

TAKE THE REINS FORWARD

PARSLEY DAYS

2001 79m prod A.D. Productions, p Andrea Dorfman, Kimberly Boyd, d/sc/ph Andrea Dorfman, ed Scott Simpson, pd Marcia Connolly, s ed Alek Bromke, mus Ian McGettigan, Robert Benvie; with Megan Dunlop, Mike LeBlanc, Marla McLean, Kenneth Wilson-Harrington, Marcia Connolly, Shannon Cunningham.



Post Gen-X Halifax, present day. What's a bicycle-maintenance instructor with a super-condom conscious boyfriend to do when she finds out she's pregnant? That's the question posed to Kate (Megan Dunlop), the protagonist of Andrea Dorfman's debut. Her response: re-evaluate her relationship and munch boatloads of parsley in an attempt to induce a homeopathic abortion. We follow Kate as she hangs out with her idiosyncratic alterna-friends; talking, laughing, gossiping and mostly pontificating on the future of her and her boyfriend, Ollie (Mike LeBlanc).

Again and again Kate is bombarded with talk that she and Ollie are "lifers" and that she couldn't find anyone as perfect. One flaky conceptual artist pal pays Ollie the highest of compliments with "I think he's a male lesbian." Nonetheless, our girl begins to doubt; she relishes the past she's had with her intended but doesn't know if she's still in love. How else could one explain the secret tryst with a dumb but hunky pupil in her class known only as the "slow student"? Finally she can't hold it in any longer. She lays down the whole story – the pregnancy, the affair – and sleeps with Ollie one last time before they part.

Andrea Dorfman, a photographer from Halifax who previously made the award-winning shorts *Swerve* (1997) and *Nine* (1998), has worked as a cinematographer on countless East Coast independent shorts and music videos. Aside from some needlessly sappy sentimentality and a cute quirkiness to characters that sometimes seems a little too pat, the film is well written. The characters are three dimensional, and we empathize with Kate and get to know and like her friends, their flaws and all. *Parsley Days* is also very well shot. Dorfman, who took on the added responsibility as the cinematographer, has a keen eye for creating straightforward but beautiful frames in which the action can easily inhabit. Her use of simple imagery, such as the repetition of the couple in a canoe in happier times under a bright blue sky and Kate all bundled up in winter wear mid-conversation with friends from whom she feels isolated, is actually quite effective. *Parsley Days* is a small, warm, and for the most part, honest film. Like its protagonist, it's sweet, funny and interesting, but still has a few problems to work out.

Simon Ennis

HEY, HAPPY!

2001 75m prod Big Daddy Beer Guts, p Laura Michalchyshyn, Noam Gonick, d/sc Noam Gonick, ph Paul Suderman, ed Bruce Little, sr Evan Kroeker, Jonah Corne, s ed Etoile Stewart, pd Simon Hughes, ad Rick Gilbert, Jim Lambie, c Billy Martin, mus Chris Robinson; with Jérémie Yuen, Craig Aftanis, Clayton Godson, John Simone, Dita Vendetta, Chelsey Perefanick, Sylva Dueck, Lola Wong.

Hey, Happy! takes place on the eve of the Apocalypse in the barren wastelands surrounding Winnipeg. Sabu (Jérémie Yuen) is a rave DJ who spends his time spinning vinyl out in the fields. His goal is to sleep with 2,000 boys before the world ends. He wants Happy (Craig Aftanis), an introverted UFOlogist to be his final conquest, and Spanky O'Neil (Clayton Godson), the local mega-bitch wants nothing less than to ruin everybody's fun. Drugs, debauchery, raves, rants and all else run rampant just outside Manitoba's capital city (played here for laughs as some kind of hip, prairie Sodom).

Noam Gonick, who wrote and directed the film, his first feature, had previously made the documentary *Waiting for Twilight*, about fellow Winnipeg filmmaker Guy Maddin, and published and edited a book on Bruce LaBruce. The latter is significant, as LaBruce's influence on the film is impossible to miss (as is the early work of John Waters). Unfortunately, the difference is that though the characters in *Hey, Happy!* may be bizarre, flamboyant and spout portentous nonsense for prolonged periods, they just aren't funny. The film takes itself far to seriously, visually distancing us from the characters' idiosyncrasies so much so that it's hard to pay attention to what they're talking – or in Spanky's case, screaming at the top of his lungs – about.

Hey, Happy! was filmed in a lush and stylized Cinemascope that would be admirable if it wasn't so sloppy. Each shot seems to be painstakingly executed and graduated filters abound. However, the framing is always just off from a well-composed image; something that becomes even more awkward when you notice the minor repositioning that occurs far too frequently. Furthermore, its attempt at creating the requisite post-teen sex fest/apocalyptic atmosphere of hallucinatory fatalism falls so short that its 75-minute running time seems positively glacial as opposed to the intended meditative.

The film has too much of an "I don't give a shit what you think about me" air to it. The problem is that there isn't much to think about in the first place. It deals with "shocking" imagery and situations without ever being too shocking. *Hey, Happy!* just isn't that interesting.

Simon Ennis

