

Cinema

HAIRSPRAY

Director: John Waters

John Waters subtitled his 1981 autobiography *Shock Value* 'a tasteful book about bad taste.' In his early Divine epics, the Bad Boy of Baltimore wasn't always so tasteful, but there's been a little gentrification over the last few years, with *Polyester* and now *Hairspray*. There are no brown-eyes, no mailbox turds and you won't see Edith Massey bulging out of a leather jumpsuit: the humour is less sensationalistic, as *Hairspray* gets its laughs from the Baroque excesses of Debbie Harry's hairdo and the experience of Pia Zadora reciting Allen Ginsberg's *Howl*.

Hairspray is a wonderfully dizzy salute to the 60s, the same period that George Lucas took so earnestly in *American Graffiti*. It opens with gleaming colours, straight off Melrose, as teenagers narcissistically spray their coiffures before appearing on the Corny Collins Show. In an affectionate parody of every teenage film ever made, Waters shows us the perm to perm battle of two girls to become Miss Auto Show 1963, spurred on by their formidable mothers, Divine's Edna Turnblad and Harry's Velma Von Tussle. Harry is the ultimate stage mother, berating her daughter one moment ("You got something against Connie Francis?") and then harrasing her the next ("Don't stop, cha cha!")

1963 was the year of the Kennedy assassination and Bob Dylan's first appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show. It was a crucial time for civil rights in the States and some of this spills onto the canvas of *Hairspray*. 'The times, they are a-changin',' comments Divine to her husband at one point, and much of the plot hinges on upon the rights of some black teenagers to appear on the Corny Collins Show.

Divine, in her last role, is... well... Divine. The support from Debbie Harry, Sonny Bono and a score of chillingly unreal teenagers is spot-on. Jo Ann Havrilla provides the last word on twitchy suburban neurosis in her performance as Prudence Pingleton, although Ric Ocasek and Pia Zadora don't get much of a chance as a beatnik couple who come into contact with the hairhoppers. Nice, though, to see R&B

veteran Ruth Brown as the aptly-named Motormouth Maybelle.

Ricki Lake makes her debut as Divine's mega-daughter Tracy. She's a big girl, but does not have to rely on the cross-dressing that is so central to much of the humour involving Divine. Lake announces to the world that she's big, blonde and beautiful, and models on television for Hefty Hideaway's House of Fashion. Whereas it was unavoidable that one would titter at the sheer bulk of Divine and Edith Massey, usually accentuated by the women's costuming, one wouldn't treat Ricki Lake in the same way. Perhaps Waters has come around to seeing that fat is a feminist issue.

WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT

Director: Robert Zemeckis

For Chinatown read Toontown, with Jack Nicholson's hard-bitten private eye replaced by the amiable Bob Hoskins, and the icy Faye Dunaway by the sultry and curvaceous Jessica Rabbit, one of the many cartoon characters that populate Robert Zemeckis's sprawlingly energetic film.

Unlike Polanski, Zemeckis plays film noir for laughs and uses it as a springboard for surreal fantasy. The script couldn't be snappier: "His wife's poison but he thinks she's Betty Crocker" quips one character of the hapless Roger Rabbit, and Jessica defends herself later by claiming "I'm not bad, I'm just drawn that way." The animation, undertaken by a huge team of workers under the direction of Richard Williams, is spectacular, whether in virtuoso sequences such as Roger's minding a roving baby in the opening scene, or in the handling of the multitude of toon stars. They're all here, from Dumbo to Betty Boop, right through to Donald and Daffy Duck who wage a war of the ivories on two pianos.

Bob Hoskins, as the put-upon detective, has an unenviable task — W.C. Fields would certainly have added toons to children and animals on his list of things to be avoided — but the English actor is superb, right down to his vaudeville turn in the lair of the villain. *Roger Rabbit* is a positive embarrassment of riches, a holiday film for young and old, without compromising either — and that is saying something these days.

