

'Logo's a Greek word. It means symbol or sign. The punk rock Hard Core Logo means direct action. Means a question authority. Means anarchy. You don't like The world you're livin' in. You don't like The answers you get. It's like fuck you. And That's exactly what we're all about. Fuck You!

— Joe Dick, lead singer, Hard Core Logo

BY KEN ANDERLINI

Hard

The comparisons between *Spinal Tap* and Bruce McDonald's latest feature, *Hard Core Logo* are inevitable. The leading duo in the band, Joe Dick (played by Hugh Dillon) and Billy Tallent (Keith Callum Rennie), even include the film *Spinal Tap* in a game of "Name the Cool Movie." McDonald calls the film *Spinal Tap*'s "mean little brother" and suggests that "they would make a nice double bill." Unlike the older brother, however, there is a minimum amount of finger pointing, satire or parody in

Core

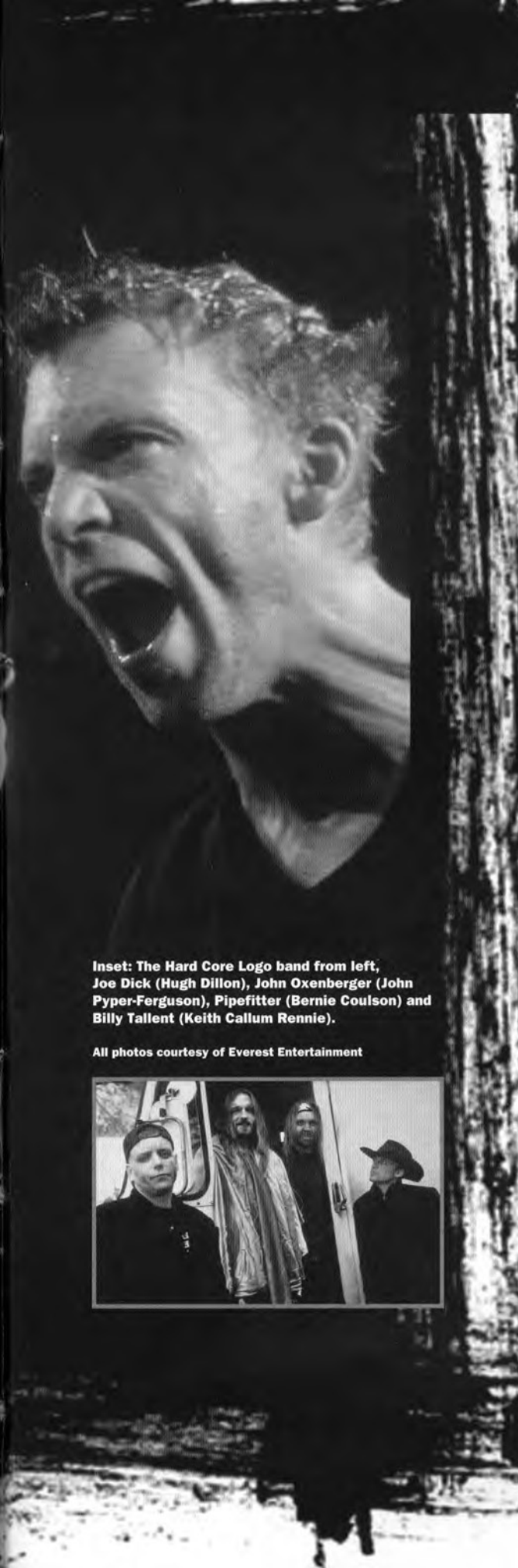
McDonald's film of a legendary West Coast punk band reuniting for a benefit concert. The story of one last Western Canadian tour is, instead, a melodrama full of cinematic poetry and humour. McDonald's film veers from Rob Reiner's mock documentary by allowing us moments in which we are pulled from the fiction to marvel at its realism, only to be sutured back into the narrative.

McDonald says *Hard Core Logo* is "a bit of a dance between the logic of documentary and narrative." The conventions of documentary are used by McDonald and the actors to tell a story of remarkable complexity and texture about the

Logo

dissolution of a punk rock band. While regularly and humorously self-reflective, the performances and the story are engagingly real and truthful. Hugh Dillon, who for the past five years has been the lead singer for the blues-rock band The Headstones, suggests that the film is a "fairly realistic look at the rock 'n' roll genre, without the glitz and the hype." It is a film about a band that doesn't make it, or as McDonald sees it, the story of "working heroes, what it is like for 90 per cent of the bands." There are no limos or Leer jets, just rusting buses, closed venues and sex workers who pocket the money meant for the hotel bill.


When McDonald was given Michael Turner's 1993 collection of poems about a fictional rock band, *Hard Core Logo*, he was attracted less by its reflection of the 1970s politicized Vancouver punk scene of bands like DOA, Art Bergman or the Modernettes, and more by the story of growing up and growing apart. The political context from



Inset: The Hard Core Logo band from left, Joe Dick (Hugh Dillon), John Oxenberger (John Pyper-Ferguson), Pipefitter (Bernie Coulson) and Billy Tallent (Keith Callum Rennie).

