

Cecil B. Demented

For those who have a taste for such things, Baltimore's own John Waters has come up with his newest outrage, *Cecil B. Demented*, the story of a guerrilla film group which flails at--and hits--numerous film-land targets. Led by Cecil B. Demented himself (Stephen Dorff), a cockeyed cluster of film mavens--called "The Sprocket Holes"--takes over a Baltimore movie premiere (at the stately old Senator theater) and kidnaps the film's temperamental star Honey Whitlock (Melanie Griffith), thus forcing her to take part in their cinema verité version of an anti-mainstream movie. Not surprisingly, the hostage Honey, totally cowed at first, undergoes her own flaky version of the Stockholm syndrome and comes to identify with her raging captors and the cracked Cecil.

The whole guerrilla filmmaking enterprise is Waters' excuse, of course, for skewering the absurdities of Hollywood's product, a product he--as a singular independent--has always both scorned and imitated, although his movies, over time, have begun more and more to acquire a patina of the mainstream product. In this kind of satire, Waters could be said to be having it both ways, the smart cutting and quality lighting contrasting with the cheesy decor and the over-the-top line readings.

Waters' movies are an acquired taste, or rather, a matter of taste--or tastelessness. If one dumb schtick doesn't quite work, wait a minute because a better one, or at least a different one, will be coming down the line. For viewers who are movie savvy, some scenes in *Cecil B. Demented* should be good for a laugh, such as closing down a screening of the execrable *Patch Adams*, throwing jujuy fruits at members of the Maryland Film Commission, or invading the set of a crummy *Forrest Gump* remake. Less to my taste was, for example, a pseudo-porn mock which features a raunchy rodent.

For long-time Waters' fans, familiar ironies abound, such as the fact that his long time associate, the once-daring Mink Stole, has mellowed into an upper-class matron (who gets summarily bumped off), or, in a movie where the lead actress pulls a "Patty Hearst," the real-life Patty Hearst herself appears as a beleaguered middle-class mom worried about her semi-radical son. John Waters' tongue must be so far in his cheek that he's caressing back molars.

(This film is rated an obvious "R" for language and general raunch.)

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