

'Divine Trash' unlocks John Waters' film treasures

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
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One look at director John Waters and you just know there's something brilliantly sinister lurking behind those body eyes and that pencil-thin black mustache which hovers slightly above his upper lip.

One look at a film like his cult classic *Pink Flamingos*, *Hair Spray* or the most recent *Pecker*, and it's easy to see into the freakish world he embraces for the love of making movies.

Steve Yeager's *Divine Trash* is a documentary that rovides to Waters' childhood in Baltimore and the making of the film that catapulted the director to the

status of other '70s visionaries like John Sayles and John Cassavetes.

Since *Pink Flamingos*, Waters has proven to be a director who isn't afraid to cross the line. His films feature freakish characters as stars and those who can't relate to the topsy-turvy antics as villains. Yeager captured this in his unflinching way beginning with black-and-white televised interview footage of a lanky, long-haired Waters in 1972.

"I'm not trying to say anything," says Waters to the reporter. "I'm just trying to make 'em laugh and give 'em a little shock value for their money." Juxtaposing full-color inter-

view footage of Waters' parents, friends and foes with the most disturbing clips of his films and the films that inspired him, the end result earned a 1998 Sundance Film Festival Award.

And it's not surprising. Yeager traces Waters' childhood back to the 8-millimeter camera his grandmother gave him on his 16th birthday, and his early fascination with violence and villains. From *Howdy Doody Time* to creating his own puppet shows, Waters showed creativity and promise early on. His first films were shown in the basement of a local church. Even the local priest supported his efforts.

Sneaking to a nearby drive-in to watch the latest B-flicks by Russ Meyer or the Kucher

Brothers, Waters always veered from the usual path. *Divine Trash* makes sense of a man who made an overweight transvestite named Divine famous. Waters described Divine as a cross between Clarabell and Jayne Mansfield, who liked to be referred to as a character actor or a "a-him." According to the film: "Glenn (Milstead) liked to dress in drag before America knew what drag was."

Proving that Waters has always been ahead of his time, actor/director Jim Jarmusch and stars like Steve Buscemi called him an inspiration. "He inspired me to make films my own way," said Jarmusch, who directed *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai* in 1999.

While everyone in the quick-paced documentary has his own take on Waters, no one can agree on his style. Some say his films were unscripted, others admit to having to learn them word-for-word, and still others recall Waters telling them how to say their lines. Like his films, the filmmaker has an unexpected effect on all those around him.

An almost comedic effect is added to the film by Mary Avara, whose title reads "The Last Film Censor in America." Avara pops in and out to describe her horrific reaction to Waters' films. "I have my own ratings," she said of *Multiple Maniacs*, "R.T. for real trash."

Divine Trash is anything but trashy. The second half of the film deals mostly with the making of *Pink Flamingos*, and in turn the making of the man himself. The documentary finally gives credit to a filmmaker who



Talking trash: In 1972, John Waters directed the cult hit of his career, "Pink Flamingoes." In 1998, Steve Yeager released "Divine Trash" documenting Waters' rise to success in underground films. Catch a special showing 9:30 p.m. tonight at the Magic Bag in Ferndale.

gives misfits a voice and audiences a laugh. Tying loose ends with footage from Waters' recent hit *Pecker*, the documentary proves his career is just as divine as ever.

See "John Waters: Divine Trash" in its Michigan premiere 8 p.m. Wednesday-Thursday, June 14-15, Magic Bag, Ferndale. Tickets cost \$5.Call (248) 544-3030.

GUIDE TO THE MOVIES

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'Gone in 60 Seconds' hardly the hit it was meant to be

BY JON KATZ
SPECIAL WRITER

In your job and mine, we're only as good as our last project. Not so in Hollywood where, if you're a major player, you get three stinkos for every hit. Which means that Nicolas Cage has paid for "Leaving Las Vegas" with "8MM," "Snake Eyes" and "Gone in 60 Seconds." Perhaps, depending on how many rabid car thief freaks can drag a paying guest along.

