

# **BIRTH. MOVIES. DEATH.**

ISSUE 13 / JULY 2014

**BAD NEWS: SPINAL TAP'S  
FORGOTTEN COUSINS**

**A REVIEW OF SPINAL TAP'S LATEST ALBUM  
SHARK SANDWICH**

**THIS LIST GOES TO 11: REAL WORLD  
ROCK STORIES THAT INSPIRED SPINAL TAP**

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## Editor-in-Chief

Devin Faraci

## Managing Editor

Meredith Borders

## Associate Publisher

Henri Mazza

## Art Director

Joseph A. Ziemba

## Graphic Designers

Zach Short, Stephen Sosa, Kelsey Spencer

## Copy Editor

George Bragdon

## Contributing Writers

Evan Dickson, Devin Faraci, Evan Saathoff, Noah Segan, Andrew Todd, Scott Wampler

## Public Relations Inquiries

Brandy Fons | [brandy@fonspr.com](mailto:brandy@fonspr.com)

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# TONIGHT I'M GONNA HAVE A LETTER FROM THE EDITOR TONIGHT

**DEVIN FARACI**

Badass Digest Editor in Chief

@devincf

Read more at [badassdigest.com](http://badassdigest.com)

Some comedies age poorly, their jokes turning into vinegar. Some comedies have their sharp edges dulled by repetition. Some comedies are good once and immediately forgettable thereafter.

THIS IS SPINAL TAP is not some comedies.

This month in BIRTH.MOVIES.DEATH. we're turning our attention solely to THIS IS SPINAL TAP. We have an in-depth appreciation of the movie, a list of real-life rock stupidity that inspired the film (yes, this list goes to 11) and even a long-awaited review of the Tap classic album SHARK SANDWICH (you may recall that in the movie the record gets a memorable two word review).

We also turn our attention to things peripheral to the Tap: we look at BAD NEWS, the little-seen British heavy metal mockumentary that was

produced at the same time as THIS IS SPINAL TAP. We invite you to lick our love pump as we look at rockers who have crossed over to the composer side of the coin. And we try -- try so very hard! -- to find the silver lining in director Rob Reiner's later output.

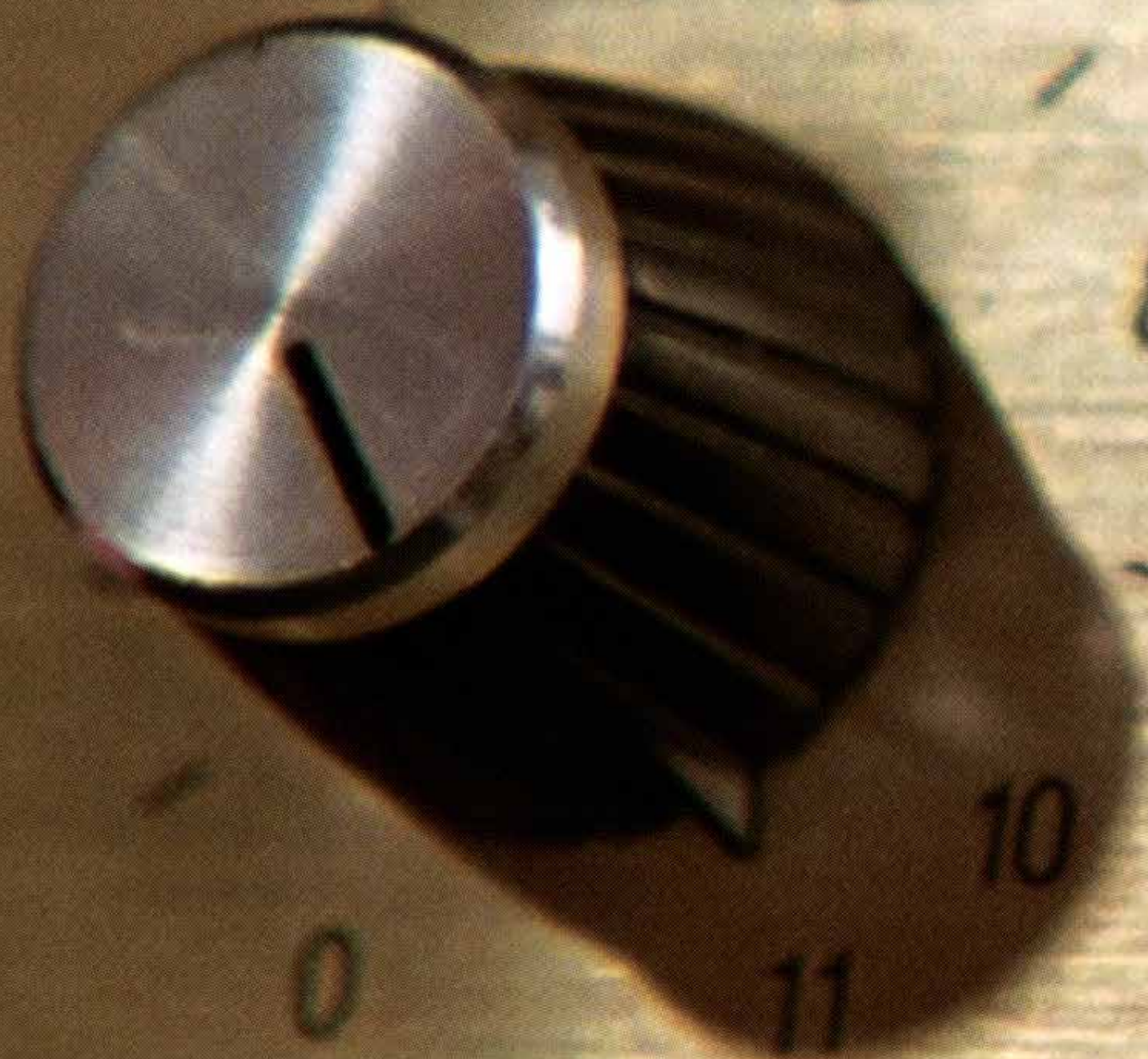
By the way, the Alamo Drafthouse is celebrating music in movies all month long, so while we're plowing through THIS IS SPINAL TAP's beanfield on this sex farm, make sure to check out the other listings for movies that'll make you sing, like A HARD DAY'S NIGHT, HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH, GIMME SHELTER, PITCH PERFECT and VELVET GOLDMINE. ✕





# THE MOVIES

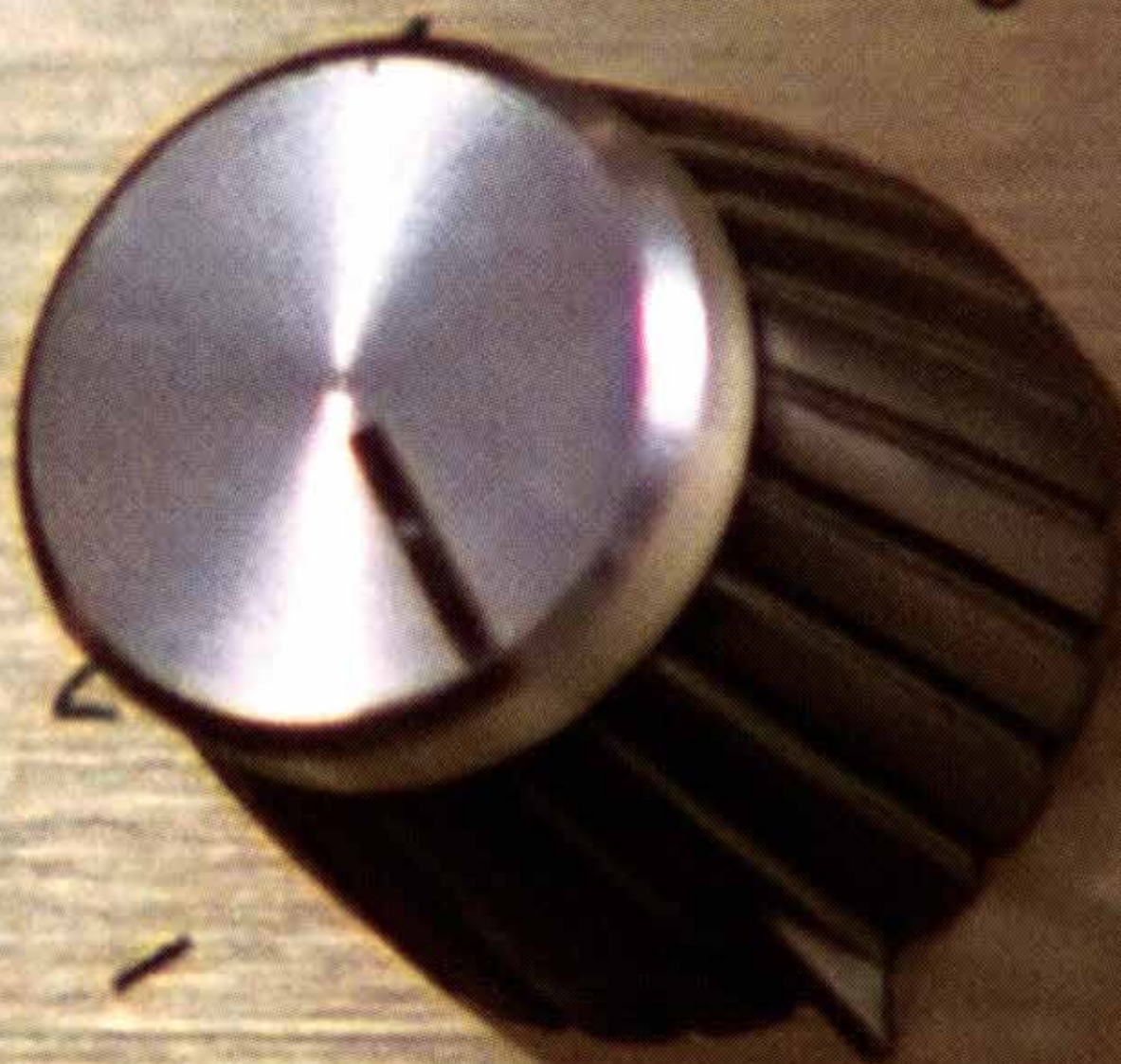
VOLUME I





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# Screening In July at the Alamo Drafthouse

*This July, the Alamo Drafthouse is going to 11! All month, we're presenting a lineup based on the most rocking musical films of all time. For tickets, showtimes, formats, and a full list of titles, visit **[draffthouse.com](http://draffthouse.com)**.*

## A HARD DAY'S NIGHT

Dir: Richard Lester, 1964, 87 min

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Meet the Beatles! Just one month after they exploded onto the U.S. scene with their ED SULLIVAN SHOW appearance, John, Paul, George and Ringo began working on a project that would bring their revolutionary talent to the big screen. A HARD DAY'S NIGHT, in which the bandmates play slapstick versions of themselves, captured the astonishing moment when they officially became the singular, irreverent idols of their generation and changed music forever. Directed with raucous, anything-goes verve by Richard Lester and featuring a slew of iconic pop anthems, including the title track, "Can't Buy Me Love," "I Should Have Known Better," and "If I Fell," A HARD DAY'S NIGHT, which reconceived the movie musical and exerted an incalculable influence on the music video, is one of the most deliriously entertaining movies of all time. (Tommy Swenson)

## EMPIRE RECORDS

Dir: Allan Moyle, 1995, PG-13, 90 min

[BUY TICKETS](#)

Whenever people ask me, "What's your dream job?" I always have the same answer: duh, working at Empire Records!! What could be better than spending your days rocking out to '90s alterna, throwing fake funerals, yelling "SHOPLIFTER!" and, most importantly, celebrating Rex Manning Day?

