Douglas Harris' 

Remembering Mel

Remembering Mel is far from memorable. This first feature from Montrealer Doug Harris is like a Saturday Night Live skit that starts with a good idea but drags on way too long. The first 40 minutes are often funny but the comedy grows stale as the same jokes get repeated over and over again. Nevertheless, it is energetic and original enough to be a promising first film. It may not get a real film deal but then again neither was Jim Jarmusch's first feature. Which is not to say that the next Doug Harris film is going to be a Stranger than Paradise but rather that this indie一定 university underground project has the potential to become something less than fully-developed-filmmaker.

Remembering Mel uses two well-worn cinematic clichés: the film within a film and the mock documentary that sends itself up. The documentary is being made by a group of ex-film students dying to break into the movie business. They pick Mel as their subject and Mel is such a loser anyway. Mel's version of their documentary is to exploit his pathetic character for the sake of making a movie that will get noticed.

This indebtedness to American docu-drama and Woody Allen's seminal mock documentary, Take the Money and Run: talking over the head with the idea that Mel's a loser, it gets boring watching him knock things over or get beat up by kids on the street.

Like several of Montreal's recent Anglo film and communications grads, Harris' style occasionally evokes the qualities that made Here's to the Cowboy such a fine work: the unpretentious, funny character, and the documentary's rawness. It is as though the desire for international success has undermined the genius of Mel's talent. The film is an odd anxiety in the film itself. Remembering Mel is all about. The director, writer, Larry Raskin is recent graduates of Concordia's Communications Program and they readily admit that their first stab at feature filmmaking was a sort of thesis. As a writer, Larry Raskin wrote the script three days and principal photography was completed between December 20 and the new year. They then slaved over the film from January 1987 to put it on the fence between the commercial young film and the mock documentary that sends itself up. The documentary is being made by a group of ex-film students dying to break into the movie business. They pick Mel as their subject and Mel is such a loser anyway. Mel's version of their documentary is to exploit his pathetic character for the sake of making a movie that will get noticed.

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