

MARCH 12, 1999

Ma Vie en Rosebud

By Dave Nuttycombe

The Ninth Annual Rosebud Film & Video Awards Nominee Showcase
At the American Film Institute Theater

The tattered red gym bag is gone, replaced by a sturdy cardboard box containing 21 neatly arranged videotapes that make up the Ninth Annual Rosebud Film & Video Awards

know that there's something about mak-

NINTH ANNUAL ROSEBUD FILM AND VIDEO AWARDS NOMINEE SHOWCASE

Highlights include

Knuckleface Jones, Todd Rohal's insanely exquisite bit of cinematic non sequiturism. (DN) (American Film Institute, Saturday-Sunday)

The hit of the show for me is another Baltimore effort, Todd Rohal's short, *Knuckleface Jones*. A work of demented brilliance, it puts words in Harriet Tubman's mouth, the angry young Kinks on the soundtrack, and a very angry young woman behind the wheel, and it offers the disquieting sight of pasty white men wandering the woods in their BVDs, spastically rapping to their cheap beatbox. The non sequiturs pile up on one another to hysterically bizarre effect. Description is difficult, explanation perhaps impossible. But *Knuckleface Jones* gives me hope for Rosebud No. 10.

Czyzk is a Baltimore cinemapresario of some renown who sent along an e-mail painfully detailing the "total nightmare" that the production became for him. Czyzk wrote that the film "took three years and a lot of my money to make, but when it was finished I had little choice but to walk away from it." I've met Czyzk, and he's the sweetest guy imaginable. I don't know Ms. Bowers, nor do I know exactly where things went awry, but I do

"face up to my own past." Unfortunately, this reckoning isn't quite captured on film. The more interesting story, also not quite captured, is that of a black woman who moved from a depressed township to an exclusive, mostly white neighborhood. What is captured, however, are echoes of attitudes and demarcations that exist in D.C.

D.C.'s Melissa Young captures the worries of children in *Sirens*. Like many of this year's films, it's a nice effort that ends rather than resolves.

In *Conscious*, Slane Ramon of Silver

The shaggy-dog story is the most prominent theme this year. Like haiku, it is a deceptive form. And most of the comedies here are simply too shaggy.

In *The Toothbrush*, David Strayer, Hugh Burruss, and Patrick Gregory present a burglar with attention deficit disorder who can't quite concentrate on the job at hand. An attempt at Jean Shepherd-style quaintness is undermined by an unpleasant punch line. Dan Schmeltzer's *Dead Sorry* is an odd gothic tale set in a Florida swamp. *The Midnight Dreams of an Urban Cowboy*, by Tzanko Tchangov, combines stream-of-consciousness drawing with Benny Goodman's "Sing Sing Sing" and the Misfits. Rachel Max's quick animated deconstruction of Sylvester Stallone's *Rocky IV* is titled, aptly, *Rocky IV*. Her version is so much better.

Suzanne McDonnell's *Every Night and Twice on Sundays* is the most ambitious and elaborate entry, but I'm not sure where the inspiration came from. It is a "mockumentary," supposedly about the woman who was first chosen to play Mrs. Fletcher in a local version of the "I've fallen and I can't get up" TV commercials. Which means it's about 12 degrees farther removed from an already obscure source than seems necessary. Original songs were written, for heaven's sake. I don't want to discourage these folks, but I have to ask, where's my reference point?

Although *Little Castles* and *Conscious* are solid contenders, the hit of the show for me is another Baltimore effort, Todd Rohal's short, *Knuckleface Jones*. A work of demented brilliance, it puts words in Harriet Tubman's mouth, the angry young Kinks on the soundtrack, and a very angry young woman behind the wheel, and it offers the disquieting sight of pasty white men wandering the woods in their BVDs, spastically rapping to their cheap beatbox. The non sequiturs pile up on one another to hysterically bizarre effect. Description is difficult, explanation perhaps impossible. But *Knuckleface Jones* gives me hope for Rosebud No. 10.

The Ninth Annual Rosebud Film & Video Awards Nominee Showcase screens Saturday, March 13, and Sunday, March 14, at 11:30 a.m. at the Kennedy Center's AFI Theater, with a "Meet the Filmmakers" session during intermission. \$7. Call (202) 797-9081, or visit <http://www.members.aol.com/rosebudwdc>. CP



Todd Rohal's *Knuckleface Jones*: Persona non sequitur.