This movie never fails to make me nostalgic for the '90s, a time when Liv Tyler was just that chick from the Aerosmith videos and Renée Zellweger was not yet a bobblehead. Back then, you could say "Fight the Man!" and listen to the Gin Blossoms without being ironic!

So if you've ever found yourself doing the Lucas dance or gluing quarters to the floor as an "artistic statement," come join us for Girlie Night, where yelling "Oh REXY, you're so SEXY!" will be highly encouraged. (Sarah Pitre)

## GIMME SHELTER

Dir: Albert Maysles, David Maysles, Charlotte Zwerin, 1970, R, 91 min

[BUY TICKETS](#)

*"There were four births, four deaths, and an awful lot of scuffles reported."*

In San Francisco of 1969 the Rolling Stones were set to give a free concert on the Altamont Speedway. Hordes gathered and many were high and/or naked before the first band even got onstage. The Hell's Angels were hired as bouncers, and tensions between them and the crowd flared up until one spectator was murdered. The events alone make for a fascinating story, but in the hands of the masterful Maysles brothers and Charlotte Zwerin, the resulting film is much more. Capturing the days leading up to the concert, we see Mick Jagger in top form at Madison Square Garden, a great contrast to his sputtering antics on the Altamont stage as he reacts to the audience chaos. The directors intercut scenes of the Stones watching footage on a flatbed editor (with Mick Jagger referring to his own yammering at a press conference as "rubbish"), an innovative technique that further brings the band down to earth because we know they're looking for the answers to where it went wrong as much as we are. (Cristina Cacioppo)

## HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH

Dir: John Cameron Mitchell, 2001, R, 91 min

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Got a sweet tooth? HEDWIG's got some sugar for ya.

In 2001, John Cameron Mitchell's adaptation of his own off-Broadway musical blitzkrieged its way into the hearts of losers, misfits and rock 'n' rollers everywhere, a cult triumph of irreverence that created an entire army of worshipful Hedheads. Mitchell plays the East German transgender rock star who stands before us "in a divide between East and West, man and woman, slavery and freedom, top and bottom." And you'd better not try to tear her down.



With rollicking, endlessly catchy songs by Stephen Trask, singularly vibrant cinematography by Frank G. DeMarco, a wicked little sense of humor and a message about staying true to yourself no matter what the world tries to take from you, **HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH** is a beacon for the LGBT community and for anyone who has ever felt out of place.

So put on some makeup, turn up the eight-track and pull that wig down from the shelf. **HEDWIG**'s the punk-rock star of stage and screen, and she ain't never turning back! (Meredith Borders)

### **THIS IS SPINAL TAP**

Dir: Rob Reiner, 1984, R, 82 min

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Even if it was not technically the first one, **SPINAL TAP** is still pretty much the granddaddy of all mockumentaries. This renowned satire focusing on the latest American comeback tour of the legendary, but now aging, rock group (dubbed "one of England's loudest bands") still manages to be hilarious and fresh even 30 years later.

The comedic and musical trio of Harry Shearer, Michael McKean and Christopher Guest (who all star and wrote the script) have amazing chemistry together. This helps sell the film's faux documentary style as real, which then makes all the absurdity that much more entertaining. Focusing on the easy targets of musicians' ego, stupidity and sensitivity, these three use the gamut of their comedy skill to craft what feel like unbelievably real characters. You laugh at them, but in a strange way you kind of care about them, too.

And that tone, which director Rob Reiner and his three music-teers employ here, makes **SPINAL TAP** so special. Sure the mini-Stonehenge and dead drummer gags are great ("He died in a bizarre gardening accident"), and nothing really beats Guest's delivery in almost every scene, but it's the unexpected heart that sets the film apart.

Original, brutally funny and masterfully made, **SPINAL TAP** will forever remain the most quintessential rock 'n' roll comedy ever made. (R.J. LaForce)

### **THAT THING YOU DO!**

Dir: Tom Hanks, 1996, PG, 108 min

[BUY TICKETS](#)

Shades hits the sticks, Jimmy has the voice, Lenny is the jokester on the guitar and... the bass player... plays bass in this Tom Hanks-written and directed musical masterpiece of '90s cinema and '60s nostalgia. They're a ragtag group of college-aged kids with dead end jobs and nowhere to go. Drawn together for a

talent showcase at their local college, these boys let a simple case of the jitters speed up a tempo and start a revolution that would launch them into the musical stratosphere. Friendships will be tested, relationships could be broken and infinitely listenable ear worms will burrow deep into the recesses of your mind until you succumb to their pop sugary toe-taps in the hopelessly enjoyable and ridiculously rewatchable **THAT THING YOU DO!**

Released to positive reviews and a modestly successful box office, **THAT THING YOU DO!** is a passion project that is just as pleasant as the man who made it. The film chronicles the meteoric rise of these four men and shows the seedy underbelly of what can happen when fame and ego collide with success and money. You'll laugh, you'll cry, and you'll most likely end up singing the title song on repeat until someone punches you.

"And if I know you you're doin' that thing, everyday just doin' that thing, I can't take you doing that thing you do!" Bum bum bum **PUNCH!** (Greg MacLennan)

### **THE LAST DRAGON**

Dir: Michael Schultz, 1985, PG-13, 109 min

[BUY TICKETS](#)

After achieving the final level of martial arts mastery, Bruce Leroy is tasked to journey out into the scummy world of New York City to embark upon his final quest to become **THE LAST DRAGON** and achieve the ever-elusive glow to earn him the title of the greatest martial arts master to have ever lived. But when low-down, no-good, all-around bad mamma jamma Sho'Nuff shows up to destroy Leroy, an epic battle of Good vs. Evil explodes that leaves '80s pop divas, breakdancing fools and child kung-fu prodigies in its wake. In the end, only one can be the master.

A neon-soaked, blaxploitation, kung-fu musical with karate chops as strong as its comedy, **THE LAST DRAGON** is undeniable insanity specifically cultivated for your eyeballs' confectionery consumption. The jokes will zing right through you as the punches smash your bones, leaving your head only to bob to the rhythm of the night while your brain melts to mush as you witness this ultra-explosion of totally '80's wildness. **ZZANG!!!** (Greg MacLennan)

### **HIGH FIDELITY**

Dir: Stephen Frears, 2000, R, 114 min

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*"What came first, the music or the misery... Did I listen to pop music because I was miserable or was I miserable because I listened to pop music?"*

There's really no more populist choice for best male romantic comedy lead than John Cusack. Pop culture aficionado Chuck Klosterman wrote his great essay "This is Emo" with that notion in mind. Basically, throughout the '80s John Cusack became the nice guy a girl should want to fall in love with.

That's what makes his performance as Rob Gordon in *HIGH FIDELITY* so interesting and complicated. He's a thirty-something that owns a record store and is obsessed with music. Unlike Cusack's earlier personas, Rob isn't a good guy. He's a funny guy. He's a smart guy. And, on the occasional night out, he's a charming guy. He's not necessarily a bad guy, but he's not a good guy... yet.

After his girlfriend, Laura (Iben Hjejle) dumps him, he does what any of us would do. He recounts his past failed relationships in his head, allowing us to see the pre-pubescent Rob, the teenage Rob, the college Rob and the young adult Rob -- and we realize he hasn't come too far. He stalks Laura at the apartment where she's staying, which makes us all seem a little less crazy. He tries to find solace with his two buddies who work at the record store he owns (the brilliantly juxtaposed Jack Black and Todd Louiso). None of it really helps.

Cusack wrote the script with his writing partners from *GROSSE POINTE BLANK*. It's based off of Nick Hornby's honest look at dating, maturing and accepting. They pretty much nail Hornby's tone and style while moving the setting from London to Chicago. The unexpected choice of British director Stephen Frears works wonders as the film has a great sense of purpose while seeming incredibly loose and funny.

By the end *HIGH FIDELITY* reaches the apex of what a great romantic comedy should be without seeming like it was trying to in the first place. (R.J. LaForce)

## **PITCH PERFECT**

Dir: Jason Moore, 2012, PG-13, 112 min

[BUY TICKETS](#)

Are you ready to get pitch-slapped? Join us for an aca-awesome and totally interactive screening of *PITCH PERFECT*!

Girlie Night and the Action Pack have teamed up to bring you a night where making music with your mouth isn't just encouraged, it's downright mandatory. We've subtitled all of your a capella lady jams, so you can sing-along with the Barden Bellas and the Treblemakers, as well as all of your favorite quotes, because we're Dixie Chick serious about loving this movie.

We'll also have yellow Bellas scarves and special plastic cups for everyone so you can try to be as talented as

Anna Kendrick (good luck with that). And, as long as you're not the cookie-tossing Aubrey type, you're encouraged to compete in our live riff-off before the movie for a chance to win a totally fake replica of the microphone that Hoobastank used when they rocked the performing arts center!

So start practicing your harmonies and your mermaid dancing, but leave those lame sock puppets at home, because we're heading to nationals, bitches. Aca-believe it! (Sarah Pitre)

## **ROAD HOUSE**

Dir: Rowdy Herrington, 1989, R, 114 min

*"Pain don't hurt."*

James Dalton (Patrick Swayze) lives the life of a loner, fights like a professional and loves like there's no tomorrow. He has a zen calm about him, but you double-cross him and you're likely to have your throat ripped out. He's the best bouncer in the business and he's about to take on the dirtiest job ever when he moves from New York for a gig at the Double Deuce in Jasper, Missouri. Pulse pounding honky-tonk, fisticuffs and beautiful mustaches soon follow in the greatest action film to take place almost exclusively in a bar.

