

William D. MacGillivray's
The Vacant Lot
and
Bruce McDonald's
Roadkill

Goodness!!! Gracious!!! Great balls of fire!!! Two Canadian rock and roll flicks were unspooled during the most recent edition of the Toronto Festival of Festivals. One of them, Bruce McDonald's *Roadkill*, blasts across the silver screen like some insane cross between *Eraserhead*, *This Is Spinal Tap* and *Rock N' Roll High School*, while the other, William (Life Classes) MacGillivray's *The Vacant Lot*, plods its way to celluloid immortality alongside such earnest, but definitely unhip, cinematic song-fests as Neil Diamond's *The Jazz Singer*.

While MacGillivray's film means well, McDonald's picture means very little (and appears to be gloriously proud of that fact). *Roadkill* is hilarious, raunchy, and boozy - it's endowed with a crassly-winning, up-yours mentality that's sadly lacking in most Canadian cinema (and even more sadly lacking in *The Vacant Lot*). In a nutshell, *Roadkill* is rock n' roll. *The Vacant Lot* pretends to be rock n' roll.

The latter movie tells the mid-life tale of David (Grant Fullerton, in embarrassingly stiff form), a 40-ish musician who befriends the 17-year-old Trudi (Trudi Petersen, an actress who is not without screen presence, but is saddled with an incredibly dull role), a choir-singing cherub who finds herself playing with "The Vacant Lot," a feminist punk band. At first, their relationship is strictly platonic; David is swept away by Trudi's (apparent) talent, (supposed) spunkiness and (undeniable) beauty, while Trudi finds a combination of mentor and father figure in the old rocker.

Trudi's dad, you see, was once a talented musician who bugged off in search of fame and fortune, only to become a pathetic alcoholic living on past (and not all that glorious) glories. David - unlike Dad - is not only talented, but is blessed with such "New Man" qualities as sensitivity, wit, and imagination. Dave's idea of a good time is driving out into the middle of airfields to watch jets take off and make landings. The airplanes, you see, symbolize flight and freedom. It's also a great way to pick up naive teenage girls. Eventually, you see, the two songbirds become lovebirds.

Ain't life sweet?

On the plus side of this celluloid mass of creaky conservatism, *The Vacant Lot* is endowed with an earnestness which is - at the very least - consistent. All the way through the film,



David and Trudi playing at rock 'n' roll

MacGillivray's intentions seem fuzzy, but the picture keeps nagging at you to like it. And, once in a while, the picture actually manages to squeeze out something that isn't contrived, maudlin or unintentionally humorous (although one thanks the good lord for the latter in this utterly humorless exercise).

For example, the scene in which Trudi confronts her babbling father is - in and of itself - rather well written and nicely performed. The scene actually comes close to being quite moving. But in the final analysis, these few moments only work out of context since the rest of the film is so sadly overwritten/underwritten and underplayed. Mainly, the problem here is that *The Vacant Lot* is so square. It appears to have absolutely no feel for the life rhythms of the rock world. Most of the musical numbers resemble an episode of *The Tommy Hunter Show*, rather than the music of a boozey, aggressive basement band gone semi-pro.

Ironically, one of the best things about *The Vacant Lot*, is the very thing that MacGillivray and his central character, David, seem to dislike. The leader of the feminist punk band, Patti Precious (a deliciously lurid and loudmouthed performance from Barbara Nicholson) appears to represent - at least to David - everything that's wrongheaded about the alternative music scene. In the context of all the dreariness and the grinding monotony of David's music, Patti Precious and her precocious self-importance are actually refreshing.

Another gem amidst the mire is Patti's lyrics. The words that she belts out are delightfully and (thank Goodness!!!) intentionally dreadful.

According to the film's press package, MacGillivray's production company, Picture Plant, prides itself on generating artist-driven product that is "fiercely independent". *The Vacant Lot* is fiercely independent, all right - fiercely independent from anything resembling fierce independence. The boys over at CBC-Drama should just love this one.

Roadkill, on the other hand, is everything *The Vacant Lot* isn't. Working with a kamikaze

shooting schedule and a minuscule budget, director Bruce McDonald has fashioned a rip-snorting odyssey through rock n' roll Hell, a hell that could only be Northern Ontario.

Yeehah!!! Regionalism with universal appeal. *Roadkill* follows the adventures of Ramona (the exquisite Valerie Buhagiar), a simpy, zombie-like underling of a sleaze-ball booking agent. Ramona has been dispatched to the wilds of Northern Ontario to put a stop to a renegade rock band that's gone completely apeshit while on tour. On the way, she encounters a variety of nutbars: a roadie-turned-cabbie who's infused with more hallucinogens than William Burroughs and Timothy Leary combined, a whacked-out filmmaker (McDonald himself), and a young man who dreams of being a successful serial killer. As well, we're treated to a superb rock score and a couple of delightful cameo appearances by the likes of Nash the Slash and Joey Ramone.

Shot in superb, high-contrast black and white, *Roadkill* manages to superbly capture everything that's endearing, sleazy, and moronic about the wonderful world of rock n' roll. Beginning with a riotously funny spoof of homage to those notorious Canadian Wildlife Service PSAs, and ending with a glorious and terrifying display of mass murder, *Roadkill* is yet another example of the sort of film which will continue to put Canada on the map. Just as *The Vacant Lot* represents the dry, humorless aspect of our country's popular culture, *Roadkill* digs beneath Canada's underbelly to reveal our sense of obsessive alienation, and our incredibly (and delightfully) perverse sense of humor.

