



Rob Reiner makes funny things happen in "Spinal Tap," documentary about a heavy-metal rock group.



the movies
Dan Greenberg

Rock stars spoofed in engaging satire

Written in part and directed by a very funny man (Rob Reiner), starring a very funny man (Rob Reiner), "This Is Spinal Tap" is a very funny movie.

Reiner's satiric scalpel lays bare all the pretensions of the heavy-metal, rock music scene without getting nasty. A warm regard for the subject's follies eliminates the unpleasant bitterness so often characteristic of satire.

Reiner portrays filmmaker Marty Di Bergi, who is directing a documentary on the rock group Spinal Tap.

The film does have some objectionable language and, of course, the lyrics are sexually explicit. As with most rock music, however, hearing the lyrics is not top priority. In the case of one tune, "The Softer the Cushion, the Better the Pushin,'" a clearer rendition would have helped caricature the style and content of popular rock lyrics.

Reiner opens "Spinal Tap" with remarks setting the documentary style and the satiric tone. Reiner makes clear his humor and good intentions with deft facial contortions and a quizzical grimace that ensure us we need not take the rock music world's pompous sense of importance too seriously. It is all just good fun.

SPINAL TAP IS a mythical rock group on the downside of its career. Certainly the subject of this documentary is nowhere near as important as the film pretends and as the band believes. Spinal Tap's part in the vast American cultural changes of the '60s was limited, as is Spinal Tap's current career. The group's latest album ("Smell the Glove") is in trouble with the recording company, which feels that the jacket design is obscene and sexist. It is funny that neither the group nor its manager, Ian Faith (Tony Hendra) recognizes this.

Reiner's comments are in part throughout the film as he traces the development of the group, its rise to the heights and its current difficulties. He utilizes cinema-verite documentary techniques so widely overused in rock-music documentaries:

Rapid cutting, panning and focusing on camera, interviews, live concert and behind-the-scenes footage, old videotapes and films of early TV appearances, and even snapshots of the group's lead performers, David St. Hubbins (Christopher Guest) and Nigel (Michael McKean) taken when those two met as 9-year-olds in 1955.

The material presented is so close to many seriously intended rock documentaries that the satire works well.

THE ARRAY OF contemporary documentary techniques includes flashing subtitles to introduce characters and the pretense that the group, though in danger of dissolving, is presently on tour.

That tour is complicated by the arrival of lead-singer David's girl, Janine (June Chadwick), whose lovely, self-possessed assertiveness first drives off manager Ian and ultimately Nigel, the No. 2.

Performances are all first-rate, combining British-rock-group arrogance with stupidity and a characteristic insouciant air that emphasizes their exaggerated adolescence.

The movie is very funny even if you don't recognize Nigel's tongue-flicking as a Gene Simmons (Kiss) characteristic or that David St. Hubbins in name and manner is a play on David Lee Roth of Van Halen. We've all seen enough of the rock music scene to recognize unwarranted pretensions.

Of course, to youth these days, rock musicians convey an appropriate sense of importance, because they are very important. Whether youthful exuberance or the music itself is the main factor, I am not quite sure.

As a middle-aged parent, I do find it difficult to fathom why young people take their music so seriously and so intensely.

Certainly, if they didn't, there would be no point to this very clever, humorous and entertaining satire of the rock music scene and the pretentious documentaries that salute rock musicians.



Members of the mythical British rock group Spinal Tap are David St. Hubbins (Michael McKean), Mike Shipman (R.J. Parnell), Nigel Turler (Christopher Guest), Viv Savage (David Kauf) and Derek Smalls (Harry Shearer).

table talk

Chef's special

Delicious dishes including such unusual ones as cold strawberry soup with silvered almonds (Midtown Cafe) and chicken salad, in an edible salad bowl made from a tortilla (Peabody's), were served up at the third annual Chef's Fest Lunch at The Community House in Birmingham. Chefs from nearly a dozen Birmingham-Bloomfield restaurants dished up their specialties to guests at the event, who made selections from individual serving areas. Open to the public, the lunch was sponsored by the Birmingham-Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce and The Community House.

Sandwich bar

A make-it-yourself sandwich bar is open from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. weekdays at Fanny's lounge in the Troy Hilton Inn. Ham, turkey, salami, roast beef and various cheeses and breads are available. Cole slaw and

potato salad complete the buffet offering, at \$4.50 per person.

Two for one

Another entree priced for two has been added to the menu Friday nights at the Kingsley Inn in Bloomfield Hills. Whitefish, which has been featured at \$15.95 for two persons Mondays, also is offered Fridays. A two-for-one prime rib dinner, at the same price, continues to be available Fridays. The restaurant's kitchen is open until 1 a.m. Mondays-Saturdays, 10 p.m. Sundays.

Crab-ee John's

A new family seafood restaurant, called Crab-ee John's, has replaced the Pantry Restaurant, open to residents and vacationers in the Blue Water Area, in Fort Huron. Luncheon prices range from \$2.50-\$4.99, while dinners including seafood and steak average around \$7. A children's menu also is available.

— Ethel Simmons

Jazz duets at DIA

Pianist Randy Weston will perform duets with percussionist Roy Brooks at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday, May 25, at "Jazz at the Institute" at the Detroit Institute of Arts indoor garden cafe, Kresge Court. Tickets at \$7 may be purchased through the art institute ticket office (phone 832-2730 during regular business hours) and at the doors. Reservations are recommended.

The "Jazz at the Institute" series will continue Friday-evening concerts through Aug. 24. A complete schedule of concerts will be mailed on request.

Wine, beer, soft drinks and snacks will be offered during the concerts at an additional cost.

Randy Weston has created a style he calls "African Rhythms," which draws on elements of various African-American styles. Roy Brooks is one of Detroit's leading percussionists.



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