It's the Swayze days of summer and it's high time we celebrate the union of the best hair in the business with the greatest mustache the world has ever seen (Sam Elliot). A whole slew of big boy southern riff raff try and derail our expertly coiffed heroes but you can take the biggest guy in the world, shatter his knee and he'll drop like a stone. So it's Dalton's way or the highway, he's always gonna be nice... just don't make him ask twice. (Greg MacLennan)

## **SOME LIKE IT HOT**

Dir: Billy Wilder, 1959, NR, 120 min

[BUY TICKETS](#)

The term "greatest comedy of all time" gets thrown around a lot, and the laurels of this statement frequently fall on the shoulders of *SOME LIKE IT HOT*. That's quite a weight to bear, and when you think about what tickles your funny bone you don't immediately think of the stylings of a film from 1959. If you haven't already taken the plunge to sit down with this Billy Wilder classic, I promise that you will not be disappointed.

Tony Curtis, Jack Lemmon and Marilyn Monroe have never been better in this tale of two struggling musicians who witness a mob hit and are forced to hit the road with an all-female traveling band in the midst of Prohibition. It's Curtis/Lemmon in drag followed by nonstop situational humor: Monroe as a boozy floozy!





Lemmon being wooed by a male millionaire! Men dressed as women sneaking in hooch on a train full of ladies and musical instruments! If seeing these three titans of cinema on display under the Academy Award-winning guidance of the great Billy Wilder isn't enough for you, well then, *Cinema Cocktails* is here to ease you into it in non-Prohibition-style.

Alamo Beverage Director (and master mixologist) Bill Norris is turning his sights towards Champagne mixes and Manhattans made in hot water bottles. So grab a drink, dress yourself up (in whatever gender you prefer), and get yourself ready for (undeniably) the greatest comedy of all time... now with booze! (Greg MacLennan)

### **VELVET GOLDMINE**

Dir: Todd Haynes, 1998, R, 124 min

[BUY TICKETS](#)

Witness the rise and fall of Ziggy Stardust... er, sort of. In director Todd Haynes's ode to the glam era, Christian Bale plays Arthur Stuart, a Brit reporter in 1984 New York begrudgingly tasked by his editor to do a "Where are they Now" piece on Brian Slade, a glittery, androgynous Bowie-esque glam superstar. Slade dominated the charts in 1974, only to mysteriously disappear from the limelight completely after staging his own on-stage "assassination."

Through flashbacks to his own turbulent adolescent days as a glam fanboy and interviews with those who knew Slade, Arthur pieces together some of the mystery of who Slade was and what he might be up to now. Much like his more critically and commercially

successful homage to Dylan, 2007's *I'M NOT THERE*, Haynes masterfully blurs fact and legend, people and personas, into one fantastic cinematic mash. Sure, the history is dubious (Bowie certainly thought so and sadly refused to let his music be used), but that's totally beside the point: his vision of the era is so completely captivating it's bound to leave a little glitter on your collar. (George Bragdon)

### **WATTSTAX**

Dir: Mel Stuart, 1973, R, 98 min

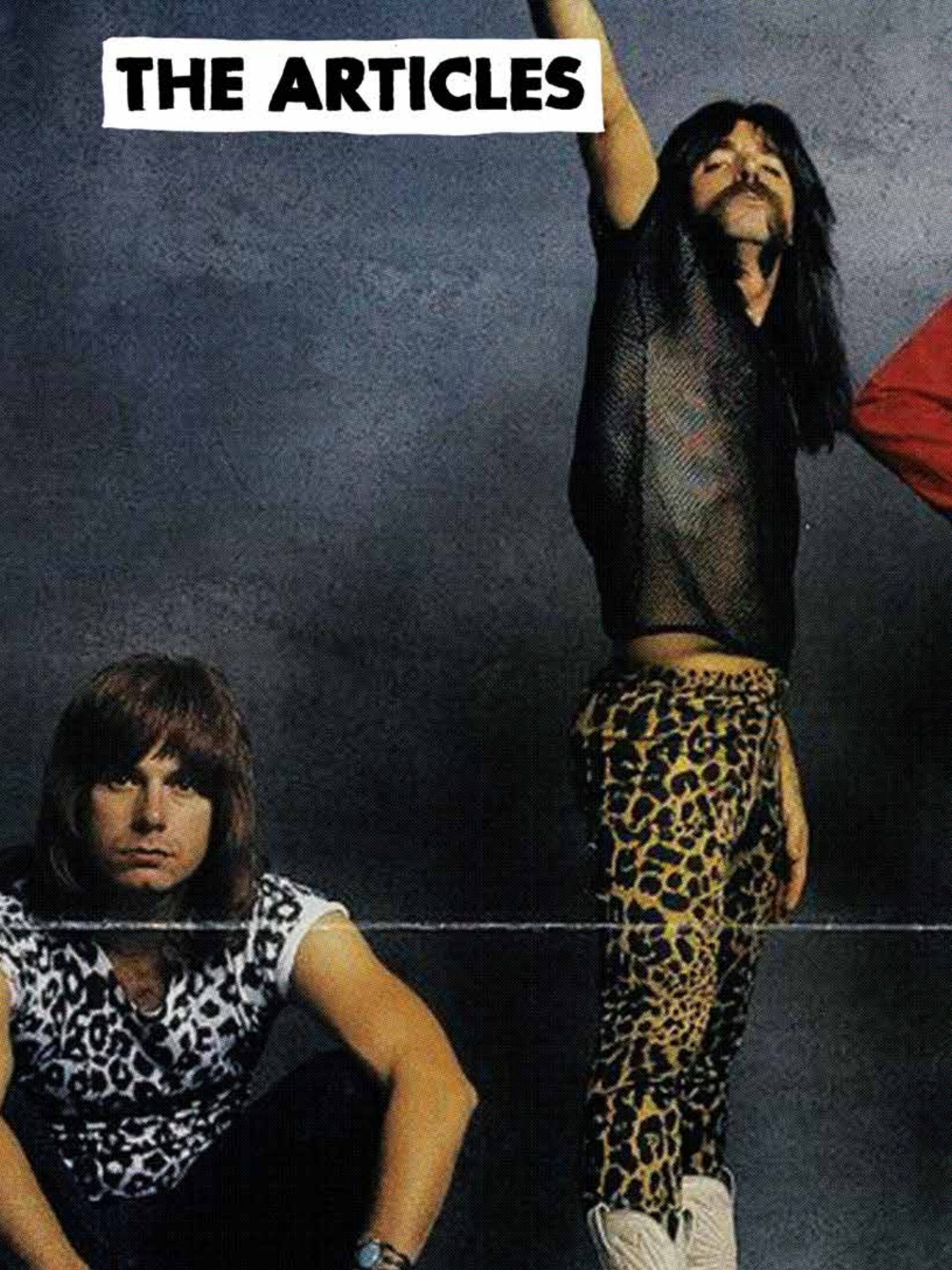
[BUY TICKETS](#)

Wattstax the concert was an incredible outpouring of music, soul and the black experience. Staged in the L.A. Coliseum in the Summer of 1972, it brought together over 100,000 people in a spirit of joy, pride and celebration. Virtually the entire Stax Records roster, including Isaac Hayes, Rufus Thomas and the Staple Singers, put their hearts into performances that matched the magic of the occasion and forged a connection with the crowd which is still remembered and revered.

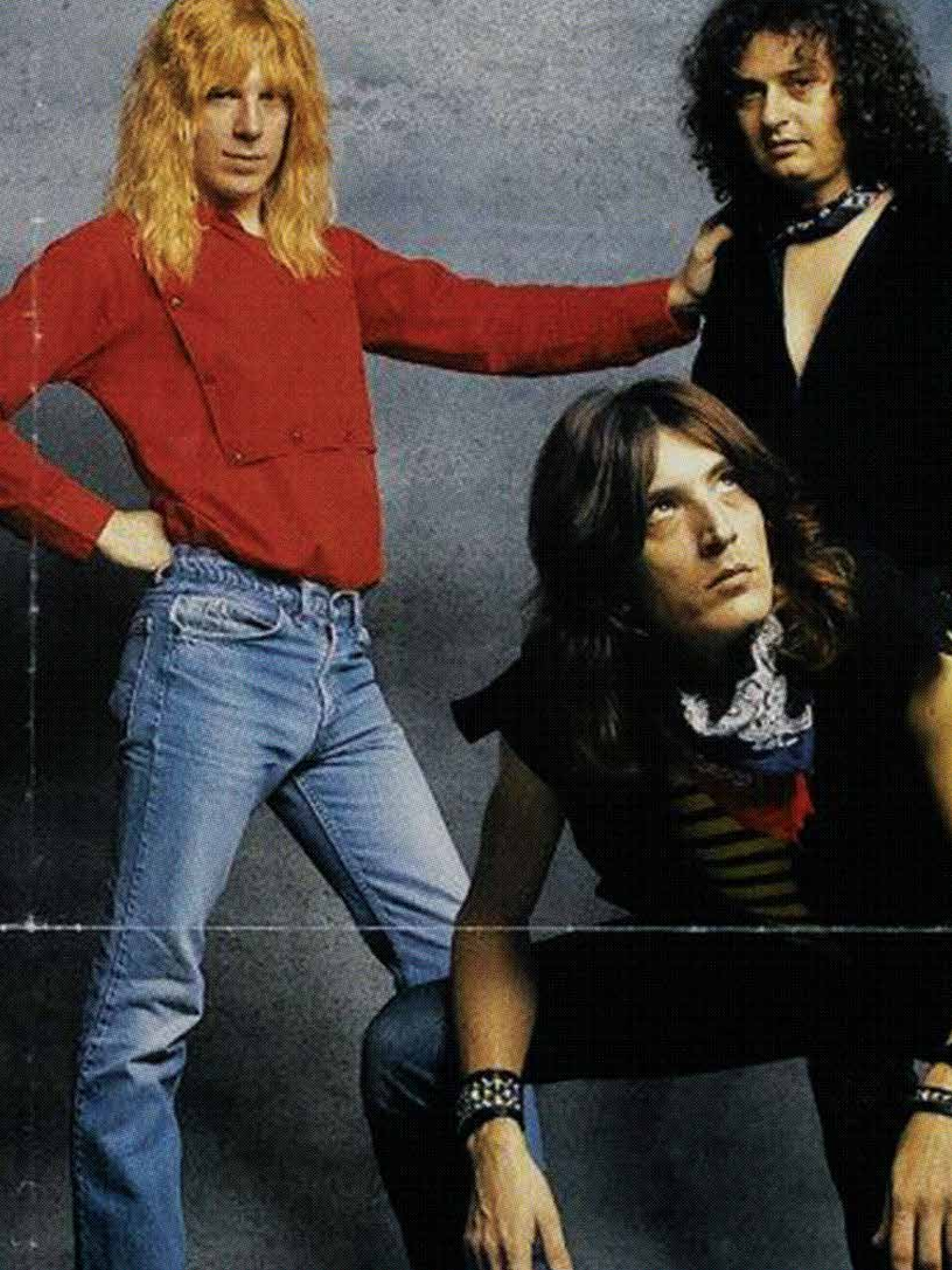
WATTSTAX the movie is more than just incredible musical performances. Through topical street interviews on subjects ranging from music and love to politics and the 1965 Watts Revolt, the film provides unexpectedly potent insight into life in Watts. A young, relatively unknown Richard Pryor peppers the film with biting wit in a series of standup routines, binding the interviews and musical performances together into a powerful statement on life in Black America. (Tommy Swenson) ✕



# THE ARTICLES









# BAD NEWS: Spinal Tap's Forgotten Cousins

**ANDREW TOD**

Badass Digest Gaming Editor

@mistertodd

Read more at [badassdigest.com](http://badassdigest.com)





Their favorite kind of music is heavy metal music.