In *Roadkill*, sickness rules - and we're all better off for it.

Greg Klymkiv •

THE VACANT LOT p. Terry Greenlaw d./sc. William D. MacGillivray d.o.p. Lionel Simmons mus. dir. Scott MacMillan art d. Angela Murphy loc. sd mix. Jim Rillie ed. Angela Baker, Bill MacGillivray p. mgr. Terry Greenlaw 1st. a. d. Paul Pope asst. p. mgr. Robin Sarafinchan loc. mgr. Gary Swim cont. Grant Innes 2nd a. d. Barry Nichols 3rd.



Russell (Don McKellar) and Ramona (Valeria Buhagiar)

a. d. Evangelo Kiousis asst. p. Cari Green p. sec. Paula McNeil unit pub. Heather Leveque key props Monique Desnoyers props Stephen Arnold set dressers Reisa Muir, Darlene Sheils, Heidi Haines cost. des. Marilyn Richardson makeup Cathy O'Connell, Paulette Cable, Gloria Glacier boom Alex Salter 1st. asst. cam. Dominique Gusset 2nd. asst. cam. James Lewis stills/grip Dan Callis 2nd cam op. Nigel Markham gaffer Dean Brousseau best boy David Coole gen. op. James Nicholson, Jan Meyerowitz, Chuck Lapp key grip Raymond Lamy grip Chuck Clark carpenters Claude Goulet, Ged Clarke, Mark Larkin, Roberto Tarlo, Cheryl Newman p. a. Paul Broadbent, Tim Woolner art dept. contr. Martha Reynolds craft. Joelle Desy sc. cons. Jean Pierre Levebvre asst. ed. David Middleton, Jane Porter sup. sd. ed. Alex Salter dial. ed. Angela Baker asst. sd. ed. Grant Innes mus. ed. Bill MacGillivray mus. eng. Harold Tstinas, Donnie Chapman, Alfred Larter. l. p. Trudi Peterson, Grant Fullerton, Barbara Nicholson, Rick Mercer, Caitlyn Colquhoun, Cheryl Reid, Tara Wilde, Heidi Petersen. A Picture Plant Production, with the participation of Telefilm Canada, and the Province of Nova Scotia.

ROADKILL exec. p. Mr. Shack p. Bruce McDonald, Colin Brunton assoc. p. Keith Michael Bates d. Bruce McDonald sc. Don McKellar story Bruce McDonald d. o. p. Miroslaw Baszak art d. Geoff Murrin ed. Mike Munn sd. des. Steve Munro m. co-ord. Peter McFadzean or. m. score Nash the Slash st. ed. Allan Magee p. acc. Maria Pimentel asst. art d. Jim Murrin ward. Kate Healey gaff. David Healey, Johnny Askwith 1st asst. cam. Lilita Tannis sd. rec. Herwig Gayer stills Chris Buck extras cast. Susan Hart p. a. Bruno Bryniarski, Michelle Bellerose, Alexandra Gill, Geoff Hayes, Jane Shmelzer, Steve Houle, Amy Bodman, David Hoyle, David Bates p. co-ord. Cynthia Roberts guest star asst. d. Ron Repke trans. co-ord. Evan Siegel sp. fx. Brock Joliffe sharpshooter Dr. James McDonald st. board art. Dr. Chris Minz iconography Kevan Buss m-up cons. Nicole Demers asst. ed. Stephanie Duncan, David Trevis, John Dowsett Foley art. Sid Lieberman sd. mix. Daniel Pellerin titles & anim. Metamedia f. timer Robert Boric f. proc. Film House f. Kodak equipm. Production Services comp. guaranter Motion Picture Guarantors, Don Haig/FilmArts inc. Canada Council, Ontario Art Council, OFDC, Mr. Shack thanks to: Robert Shoub, Bananazz, Inco, Jim & Cathy McDonald, Joe Quan, Dianne Siegel, The Catholic Church, Manny's Gaz Bar, LIFT, Our Furry Friends, Mr Shack's #1 Groupie Heather Davis, Michelle Pinaud sp. thanks to: Norman Jewison, Louise Clark, Atom Egoyan, Neal Arbick, A Neon Rome l. p. Valerie Buhagiar, Gerry Quigley, Larry Hudson, Bruce McDonald, Shaun Bowring, Don McKellar, Mark Tarantino, Bob, Peter Morlea, Patricia Sims, Nazareno Buhagiar, Giovanna Buhagiar, Glen McLaren, Ellen Dean, Earl Pastko, Dean Richards, Jim Millan, Bruce Wilson, Herwig Gayer, Namir Khan, Evan Siegel, Kate Healey, Casey Sebert, Tim Sebert, Dr. Chris Minz, Leanne Haze, The Sargent Family, The Leslie Spit Tree-O, Nash the Slash, Dave Williams, Joey Harden, Martin Waxman, Sidney Stoyan, Donald Nijboer, Colin Brunton, Joey Ramone, Joanie Noordover.