

Bent talk from an anarchist director

by Anthony Pizzari

He's a self-proclaimed "anarchist" filmmaker. That's quite a statement, but compared to his colleagues (Egoyan, Rozema, Arcand) Bruce McDonald does walk a different path. He's not concerned with the theory of art in his films — he just wants people to have a good time.

"No one's had any fun in this country," McDonald says of Canada.

Talking with *Highway 61* director McDonald and writer/actor Don McKellar, I found it easy to see where

INTERVIEW

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

the down-to-earth nature of the movie stems from.

Highway 61 was conceived and half-written before McDonald's award-winning *Roadkill* was made. He says he went to Memphis on a borrowed \$200 to research the highway's "mythological musical past." He unwittingly arrived in

Valerie Buhagiar thumbs a ride in Bruce McDonald's rock and roll road movie *Highway 61*. "I think that the movie is in a sense about disillusionment," says writer and co-star Don McKellar. "All the characters along the way have their idea about the American Dream and all their goals are very dear — and they're all shattered by the end of the trip..."



Memphis just as Jim Jarmush and Joe Strummer were filming *Mystery Train*. McDonald took this as a good omen.

The "road" has always had a personal appeal for McDonald. "Both films and music have been part of its [the film's] motor. I associate music with driving because it's one of my favorite things in the world to do — to just drive all night with a great tape selection."

"I think that the movie is in a sense about disillusionment," McKellar says. "All the characters along the way have their idea about the American Dream and all their goals are very clear — and they're all shattered by the end of the trip... People have to confront their own illusions by the end."

To McDonald's surprise, *Highway 61* won the best film in Spain's San Sebastian Film Festival. On the growing status of Canadian films overseas, McDonald says "there's this perception in Germany and Japan that what's happening in Canada is similar to what happened with the German New Wave — the new German cinema in the early seventies — and what happened with Australian cinema. There's a great sort of government support for films which you don't find in many other countries."

"Also there's a very rare kind of a community with a diverse range — people like Egoyan... Arcand, Rozema, Bruce Elder — carrying the experimental torch — Michael Snow, Phil Hoffman and so forth. The perception is quite astonishing when you go over there and you realize that they know more about [the Canadian] scene than you do."

Both McDonald and McKellar were reticent about speaking on upcoming projects, McDonald stating that *61* was a "workout film." Rumours have it that they will be working on a film related to kung fu.

Hopefully McDonald's next work will enjoy similar success to *61*, which is currently the second most popular film in Toronto.

Allen's directing ability is lost in *Shadows and Fog*

by Ira Nayman

Woody Allen's latest film is about a small town stalked by an unknown killer. Allen plays a clerk who is woken up by a vigilante group trying to catch the killer; although they enlist him in their plan, they don't tell him what it is. He spends most of the film wandering through the city trying to figure out what's going on, dodging the killer and meeting other people who, inexplicably, are wandering the streets dodging the killer.

Every strength in the film seems balanced by a weakness. The black and white cinematography, for instance, is gorgeous. The way human figures move through — well — shadows and fog effectively creates tension, the expectation that something nasty is about to happen.

Unfortunately, each moody scene is followed by a now typical Allen discourse, in the form of a conversation, on the nature of evil and the existence of god. Not only do these scenes dissipate any tension, but they aren't even interesting in themselves, being a rehash of old themes.

Allen is a good actor's director. In *Shadows and Fog* he does something I didn't think was possible: he gets a natural, unaffected performance from John Malkovich. Another decision he made which must be applauded is keeping Madonna's appearance in the film

FILM

Shadows and Fog
directed by Woody Allen
starring Allen and Mia Farrow
produced by Orion Pictures

to a single 30 second scene.

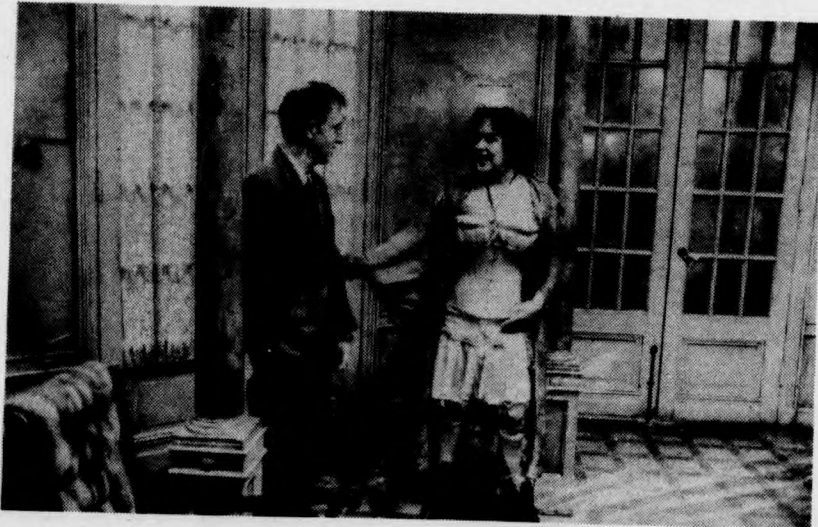
On the other hand, Mia Farrow was given such a thin character that her performance amounts to little more than a really annoying whine. In addition, many of the featured performances, including turns by Lily Tomlin, Wallace Shawn, Fred Gwynne, Kenneth Mars and Kate Nelligan, are disappointingly little more than walk-ons.

Allen himself seems uncomfortable, pushing his nebbish character

to the limits of credibility. It's as if he no longer believes in the character, but is going through the motions for fans who won't let him do anything else.

Allen does get off several funny one-liners, although they don't come as quickly or as often as they once did. But, the comic aspects of the premise are not well developed (as Allen proved he could do in, say, *The Purple Rose of Cairo*).

I've been a Woody Allen fan since the 70s — I wish I could have liked his latest film more. Unfortunately, *Shadows and Fog* is further evidence of a filmmaker working against his own best instincts.



Woody Allen and Cathy Bates share a laugh in a brothel in *Shadows and Fog*, Allen's latest film. Imagine Allen's nebbishy character from his early comedies dropped into the middle of a film of a short story by Franz Kafka directed by Ingmar Bergman and you'll understand what this film is — a mess.



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