*"The f\*\*\*ing worst band I've ever seen in the f\*\*\*ing world." -- Phil "Philthy Animal" Taylor, Motörhead*

Spinal Tap may be the biggest parody metal band in the world, but they're not the only one. Countless imitators have sprung up over the years since the release of THIS IS SPINAL TAP, but one oft-ignored counterpart of the group appeared a year earlier, and their English accents were genuine.

English comedy underwent something of a revolution in the early 1980s, with talents like Ben Elton, Eddie Izzard and Jo Brand springing out of the alternative comedy scene. The Comic Strip, a company of comedians based out of Soho, were the icons of the movement, rising to popularity with live shows before producing several seasons of their anthology TV series THE COMIC STRIP PRESENTS and a couple features. Company members Rik Mayall, Adrian Edmondson, and Nigel Planer in particular saw great success with their shows THE YOUNG ONES, FILTHY RICH & CATFLAP and BOTTOM (sans Planer). They also formed three-quarters of Britain's worst heavy metal band: Bad News.

1983's THE COMIC STRIP PRESENTS: BAD NEWS TOUR was produced concurrently with THIS IS SPINAL TAP, so there's no ripoffery in play here, but the basic idea is the same: the episode is a parody of rockumentaries, following the eponymous metal band on a "tour" to the rockin' UK hotspot of Grantham. Shenanigans ensue.

The key difference between Spinal Tap and Bad News lies in competence. While Spinal Tap's fictitious history features its share of disasters, there is the implication that they saw at least a little success along the way. Bad News, on the other hand, are just shit. Only two band members have any level of musical ability. All of them are pathetic. Nobody listens to them, their music is even dumber than the bottom of Tap's codpiece-shaped barrel, and as a group of musicians and human beings, they're completely dysfunctional.

*"I could play Stairway to Heaven when I was twelve. Jimmy Page didn't actually write it until he was 22. I think that says quite a lot." - Vim Fuego, Bad News*

Vim Fuego (Edmondson) is the fire behind Bad News. Desperate to escape his real-life alter ego of

painter/decorator Alan Metcalfe, he's all spirit and gusto, spitting fury when he's not waxing ineloquent about the puerile "politics" in his lyrics. Toilet-obsessed Den Dennis resembles actor Nigel Planer's YOUNG ONES character Neil Pye, except where Neil's slowness comes from depression, Den's is borne of gormless stupidity. Colin Grigson is a rock poseur par excellence, but underneath his leopard-print exterior lies an uptight, childish bank clerk, Rik Mayall's eyes popping hilariously on the many occasions when his ability to play bass is questioned. Only drummer Spider Webb (Peter Richardson), with a banshee giggle and a drug problem, is comfortable with his lifestyle, which goes some way to explaining the verse in "Masturbike" where the rest of the band calls him a "f\*\*\*ing c\*\*t." Rounding out the Comic Strip cast, the band is complemented by Dawn French as a schoolgirl groupie (and later manager in the 1988 followup MORE BAD NEWS) and Jennifer Saunders as an ultrahip rock journalist who outclasses the band in every respect.

The joke's always on Bad News, whether the great cosmic joke of their existence or the in-universe documentary crew pulling pranks to jolt them into conflict. The most galling is the band's appearance at the 1986 Monsters of Rock festival alongside Ozzy Osbourne and Def Leppard, booked solely to see how the audience would react. Thanks to a riot at the gig, the band is left physically destroyed: Den with broken limbs, Vim in major surgery (and "looking quite dodgy actually"), Colin with a slit throat and Spider in full traction after blowing himself up in order to avoid being beaten up. These harrowing images are the last ever recorded of Bad News.

*"I am shitting bricks, but it's got nothing to do with nerves. It's just, like... this problem I got." - Den Dennis, Bad News*

The music of Bad News is more closely aligned with early British metal bands like Motörhead than Spinal Tap's more grandiose influences. Produced by Queen's Brian May, it's tight and fast, with swaggering energy that could only be generated by guys whose opinion of their genitals vastly exceeds their reality.

Fuego's lyrics present a broad, imbecilic view of the rock-and-roll lifestyle. "Drink Till I Die" is a paean to alcoholism; "Warriors of Genghis Khan" an ode to extreme violence and sex. The most consistent throughline is the self-aggrandizement of songs like "Hey Hey Bad News" and "Bad News." In the real world, their biggest hit (peaking at #44) was a barely coherent cover of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody"; in fiction, you have to presume it's their tribute to the British tradition of Christmas



singles, “Cashing In On Christmas,” in which the band proudly proclaim they’re “rockin’ all the way to the bank.”

Those are the songs the band can actually get through in their entirety. Several tracks, like “Excalibur” and “Bad Dreams,” appear only as aborted attempts at performance, the butt of comedy material as the band members bicker. Bad News’ 1987 self-titled album is a prime example of a phenomenon dying away nowadays: the comedy record. Like MONTY PYTHON and NOT THE NINE O’CLOCK NEWS’ efforts before them, BAD NEWS mostly consists of spoken-word comedy. It’s an enjoyable listen, with a few songs peppered through short sketches and band infighting. Similar collections of tracks were reissued in 1989, 1993 and 2004; their rumored second album “Satan Ate My Knob” never surfaced.

Right now, there’s a parallel universe (theoretically, infinite parallel universes) where Bad News occupies the place in mock-and-faux history that Spinal Tap does in ours. People are wearing “Here Comes The Beast Again” T-shirts and broccoli-print underwear. “Masturbike” is a karaoke staple. Children beg their parents for Den Dennis haircuts. But that is not our universe. In our universe, there is only one appropriate response to the call of “Hey Hey Bad News”:

F\*\*k off, Bad News. ✖





# A Review of Spinal Tap's Latest Album **SHARK SANDWICH**

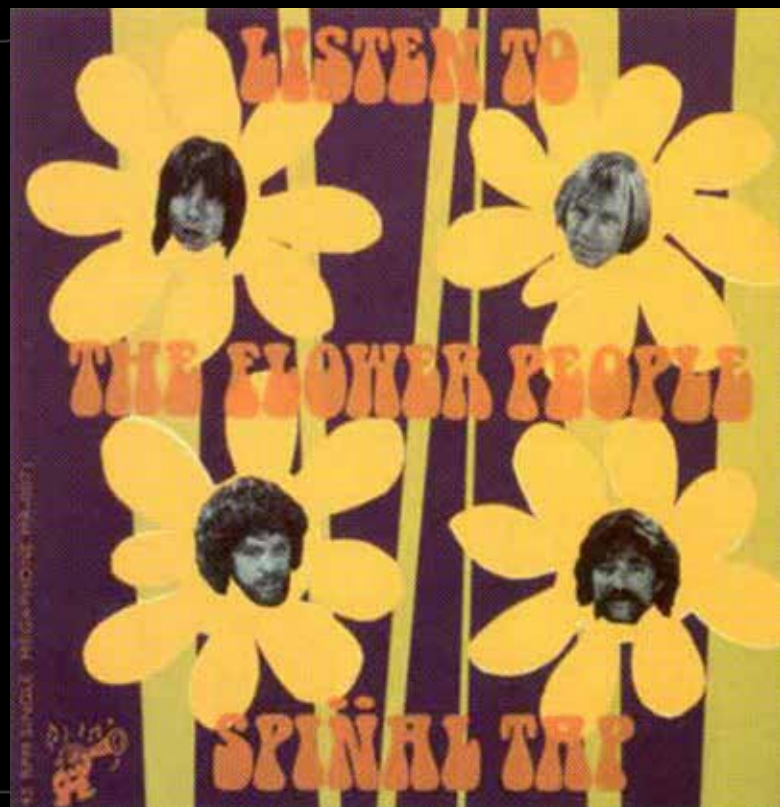
**EVAN DICKSON**

Badass Digest Contributor

@evandickson

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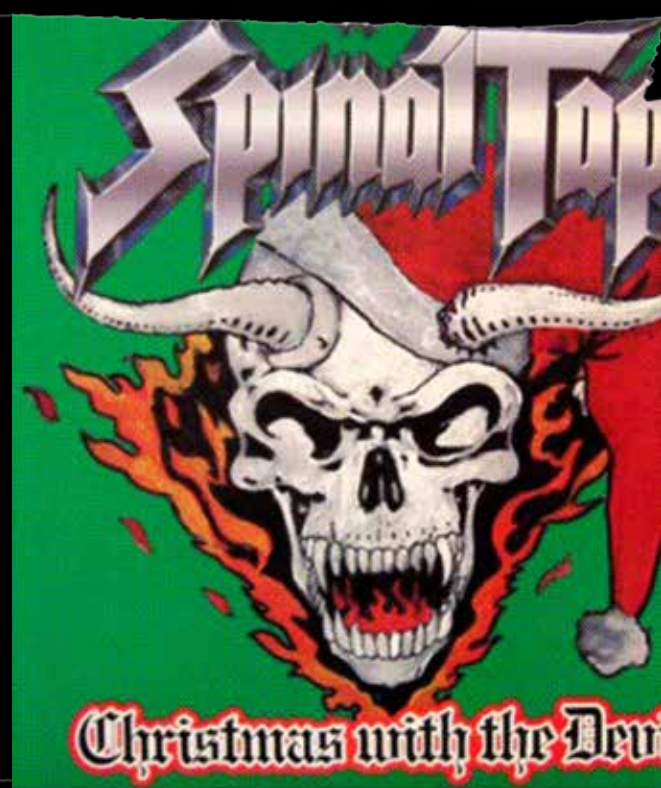
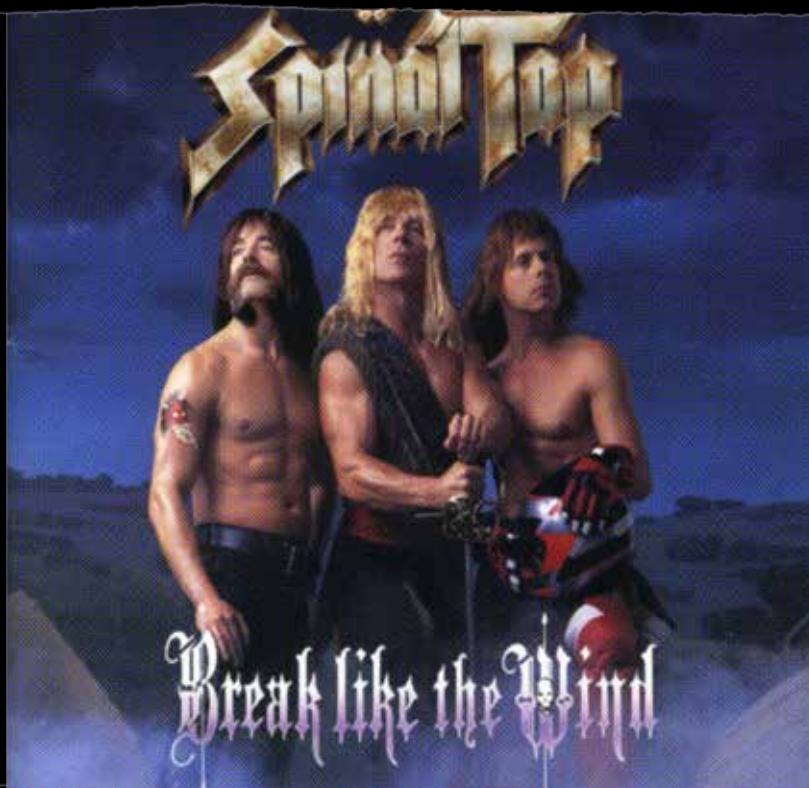


*Note: In Spinal Tap lore, SHARK SANDWICH is the immediate predecessor to SMELL THE GLOVE, the album and tour that anchor THIS IS SPINAL TAP. You may be most familiar with this LP from the two word review – “Shit Sandwich” – featured in that film. Still, canon dictates that this magnum opus birthed “Sex Farm” and thus it would be irresponsible to relegate it to the dustbins of history. As such, the following is a recently unearthed (entirely fictional) review that serves as an antidote to the small-minded derision and abysmal sales that greeted this (nonexistent) masterpiece upon its release.*

I can hear the typewriters click-clackety away already. I can feel the rush to judgment in the air. I can smell the sweat escaping the pores of my fellow critical brethren as a result of their strained and determined efforts not to listen, but to judge. After all, this is Spinal Tap we're talking about here. A band long thought to be running on empty of both ambition and talent. A band unjustly accused of appropriating whatever identities happened to be in vogue (as if remaining relevant is a bad thing). A band it is very much in vogue to hate (and a band that at times seems to hate itself). But what happens when such a band delivers a late stage masterpiece such as this one? With a lead time of three months I won't know for sure what my fellow critics will say until the leaves turn to autumn and the smell of spiced ale is on the wind. But I do hope they take notice of the quiet majesty at work in even the loudest of cuts featured on SHARK SANDWICH.

It's been three long years since ROCK 'N ROLL CREATION (aka THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO SPINAL TAP) disappeared in a flurry of bad press and in-fighting with the brass at Megaphone Records. But the boys (David St. Hubbins, Nigel Tufnel and Derek Smalls) are now well-rested and ably supported by new drummer Mick Shrimpton and powerhouse label Polymer records. The result is nothing short of magisterial. Ambition, excellence and triumph personified. If you rock hard enough, long enough, you produce enough duck butter to slicken even the tightest of grooves and that's what we have here. Slick, tight grooves with a puckish warmth that is undeniable. Opening with the ominous instrumental “Soggy Loaf [Wet Bread],” the tone of the table is set. This will be a hot and juicy meal, yes... but it will also have bite. From there we're off to the races with the thunderous one-two punch of “No Place Like Nowhere” and the





unflinchingly pulsating “Throb Detector.” It is utterly what I imagine sex must feel like. When a woman or man lowers themselves onto you, that connection, the realization that you indeed are somebody and that somebody else wants to be with you, that’s what “Throb Detector” actually sounds like. I think.

We then move onto the beautifully flaccid pastures of “Cream Of Quint [Seaman],” a profoundly languid and peaceful instrumental (yes, another one), all aqua tones and velvety lust. It’s here that Spinal Tap reminds us that their staying power rests not only in their perseverance, but in their willingness to innovate. Is that a hint of mixolydian I smell? Indeed! Dulcet tones, flange, delay, reverb and the slight cuckooing of the ocean are mother’s milk for lonely ears.

At the end of the A-side we reach the album’s sole sore spot, “Sex Farm.” When the books are written on SHARK SANDWICH, and they will be, this will be noted as the sole misstep. The allegory drawn here hits uncomfortably close to home. While one imagines carnal relations of every variety are pleasurable, intercourse with animals is very much illegal. While the song doesn’t get too explicit in this regard, it does irresponsibly tap into familiar urges that must be kept at bay. This song is best left forgotten, a task possible with time and effort.

Things recover nicely on Side B with the multi-track suite, “Running The Labyrinth.” Never in my life have I been subjected to such an exhilarating, sustained sequence of emotions. Kindness, love, acceptance, jubilation -- no more staying out of the sun because of my moles for I am free! Don’t get me wrong, this breathlessly tumescent tapestry is pummeling. With an intensity even hotter than 1975’s live album JAP HABIT, it can be a challenge to stay afloat for all 25 minutes. But I implore you to take this ride with me, for I cannot abide these highs and lows alone much longer.

Indeed Spinal Tap are back and, dare I say, better than ever. I can’t ever recall feeling quite like this, in fact. In my 30-plus years as a music journalist I have sat, quivering and cold, for even a hint of the pageantry on display here. When the brutish rain of the English countryside beads down on me I have the comfort now of knowing things I have not known before. I have heard SHARK SANDWICH and will keep it in my heart. Always. Won’t you take a bite? ✕

— J. Spaulding Glenshire



# On Musicians and Movies

**NOAH SEGAN**

Badass Digest Contributor

@kidblue

Read more at [badassdigest.com](http://badassdigest.com)





In a battle royale between sheer, unbridled egomania, filmmakers and rock stars could duke it out ad infinitum. Nary have two collaborative mediums been so rife with individual motivations. Adding to the enigma of how auteurs and songwriters manage to get anything done is when they work together, which happens frequently. Perhaps there's a kinship -- game recognizing game. Maybe there's that dirty little secret that all "doms" are really just "subs." Somehow, rockers and moviemakers find themselves intertwined on the reg, and their marriages are often as profound as those between actors, cinematographers, editors, writers and producers.

Full Disclosure: this isn't a comprehensive list of rock stars who write movie music, so don't trip on your favorite shit being omitted, you megalomaniac. You don't get brownie points for mentioning Tindersticks writing for Claire Denis or Sonic Youth composing on DEMONLOVER. Wax your mustache and ride your old-timey bicycle down to your local artisanal cheese shop if you want that kind of stroking. Yeah, doggg, I saw Goblin recently, too.

With little argument, Danny Elfman is the epitome of rock star-composers. In the '70s and '80s, he fronted seminal art-punk-rock group Oingo Boingo and has gone on to be endlessly prolific, both culturally and in his working relationships, specifically with Tim Burton. What sets Elfman apart from many similar collaborations is that he has fully embraced film and theatrical composing while eschewing his roots as a rock frontman. The Pepsi to Elfman's Coke, Mark Mothersbaugh, has also stepped back from leading a band, but still maintains his Devo persona regularly, playing shows. While composing for films is a non-mutually-exclusive way to diversify, it's Elfman who has gooble-gobbled himself to us cinefreaks.

As far as direct connections between a film, filmmaker and its composer, Neil Young's soundtrack to Jim Jarmusch's DEAD MAN is the watermark. For a guy who represents the dystopian grounds on the bottom of Counter Culture's coffee mug, writing music for an existential black-and-white Western couldn't be more apropos. Except it was. Young eschewed the usual form-and-function of writing music inspired by the film or its content -- which also likely means serving oneself and whatever's in the back-catalog -- for what he's best at. He rocked the fuck out while watching the movie. He'd sit in his studio, Old Black in his lap, and he'd screen Jarmusch's masterpiece, playing along when it felt right, finding the pieces that fit. Young treated the film as if it was a member of his band, a duet. He defied the usual moviemaking approach of harping on the result by embracing the foundation of rocking, the process.

Let's blur the lines even further. After writing a couple tunes for Peckinpah's PAT GARRETT & BILLY THE KID, Bloody Sam gave Robert Zimmerman an acting role in it. When production on the film was finished, he immediately went into the studio to record an entire album. Bob Dylan's soundtrack to the film, straddling its own production, is another testament to the anachronism of egos. With few exceptions, that record is so specifically tailored to the film's rhythms that being involved in the actual shooting couldn't have been for naught. Even more thorough is a rare occurrence of the rock star finding his way beyond composing or playing a part. Nick Cave has successfully joined composition and screenwriting, pulling double-duty on THE PROPOSITION and LAWLESS. Recently, we've enjoyed a spate of rock musicians finding their way into the theatrical zeitgeist. Guys like Johnny Greenwood and Trent Reznor have successfully found success with their very specific crescendos, maintaining their almost holier-than-thou musical reputations by joining up with cinematic counterparts. This last year, Arcade Fire staunchly defied the individualized norm and maintained a "whole band" approach to working on Spike Jonze's HER.

