strictly for laughs, the humour deriving from the ridiculous lengths people will go to in order to obtain the desert. On the other hand, isn't this exactly what advertisers want all along: to reduce consumers to docile, obedient animals whose appetites can be instantly turned on with just a few catchphrases? It's no coincidence that the two creatures mentioned in the commercial are a primate and a domesticated animal.

What would you do for a Klondike bar?
Baa!

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Music videos are not known for their intelligence or originality, but Paula Abdul's "Rush Rush" certainly deserves a special MTV award for the most embarrassing video of the decade.

The clip is made up of recreations of scenes from the film *Rebel Without a Cause*, done in all seriousness, with Keanu Reeves (of all people) trying his best to act like James Dean (but looking more like Ted) and Abdul in the Natalie Wood role.

Aside from being a shameless travesty of the Nicholas Ray classic, the video is uninspired, heavy-handed and humourless. One need only compare this with Madonna's well-known appropriation of Marilyn (most overtly in "Material Girl"), which always manages to delight because she doesn't take herself seriously. Even at her most didactic (for instance, when she chanted "Hey you silly, wear a condom on your willy!" during her *Blond Ambition* concerts), Madonna never loses sight of her street-smart sense of ironic campiness.

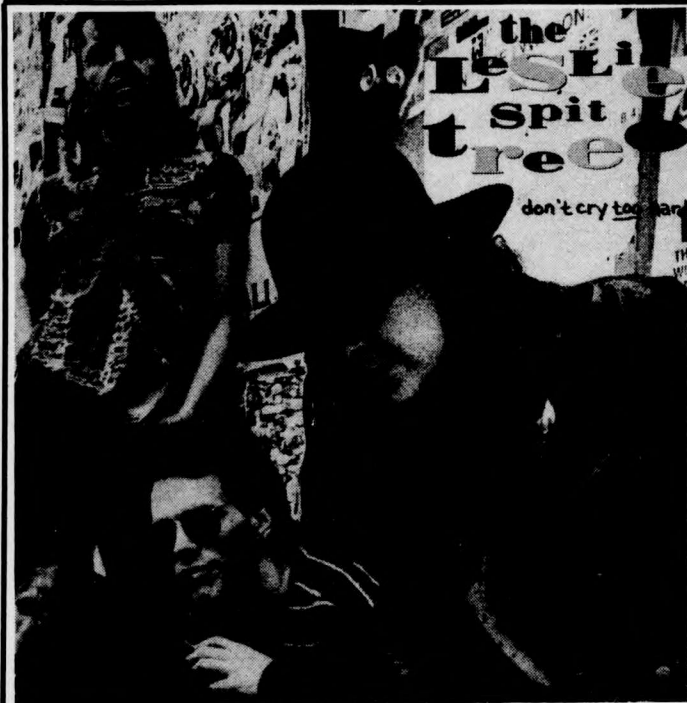
There's no denying that, for better or worse, Madonna has set a standard of behaviour by which every pop star of our generation must be measured. Part of that standard is certainly the ability to make the borrowed seem original, while transforming cultural clichés into personal statements. Paula Abdul has a long way to go.



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