

THE ROAD TO NOD

“Some decisions are irreversible“

Interview

*THE ROAD TO NOD
&
THE DEATH OF TRUE INDEPENDENT CINEMA*

- An Interview with director M.A. Littler -



Q: You've mostly made documentaries, why now the change to feature films?

A: I began as a writer. Initially I wrote screenplays, later on poetry. My first films were all narrative short films. I slipped into documentary filmmaking by accident and through my interest in Underground Rock 'n' Roll, Blues, Jazz and Country music.

Q: That's what lead to your connection to the Underground record label VOODOO RHYTHM?

A: Correct. I was interested in the label and it's founder Beat-Man because he wildly mixed all sorts of musical styles. We eventually met and found out that we were kindred spirits. The same thing happened with several musicians on the label...we became friends.

Q: After that film, you stuck to music documentaries and made a film about the funeral orchestra THE DEAD BROTHERS.

A: I did, although I don't consider the film a music documentary. I was interested in dealing with certain philosophical issues and THE DAED BROTHER's biographies offered the perfect opportunity for that.

Q: Which issues are you referring to?

A: The film's about the Diaspora, father-son relationships, the peculiar relationship between death and humour, the origin of creativity and the life of outsiders, which is a key theme in all my work.

Q: Why now the feature film and not another documentary?

A: As a matter of fact I did make another documentary, prior to the feature. It's a portrait of the photographer, crime novelist and underground filmmaker MIRON ZOWNIR. After three documentaries I felt it was time to get back to writing and developing scenes, that eventually led to THE ROAD TO NOD.

Q: What is the new film about?

A: The film tells the story of a bank robber, who served a 6 year prison sentence. The film begins on the day of his release. He immediately attempts to hook up with his old partners and peers, yet quickly discovers that the power structures within the criminal world have shifted. That eventually leads to a trans-European escape odyssey.

The film is influenced by biblical themes and is basically a bastard child bearing the DNA of the Old Testament, film noir, pulp literature and the road movie.

It's a slow and moody film, not unlike its director.

Q: Religion is always a key theme in your work, isn't it?

A: I was raised with the heaven & hell concept. My father is a preacher and I've spent a fair bit of time in the South. That has left its marks and has influenced my work until today.

Q: Many roles are being played by musicians that have appeared in your previous films. Why?

A: I wrote the characters with certain individuals in mind. It was my goal to merge fact and fiction. Apart from details, the actors are their character, they don't pretend to be someone that they're not.

Q: Your production company SLOWBOAT FILMS plays a key role in your life...maybe you could elaborate.

A: The Company is the result of blind and ignorant idealism. That applies to me and the rest of my team...especially my wife.

I consider us the malign tumour in the belly of the film industry. They don't like us and we don't like them. It's a battle. We're small, they're big...yet also a tumour is initially tiny and we all know where that can lead.

Q: Sounds militant.

A: It is. I'm interested in films and filmmakers that have integrity and do not allow the business to corrupt them. There are very few of those maverick filmmakers left. We live in an age of watered down ideals and cynicism where Mammon is the only god and almost everybody is willing to get fucked by Mammon. Most filmmakers are dependent on studios, funding agencies and networks...that is the death of true independent cinema! It's tragic that most people nowadays believe film equals entertainment. Thereby film is subjected to the lowest common denominator.

Q: Which filmmakers do you consider to be mavericks?

A: Most filmmakers I admire are dead. I love CASSAVETTES, MELVILLE, SAM FULLER or PECKINPAH.

Most of the younger generation have been gobbled up by the biz. SCORSESE'S early films were great...eventually they became pathetic.

Q: Let's talk about literature. Which factors do you consider when deciding whether you're writing for print or the screen.

A: Every story demands its own form. For me the best way to pin down abstract thoughts is poetry.

Long complex stories are best explored in form of a novel. Stories that I see before my inner eye so to speak I try to turn into films.

Q: Let's get back to THE ROAD TO NOD. Perhaps you could elaborate on the film's key themes.

A: I'd like the audience to decide that for themselves. I don't want to rob them of their own interpretation.

One can thing I can say: It's amongst other things about the irreversibility of decisions.

Q: Are you pleased with the end result?

A: Of course I can only speak for myself, but I assume that all directors, wish they could change a thing or two once their films are finished and regret certain missed opportunities...I'm the same.

All in all I'm satisfied...it was logistically a difficult film to make.

There are scenes that cause me to close my eyes, yet there are also scenes where I feel like patting myself on the back...It's pretty schizophrenic.

Q: Describe the shooting process.

A: It's always difficult if you're working on a shoestring budget. You end up entering production with a pistol and a prayer.

Q: So you are, how should I say...an authoritarian director?

A: It depends on the film. I reckon this time around I was more a friend of the actor's than the crew

Q: Can you describe your directing style?

A: During production I work intuitively. Good preparation is essential for me from a technical point of view. I need to know the film I'm making prior to production so that I can give my crew precise instructions.

Working with actors is more difficult. It's like alchemy or making your kids eat Brussels sprouts. It doesn't help to force Stanislavski on someone, who has an entirely different approach to performing. I give my performers plenty of freedom, yet emphasise the fact that they also carry a great amount of responsibility as far as the success of the film is concerned.

If they fuck it up, they usually realise it themselves and correct their mistakes. I also offer them the opportunity to first follow my directions and in another take to try it their way.

Then I decide which take is better for the film.

Often times the actors have better ideas than I have. Then again sometimes they have totally absurd ideas...it's a balance between genius and hideousness.

Q: What does the future have in store for you?

A: I'll try to realise another film called THE LAST HOTEL.

Q: What is it about?

A: 7 rooms of a run down hotel, a bunch of surreal characters and the nuclear holocaust.

Q: Your kidding.

A: Absolutely not.