As my good friend Film Crit Hulk often points out, sound is half a movie. But it isn't the other way around. Us movie folks need these rockers a lot more than they need us, and maybe that humility goes somewhere. Perhaps there's a mutual respect, a code of criminality and fascism. As with most great art, the union between filmmaker and musician exists in spite of itself. It shouldn't. The result should be a mutant baby, begging to die, being force-fed into a scenario that is usually so pure. With that kind of description, This Author can't imagine anything more Rock, more Punk, or more Metal. ✕



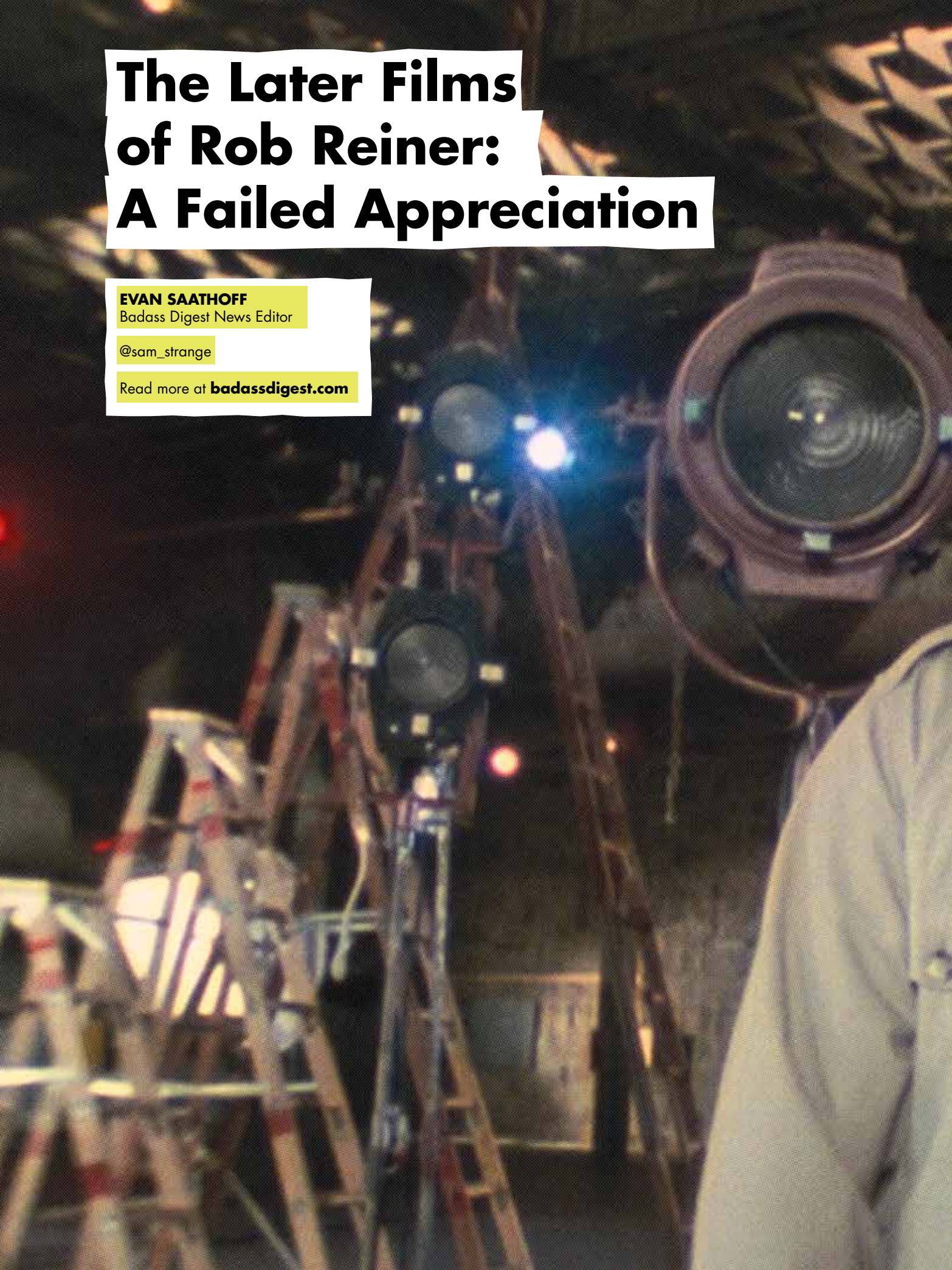
# The Later Films of Rob Reiner: A Failed Appreciation

**EVAN SAATHOFF**

Badass Digest News Editor

@sam\_strange

Read more at [badassdigest.com](https://badassdigest.com)









THIS IS SPINAL TAP, THE PRINCESS BRIDE, STAND BY ME, WHEN HARRY MET SALLY, MISERY -- if Rob Reiner's filmography stopped there we'd probably consider him one of America's great pop directors. These films aren't just good -- some are beloved classics. THIS IS SPINAL TAP in particular stands as a cultural milestone, a legitimate masterpiece.

But Reiner's career did not stop there. While not necessarily prolific, Rob Reiner has enjoyed a steady directing career ever since his 1984 debut. A new Rob Reiner film comes out every two or three years, but chances are you don't even know he directed them. You might not even remember that they exist at all.

That's because they are not movies made with film fans in mind. At some point, and for whatever reason, Rob Reiner turned into a populist softy, producing stock, inoffensive material tailored almost exclusively for elderly folks who only see a handful of movies a year.

My task was to watch Reiner's later films and discover some silver lining within them. Perhaps with a mindset free from prejudice I might excavate some hidden thematic through-line to explain how Rob Reiner could go from being one of the most reliable directors out there (regardless of genre) to one of the most reliably worst (regardless of genre), while still being the kind of guy who can deliver such a wonderfully ribald performance in Scorsese's THE WOLF OF WALL STREET.

But I couldn't do it. There is nothing going on in these films. A couple of them manage to charm enough to be harmless. If you squint you can see Reiner revisiting tropes he utilized earlier in his career, but they are

shadows. At the end of the day, Rob Reiner is basically another Ron Howard, except Ron Howard occasionally kicks ass.

The last time I anticipated a Rob Reiner film simply for being a Rob Reiner film was the lead up to 1999's THE STORY OF US. The idea of watching the ups and downs of a rocky marriage between Bruce Willis and Michelle Pfeiffer as told by the director of WHEN HARRY MET SALLY seemed like a slam dunk. It wasn't. THE STORY OF US, like a lot of these films, suffers from lack of character and a sitcom-level realism that keeps real emotional connection at an arm's length.

But at least it had Bruce Willis and Michelle Pfeiffer. Reiner's next stab at romance, ALEX AND EMMA, trades down these titans for the aww shucks blandness of Luke Wilson and Kate Hudson. Rather than watch a relationship fall apart over several decades, we supposedly witness one blossom over the course of a month as Wilson dictates a novel while Hudson types. Reiner frequently cuts to a dramatization of the novel itself, which Wilson and Hudson freely interrupt and amend, much like Fred Savage and Peter Falk in THE PRINCESS BRIDE. But this film is nowhere near that clever. Alex and Emma make all the jokes we expect them to make, their relationship goes through the standard motions, and there's not a single spark of creativity, save for Reiner's casting of himself as Wilson's agent/publisher/whatever he is.

Probably the best film of the bunch is 2005's RUMOR HAS IT... thanks to a great cast (including an effortlessly awesome Shirley MacLaine), a truly wacky premise (Jennifer Aniston suspects she may be the





product of the sexual union made famous by *THE GRADUATE*), and a brief flirtation with some stone cold incest. The film isn't necessarily awful, it just lacks life, a crime considering its huge comedy potential. Furthermore, it fully participates in the strange and unfortunate tradition common to female-centric stories in which protagonists make awful moral decisions that hold them back from likability while asking us to accept such villainous behavior as normal. In this case, Jennifer Aniston can't decide if she's truly ready to marry nice guy Mark Ruffalo until she's cheated on him with the astoundingly rich Kevin Costner (who might be her dad). On second thought, *RUMOR HAS IT...* is amazing.

After that we run into *THE BUCKET LIST*. You know about *THE BUCKET LIST*. But have you actually seen *THE BUCKET LIST*? It is quite possibly the most John Travolta movie ever made, and John Travolta's not even in it. To give you an idea of how embarrassing it feels, just imagine Jack Nicholson strutting his way through a million gay panic jokes in *WILD HOGS*, and you get the idea. Having said that, it's not so bad.

Finally there's *FLIPPED*, a movie I had never even heard of. *FLIPPED* takes us through the adorable ups and downs of an adorable childhood romance between two adorable preteens in the adorable 1960s. It is adorable. But it is also very boring and as a nostalgic period piece absolutely pales in comparison to Reiner's amazing *STAND BY ME*. The only real noteworthy thing going for it is Aidan Quinn's performance, which hilariously alternates between heartwarming magnanimity and blistering anger.

These films actually have very little in common. They

feature wildly different stories and shoot for a variety of tones. The only consistent element between them is a kind of laziness. None care to delve any deeper than their most surface level entertainment requirements. It is with this in mind that I turn to the one later Rob Reiner film not listed above: *NORTH*.

For many, *NORTH* is the definitive turning point in Reiner's career. No matter how bad a movie he delivers from now unto the end of time, none will surpass *NORTH*'s notoriety. But here's the thing: I kind of liked *NORTH*, especially after watching all these other films. It's a bad movie; there's no doubt about that. But it's also a weird movie, one committed to its tone enough to go out on a couple of limbs it probably should have avoided. The reason we all know about *NORTH* is that it has memorable elements: Elijah Wood, a ton of cameos, a bizarre fantasy plot filled with accidentally creepy sentiments. It's awful, but it's not lazy or boring like these other entries.

So, for lack of any better answer, I propose that *NORTH* broke Rob Reiner. Emboldened by the impossibility of any experiment that could be wrong, I feel that, had *NORTH* been just a regular old flop rather than a brief poster child for the worst cinema ever created, we might have kept the good Rob Reiner a bit longer than we did. And the world would have been a better place.