All photos courtesy of Everest Entertainment





Director Bruce McDonald has produced a definitive 30-something look at growing up and leaving the past behind.

which *Hard Core Logo* presumably emerges, is played out in the Rock Against Guns benefit tour which Dick organizes to reunite the band, long disbanded, and help his musical idol Bucky Haight (a bitter Iggy Pop look-a-like masterfully played by Julian Richings), who has been "shot" by a psycho fan on his farm in Saskatchewan. Filmmaker Bruce McDonald and his small crew have been hired to film this reunion tour.

Screenwriter Noel S. Baker, with ample creative consulting from McDonald, Dillon and Rennie, has fashioned a buddy film not afraid to be a love story. McDonald says he was interested in the story of the two men, "friends from age 13, who have done pretty much everything together. What happens when this has to end? I was more interested in the notion of the reunion of these two, after years apart, and it didn't matter if it was punk, per se." But punk it is, and although this may not be the definitive DOA documentary, there is enough spitting, urinating, drinking, drugs and "fuck yous" to go around. *Hard Core Logo's* touring anthem is a catchy, passionate, tongue-in-cheek number, "Who the hell do you think you are?" and the Ramones' "Touring" is the film's theme song. Bruce McDonald has produced a definitive 30-something look at growing up and leaving the past behind. The music is hot and the drama is likely to strike a few chords in anyone who ran to the record store for the arrival of "Never Mind the Bullocks" by the Sex Pistols. With a good thrash guitar, neither a band nor a road movie can go wrong.

Like the band, the film has an edge and shifts between concert footage, interviews, landscapes and acid trips. The film's revision of Turner's ending came out of creative collaboration. Rewrites were frequent on set and many of Joe and Billy's finest moments were added by Rennie and Dillon. Rennie, who is proving himself to be the 30-something punk James Dean (or is it Montgomery Clift?) of the Canadian independent film scene, conjures up references to Tom Sawyer to explain McDonald's methods: "Bruce's wisdom is in painting the fence and getting other people to do the work. When you are working with Bruce, you are working towards the same goal. Bruce would listen. He's done enough work to know that it is not about dick size."

"After three movies, I've figured out how film works, and I feel comfortable with the medium," says McDonald. "It was fun to get back to a kind of film school energy and play a little bit more. I could pay attention to the moment because I was comfortable with the process." McDonald compares the experience of the film to forgetting the rules after the more classical form of *Dance Me Outside*. "It was as if we wiped the slate clean and pretended we didn't know." The film's documentary style and reliance on hand-held cameras encouraged and inspired the performers to go all the way. Rennie prepared for his role by touring with Dillon and The Headstones. "There was something very real because of the documentary style," he says. "We didn't want it to look really clean. It was looser, but had to be really focused. We were shooting over a short time and had to move through quicker. It was very loose."

This surface looseness, however, covers an intense family melodrama worthy of Douglas Sirk or Rainer Werner Fassbinder. This band has chemistry and the intervention of McDonald and his

film crew sets the roller coaster in motion. This is a complex film, made all the more so by use of the AVID system to explore digital non-linear video. "This helped in the transitions and choices," says McDonald. "It added to the fabric because you could preview things almost immediately and see how they worked."

The film succeeds in heightening the romantic involvement between Joe and Bill without the sex. Within the tradition of the buddy movie, the film is implicitly homoerotic, an element which complicates the drama between the protagonists. The intensity and intimacy of the relationship established between two life-long friends leads the film away from mock documentary to a love story between Joe and Billy. Rennie and Dillon say they bonded around a similar artistic and generational experience. They both were so fascinated with each other's worlds that they developed a real, mutual and deep respect for one another.

Not surprising for what one might call a "homosocial" drama, the band is frequently faced by threats to the sanctity of the family unit in the form of Jenifur, a band in Los Angeles which promises money and success to Billy. With male sexual politics abounding in the film, Jenifur's pulling the buddies apart is loaded with questions of success, intimacy, trust, growing up and homosexuality. In Regina, a college newspaper reporter is interviewing Billy, discussing his contract with Jenifur. Joe enters and Billy quickly changes topics. The reporter engages Joe about *Hard Core Logo*, but to no avail. She confronts him: "It is said that you two fight like some tanked-up white trash married couple in a trailer park." Joe responds: "Well, some of that is true, but that's what makes our music and our art great." Billy interjects: "I suffer for his art." To which Joe adds: "That's what keeps you honest." The reporter is uncomfortable and pipes in, "So, Mr. Dick does *Hard Core Logo* have a future?" Joe tells her, "Yes it does. Now, can you do me a favour? Can you fuck off?"

McDonald suggests that the film "pulls the rug from under the male bravado, poser thing." In doing so, it offers a buddy film in which the homoeroticism or at least the "homosocial" of male relationships becomes visible. *Hard Core Logo* is a hardcore deconstruction of masculinity. Dillon suggests, "You can read anything you want into it. However one reads the film, there is enough of a suggestion of a sexual relationship between Billy and Joe that there are cracks in the straight macho facade. ■"