EVIL ANGELS

Director: Fred Schepisi

The opening sequences of *Evil*



Michael Jackson had a whole movie to play with so he came up with *Moonwalker*, a full-on extravaganza of his own music and the best special effects Hollywood has to offer. *Moonwalker* blends concert performances, a retrospective of Jackson's career, OTT FX sequences as well as the clip for his new single, 'Smooth Criminal.' Oh, and he dances.



Whammy! Things go up in smoke during Geoff Murphy's new film *Never Say Die*. After directing *The Quiet Earth* Murphy returned to the action-style of his earlier *Goodbye Pork Pie*. "It fascinated me," he said, "the idea of a New Zealander who's convinced someone's trying to kill him. Anywhere else, particularly in the States, no-one would even question the logic of it, but here, they'd look at you as if you're mad!"

Angels, setting up the Chamberlain dingo abduction, are awkward — endless shots of Meryl Streep clasping and cooing over little Azaria, and some heavily underlined appearances by several rather placid looking dingos. Once the deed has been done, the rest of the film concerns itself with the trials and torments of Lindy Chamberlain through to her release from prison in 1987.

Although there are some elements that are hard to accept — a relentless MOR piano soundtrack laced with

touches of didgeridoo, the recurring tracking shots of Ayers Rock and a particularly clumsy flashback sequence during Streep's final testimony — Schepisi is right on target when he reveals the ruthlessness of the Australian Press machine. We see the rowdy and raucous cynicism of the court reporters, taking bets on the final verdict, and a series of *cinema verite* cameos as Australians from all walks of life reflect on the affair. No-one, it seems, from matrons strolling in the park to yuppies relaxing after a tennis

game, remained uninvolved.

In spite of the evident serious intentions of the film — perhaps too serious judging by the spoken homily on innocence over the final frozen frame — *Evil Angels* is another star turn for Meryl Streep, who has the Oz accent down to the last flat vowel, even if one suspects that the Lindy Chamberlain character has been heightened a little to give the actor a few snappy lines. WILLIAM DART

IMAGINE

Director: Andrew Salt

"I want to be a rebel and want to be loved and accepted" — these are the first words you hear in *Imagine*, the new documentary pieced together with John Lennon's own commentary gathered from over 100 hours of interview. Such a credo reveals the sharp dichotomy in Lennon's character, a quality which Albert Goldman has exploited to the full in his recent biography. *Imagine*, though, is Lennon "in his own write," supported by some extraordinary film footage. Not only words have been preserved: Lennon and Yoko Ono were obsessive visual diarists, filming private and public moments over a decade of their lives together, from meeting an admirer at their Tittenhurst estate and inviting him in to break bread, to home movies of a startled Lennon in the bath. In releasing these, Yoko Ono is cleverly perpetuating a legend, although there is the possibility that the treatment of these images is just as manipulative as Goldman's presumptions in his sensationalistic account of Lennon's life.

Imagine does not see Lennon through rose-coloured glasses: American colleague Elliot Mintz talks of "a lost weekend that went on for fourteen months" and describes Lennon as a man "who would start to snarl after the third Brandy Alexander." We see the feisty Gloria Wolper of the *New York Times* berating Lennon as a phoney, and an even more prolonged and bitter intercation with a Canadian cartoonist during Lennon and Ono's Sleep For Peace campaign — looking through the collection of press clippings that come with the couple's *Wedding Album* one feels the archives could have been a little more assiduously raked for this phase of their career.

The camera has caught some wonderful musical moments, from Lennon's nonchalant laying down of his vocals for the song 'How?', with an impassive Phil Spector in the producer's chair, to an incredibly spare version of 'Mother' at the Madison Square Garden concert in 1972. We see Lennon making his famous "rattle your jewellery" suggestion at the Royal Command Performance, and relive all the news footage and controversies that followed the Beatles around the world. The post-production here is stunning, particularly in a clip in which a black-and-white version of 'Twist and Shout' is smoothly followed by a

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