And let's not forget that we still have Rob Reiner the actor. I'll take a million *BUCKET LIST*s if it means another performance like the one he gave in *THE WOLF OF WALL STREET*. In fact, hearing Rob Reiner discuss his tastes regarding female pubic hair was once on *my* bucket list. Not anymore! ✕





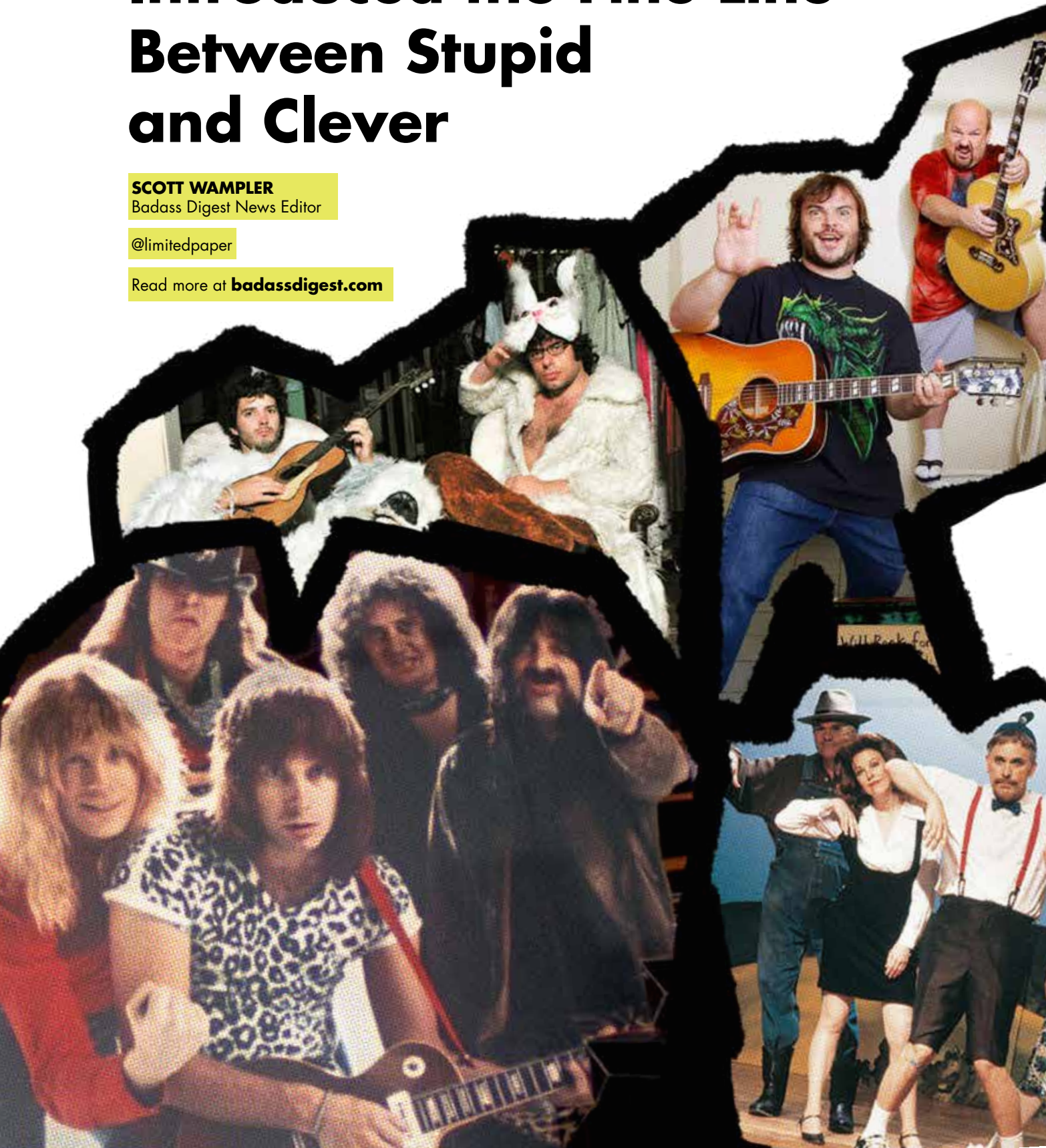
# Thirty Years Ago, THIS IS SPINAL TAP Introduced the Fine Line Between Stupid and Clever

**SCOTT WAMPLER**

Badass Digest News Editor

@limitedpaper

Read more at [badassdigest.com](http://badassdigest.com)





When ABC passed on THE T.V. SHOW -- a 1979 sketch comedy pilot starring ALL IN THE FAMILY's Rob Reiner -- they had no idea that they'd just passed up the opportunity to introduce the world to one of the most influential and enduring musical-comedy acts of all time: Spinal Tap.

Created by Reiner, Michael McKean, Christopher Guest and Harry Shearer, Spinal Tap was a swaggering, clueless, spandex-clad hair-metal band from the UK, and -- had THE T.V. SHOW been picked up -- the band would have made its debut in a faux-promo video for the song "Rock and Roll Nightmare." That never came to pass, unfortunately, but something about the Spinal Tap concept had struck a chord with its creators. Several years later, they decided to reintroduce the group in its very own feature film, THIS IS SPINAL TAP.

Ostensibly presented as a documentary by commercial director Marty DiBergi (played by Reiner), THIS IS SPINAL TAP tells the story of "one of England's loudest bands" as they embark on an extremely ill-fated tour of the United States. From the get-go, we see that the band -- lead singer David St. Hubbins (McKean), guitarist Nigel Tuffnel (Guest), and bass player Derek Smalls (Shearer) -- is utterly clueless, lacking in both self-awareness and anything resembling street smarts. But for as dumb as Spinal Tap (and virtually every other character they encounter on their journey across the States) is, Reiner also makes it clear that these guys really do know how to rock.

This is crucial to THIS IS SPINAL TAP's enduring popularity. If Spinal Tap were just a terrible band, the story being told would be unbelievable, and the joke would quickly grow tiresome; Tap's idiocy would be pathetic, something for which the audience could only feel pity (or worse: aggression). Even if everything else in the film were exactly the same, THIS IS SPINAL TAP still wouldn't quite work as a comedy because the trio of bumbling fools at the center of Reiner's mockumentary wouldn't be likable. We wouldn't root for them to

succeed. We wouldn't think, "Y'know, I think I'd actually pay to see this band put on a show."

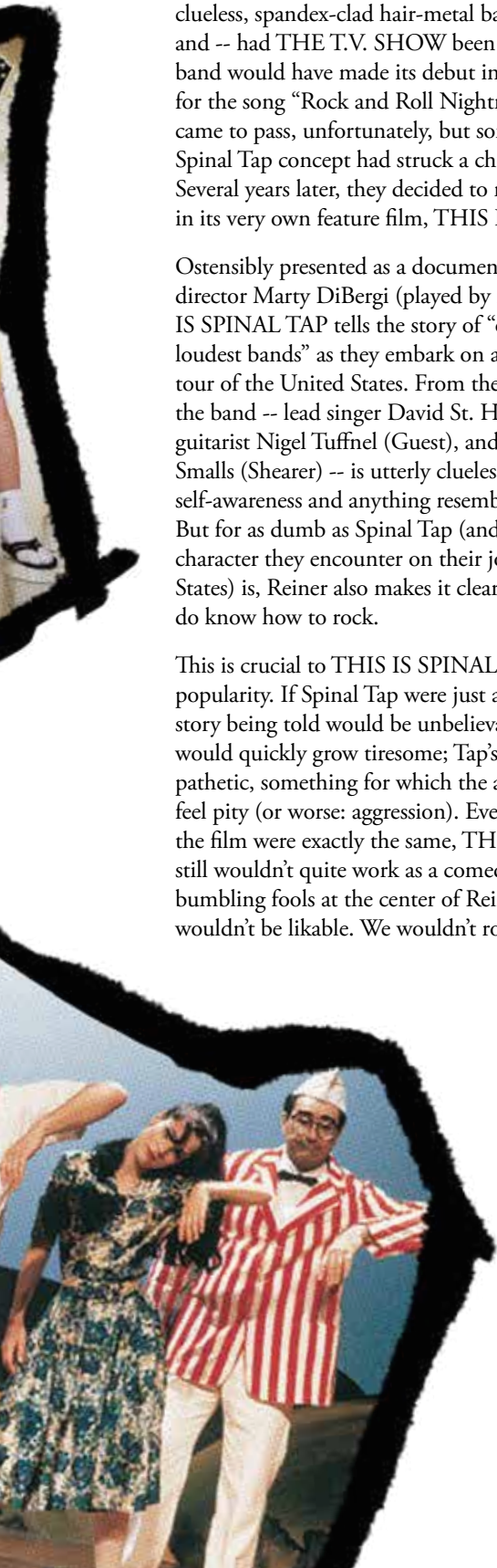
In song after song, McKean, Guest and Shearer prove (as they later would in Guest's A MIGHTY WIND, one of the many mockumentary projects Spinal Tap's members would "reunite" for in the years that followed) that they know how to rock. As obviously over-the-top as Spinal Tap's lyrics can be ("Big Bottom, Big Bottom/Talk about mud-flaps, my girl's got 'em"), the music at the center of THIS IS SPINAL TAP is genuinely awesome, a concrete foundation on which Reiner cleverly builds a very silly temple to swaggering rock'n'roll.

If Reiner's film works because of the band's musical talent, it endures because of the actors' comedy chops. THIS IS SPINAL TAP is truly one of the funniest films ever made, mandatory viewing for both comedy connoisseurs and film geeks. The film's influence is huge, leaving telltale fingerprints on virtually every musical-comedy project and mockumentary that's been released in the years since its release. Without Spinal Tap, it's possible there'd be no WAITING FOR GUFFMAN or BEST IN SHOW. ANVIL: THE STORY OF ANVIL might never have been made. We might never have experienced the majesty of FLIGHT OF THE CONCHORDS. I mean, my God, without THIS IS SPINAL TAP, there might never have been a Tenacious D. The mind reels.

Skipping SPINAL TAP will have implications on your very ability to have fun. Do so, and you risk being utterly lost whenever a friend mentions that something "goes to eleven." Oblique references to Stonehenge will fly right over your head. People will feel sorry for you in karaoke bars when you aren't able to sing along to "Tonight We're Gonna Rock You (Tonight)."

Featuring guest appearances and cameos from a murderer's row of comedic talent (including Billy Crystal, Paul Shaffer, Fran Drescher, Bruno Kirby and Fred Willard) and what may very well be the funniest performances Michael McKean, Christopher Guest and Harry Shearer have ever committed to film, Rob Reiner's THIS IS SPINAL TAP is among the very best comedies ever made, a joyous celebration of rock'n'roll excess and dimwitted buffoonery. It is a mockumentary without equal.

To paraphrase a lyric from the great David St. Hubbins: "Little girl, it's a great big world/but there's only one Spinal Tap." ✱





# **This List Goes To 11: Real World Rock Stories That Inspired SPINAL TAP**

**DEVIN FARACI**  
Badass Digest Editor-in-Chief

@devincf

Read more at [badassdigest.com](http://badassdigest.com)





The story goes that the first time Eddie Van Halen watched THIS IS SPINAL TAP he didn't laugh. He didn't understand why everybody else in the theater was laughing, either. What he saw on screen was a pretty fair representation of life on tour for a hard rock band. Sometimes it's tough to get the joke when you are the joke.