The safe bet is that "Gone in 60 Seconds" is not so much a title as a prediction.

As the former, however, it refers to the supposed time it takes to "boost" (steal) a vehicle. Randall "Memphis" Raines (Cage) was the best there was before his mama made him go legit and ran a gas and oil govt track in northern California. Memphis did what she told him to do, probably because he was grateful she didn't nickname him "Chattanooga."

When Memphis learns that kid brother Kip (Giovanni Ribisi) is not only following in his footsteps but is also in trouble with Mr. Big, he's sucked back into the business for one last heist. In fact, he must steal 50 luxury cars in one night to save Kip's life.

"Gone in 60 Seconds" comes out of the Jerry Bruckheimer stable, which means there's a wall of noise like the producer's "Armageddon," thrills and spills like "Con Air," and suspenseful action sequences like "The Rock," the last two of which were successful Cage-Bruckheimer collaborations.

Unfortunately, "60 Seconds" rarely got out of first gear in any of the categories that matter.



Going, going, gone: Angelina Jolie and Nicolas Cage star in the over-hyped "Gone in 60 Seconds" in theaters now.

In fact, the best part of the movie lasts just about that long, a comedy relief scene with one of Cage's old beating buddies who's now a driving instructor.

Three Academy Award-winning performers, including Cage, can't rev up the story. Robert Duvall (most recently in "A Civil Action") plays crafty, crusty Otto, the former chop-shop operator who was Memphis' mentor in the old days. And Angelina Jolie (Oscar winner for "Girl, Interrupted") is Cage's onetime gal pal now a mechanic by day and barmaid by night. She wears blond dreadlocks, with the emphasis on dread, and has maybe a half-dozen lines.

The pairing of Memphis' old cronies with Kip's computer-savvy mates works to blend the old ways of boosting (bent hangers) with the new (electronic code-breakers). But one wonders throughout why so many of the hot wheels they heist are parked right out on the curb. Are there no garages in these ritzy L.A. hoods?

Meaningful dialog you won't find here. "I'd best hear," Memphis reminisces, "instantly feeling better about being mo." And while the final chase scene is a close cousin to the one in "Blues Brothers," which is fine with us, the ultimate steel mill showdown is taken right out of "Terminator 2," which is not.

While Cage and company are busy stealing cars, Dolroy Lindo as the police detective in pursuit of the Raines Gang pretty much steals the movie.

Cage falls one off with "60 Seconds," but still has two strikes on him. He needs that hit.

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Scheduled to open Friday, June 16	crimo. Stars Vanessa Williams, Christian Bale.	boy and his compassionate teacher who teaches him to find his way in an increasingly tightening world.
BOYS AND GIRLS Romantic comedy explores the games that men and women play. Stars Freddie Prinze Jr., Claire Forlani, Jason Biggs.	JESUS' SON Based on Denis Johnson's cult novel this saga stars Billy Crudup, Denis Leary and Jack Black.	ME, MYSELF AND IRIS Comedy about a mild-mannered Rhode Island copy with a split-personality disorder who escorts a woman back to her home town. The cop and his hyper-aggressive alter-ego both fall in love with the confused lady and he wages war—with himself—for her affections. Stars Jim Carrey, Renee Zellweger.
TEAM A.E. In a journey that begins after Earth ends, a rebellious teenager named Gale embarks on an adventure through space to find the legendary spacecraft, the Titan, which holds the secret to salvation for the human race. Animated full length feature film with the voices of Matt Damon, Drew Barrymore.	SCHEDULED TO OPEN FRIDAY, JUNE 23 BURNHEIM Directed by Ivan Szabo, the film conjures up three themes: the inhumanity of human species, the symbolic meaning of a family name and theaching tolerance and acceptance in modern society.	CHICKEN RUN Full-length animated feature is set at Tweedy's Chicken Farm, where any chickens who can meet a "foul" fate. Features the voices of Mel Gibson, Julia Sawalha and Miranda Richardson.
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