Eddie isn't the only rocker to look at THIS IS SPINAL TAP and think they're looking into a mirror. Members of the band Foghat said that screenwriting team -- Tap members Michael McKean, Christopher Guest, Harry Shearer and director Rob Reiner -- must have been listening in to their private conversations, since all the stuff about David St. Hubbins' girlfriend trying to guide the band's tour by astrology was lifted directly from their lives.

Here then are nine THIS IS SPINAL TAP jokes that are heavily influenced by the real-world ridiculousness of rock n' roll... and two that weirdly came true.

Yes, this list goes to 11.

**"Hello Cleveland"** - Perhaps the most iconic moment in THIS IS SPINAL TAP sees the band trying to get from the green room to the stage and becoming hopelessly lost in the bowels of the stadium. This gag comes from not one but two real life incidents. In the seminal rock doc DON'T LOOK BACK, Bob Dylan is trying to get out of the backstage area after a concert in Manchester and just can't find the exit. "Where's the door?" young Bob asks, exasperated.

But more directly the joke comes from a tape of a Tom Petty concert in Germany. Petty and his band, profoundly stoned, leave the stage and try to get back to the dressing rooms; when they open a door onto an indoor tennis court they all stand there stunned for a moment.

**Marty DiBergi** - The entire character of Marty DiBergi, the director of the documentary that is THIS IS SPINAL TAP, is a joke on Martin Scorsese in the film THE LAST WALTZ, a document of the last performance by The Band. Scorsese, like DiBergi, is a big fan of the band, and he inserts himself into plenty of the on-camera interviews. He also gets lots of rambling, strange answers that would fit right in the mouths of the members of Spinal Tap. At one point Robbie Robertson tells Scorsese that The Band's journey "took us everywhere. It took us to some strange places... physically, spiritually and psychotically."

**Miniature Bread** - Nigel Tufnel has a breakdown backstage when the catering isn't up to his requirements (the bread in particular is too small for him). He's actually pretty reasonable compared to some of the true rock stories of backstage mayhem caused by riders not

being met. A rider is the list of demands that a band includes in their contract, and Van Halen famously demanded bowls of M&Ms... with the brown candies picked out. When they got to the dressing room before a Pueblo Colorado show and found a brown M&M in that bowl they proceeded to trash the place, causing thousands of dollars in damage. Or so the story goes; the band would later say it was all blown out of proportion.

**Derek Smalls In The Pod** - When performing Rock n' Roll Creation, Spinal Tap emerges onto stage from hydraulically controlled pods... except for bassist Derek Smalls, who becomes trapped inside of his. As the band plays on the roadies desperately try to extricate him from his plastic prison. This actually happened to Yes drummer Alan White in 1974 while the band was on the Tales of Topographic Oceans tour. White would play inside a giant seashell that would open to reveal him... except the one time it didn't. Because the shell had limited air supply roadies pumped in oxygen while attacking the hinges with fire axes. White kept playing.

This ridiculous moment would come true AGAIN in 1997, when U2 would get trapped inside a giant lemon on their Popmart tour in Oslo. They climbed out an emergency hatch in the back -- it seems some lessons were learned over the years.

**Death By Vomit** - Spinal Tap has gone through many drummers (32 up to the release of the film, who knows how many since), and one of them, Eric 'Stumpy Joe' Chiles, choked to death on vomit. Whose vomit we don't know since, as Nigel Tufnel notes, you can't dust for vomit.

That terrible death places Stumpy Joe in a pantheon of rock greats who have asphyxiated on their own vomitus. Jimi Hendrix, John Bonham of Led Zeppelin and Bon Scott, original singer for AC/DC all went in this most disgusting way. And it isn't just rockers who regurgitated themselves to death -- big band leader Tommy Dorsey led the way back in 1956.

**Smell The Glove** - Spinal Tap's original cover for their album SMELL THE GLOVE gets nixed after record company rep Bobbi Fleckman describes it as depicting "a greased, naked woman on all fours with a dog collar around her neck and a leash, and a man's arm extended out... holding on to the leash and pushing a black glove in her face to sniff it." When she says the image is sexist, Nigel Tufnel responds, "What's wrong with being sexy?"

The funniest thing about SMELL THE GLOVE's cover is that it's not even as offensive as the real album cover on which it's based. LOVEHUNTER, released in 1979, was the second album from Whitesnake and the







cover depicts a fully naked woman straddling a giant snake, head raised in ecstasy. Supposedly the uproar over the cover made the painter, fantasy artist Chris Achilleos, quit doing album covers for decades.

**One Handed Bass Playing** - Derek Smalls' signature move is playing his bass with one hand so that he can pump the other while displaying the devil's horns. It's a totally ridiculous way to play... and it's based on reality. Harry Shearer toured a bit with the heavy metal band Saxon while prepping for the movie, and he based that particular move on original Saxon bassist Steve Dawson. His mutton chops, though, seem to be all Lemmy Kilmister.

**Rainbow Trout Studio Fight** - When the band gets into Rainbow Trout Studio to record a new song, tensions run high and the whole thing devolves into a swear-filled argument. Sure, this has probably happened to a lot of acts, but only one had their f-bombed breakdown recorded and passed out in the underground.

The Troggs may have had a hit with "Love Is All Around," but there wasn't much love in the session captured on the infamous "Troggs Tapes." In 1970 the band, which had become massive with "Wild Thing," was on the wane, and they took to fighting in the studio. An engineer leaked a tape of one of the fights and it spread like wildfire -- back in the days when such things had to be handed from person to person. The tapes include highlights such as:

*But it f\*\*\*\*\*g well won't be unless we spend a little bit of f\*\*\*\*\*g thought and imagination to f\*\*\*\*\*g make it a f\*\*\*\*\*g number one. You gotta put a little bit of f\*\*\*\*\*g fairy dust over the bastard, you know....*

and

*So, this is what is been going f\*\*\*\*\*g wrong. You've gotta have a f\*\*\*\*\*g bloke that says, "I've got a f\*\*\*\*\*g sound in here that's f\*\*\*\*\*g great! Come in here and have a f\*\*\*\*\*g listen to it. And you come in here and it's probably a different f\*\*\*\*\*g tune, nearly. But if it's f\*\*\*\*\*g good? Yeah, that's it. But when we go through that door, we think, oh f\*\*k, no. You know?*

and

*I f\*\*\*\*\*g can and I'm the c\*\*t that's playing it so when I'm f\*\*\*\*\*g hearing it in my f\*\*\*\*\*g head, yeah, that's what I gotta f\*\*\*\*\*g do. Then I'll do it! You big pranny.*

Ahh, how the British use the Queen's English so beautifully.

**Airbase Gig** - As Spinal Tap continues their tour the gigs get dodgier and dodgier, and at one point they end up playing at an Air Force Base, where their

equipment picks up the air traffic control tower chatter. One of the bands that heavily influenced Tap, Uriah Heep, actually did play at an Air Force Base, although it's not clear if they had that same interference.

How close is the Tap/Uriah Heep connection? Christopher Guest heard about playing the airbase when Uriah Heep keyboard player John Sinclair came aboard to provide keys on the THIS IS SPINAL TAP album.

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Those are the jokes that were based on real life rock antics. THIS IS SPINAL TAP has since become almost a handbook for rockers, with "That's so Tap" being a common utterance on tour. Some famous THIS IS SPINAL TAP jokes actually came true after the movie was released -- one tragically, one hilariously.

**A Bizarre Gardening Accident** - John 'Stumpy' Pepys is one of Spinal Tap's many dead drummers; his cause of death was a 'bizarre gardening accident.' "The authorities said best leave it unsolved," Nigel Tufnel explains.

In 1992 that odd rock star death actually came true as Toto's drummer (!) Jeff Porcaro died in... a gardening accident. The drummer, whose heart had problems from years of cocaine abuse, died after inhaling insecticide in his Los Angeles garden.

**Stonehenge** - When the band decides they want to have Stonehenge onstage while they play their prog rock epic of the same name, they hand off a quickly sketched design that marks the stones in inches, not feet. The result, as David St. Hubbins notes, is "a Stonehenge monument on the stage that was in danger of being crushed by a dwarf."

On their Born Again tour Black Sabbath also had a problem with a Stonehenge prop -- except that their prop, built life-sized, ended up being too big to actually fit inside any of the venues where they were playing. Many people have assumed that the joke in THIS IS SPINAL TAP was a riff on Sabbath's poor prop planning, but the truth is that the Stonehenge bit was in a 1982 proof-of-concept short the team made -- which means that Black Sabbath brought the Spinal Tap joke to life. ✕





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# Drafthouse Recommends: SNOWPIERCER

**DEVIN FARACI**

Badass Digest Editor-in-Chief

@devincf

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This month Drafthouse enthusiastically recommends SNOWPIERCER, the latest film from great Korean director Bong Joon-Ho, and his first in English. Based on a French graphic novel, SNOWPIERCER is set in a dystopian near future. Attempts to halt global warming had a strange backlash, and ice has covered the Earth. Only the inhabitants of a train -- the Snowpiercer -- which circles the planet with its perpetual motion engine have survived the catastrophe. Inside the train society is broken up into classes, with the elite comfortable up front and the poor in the rearmost cars, living on protein blocks and under the sway of powerful drugs provided by the elite.

It's exciting that Joon-ho is making his English language debut, and it's even more exciting that he's doing it in a film that continues the proud tradition of socially-conscious science fiction. One of the earliest sci-fi movies, METROPOLIS, also dealt with class issues in an industrial society -- and introduced one of the most kick-ass robots in history (who later influenced the design of C3P0). INVASION OF THE BODY SNATCHERS used science fiction to comment on the McCarthy witch hunts of the day, while PLANET OF THE APES talked about race relations through the prism of a time travel adventure. The '70s saw a golden age of socially conscious science fiction, including SOYLENT GREEN (whose starving masses plot has gone from a joke to feeling kind of prescient) to LOGAN'S RUN (which dealt with the generation gap) to SILENT RUNNING (a beautifully sad environmentalist fable). Other classic socially conscious sci-fi films include THEY LIVE, ROBOCOP and even AVATAR.

SNOWPIERCER joins a new wave of such films, many of them lower budget, scrappier and with more to say. SLEEP DEALER examines issues of illegal immigration in a cyber world, while DISTRICT 9 tangled with South Africa's complex and ugly racial history. Last year's HER is a wonderful science fiction story that deals with the ways we relate and communicate in a wired world.

If you like big concepts being explored with your science fiction action, Drafthouse recommends SNOWPIERCER to you. ✕



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