

Cecil B. Demented

USA / 88 mins / 2000 / cert 18

Director and Screenplay: John Waters
Director of Photography: Robert Stevens
Editor: Jeffrey Wolf
Production Designer: Vincent Peranio
Music: Zoë and Basil Poledouris

Cast	Role
Melanie Griffith	Honey Whitlock
Stephen Dorff	Cecil B DeMented
Alicia Witt	Cherish
Adrian Grenier	Lyle
Larry Gilliard Jr	Lewis
Maggie Gyllenhaal	Raven
Ricki Lake	Libby
Patricia Hearst	Fidget's Mom

and two the long extras list, selected because of their bizarre names:

Jack Noseworthy	Rodney
Mink Stole	Mrs Mallory



I did a bit of research last year as it was the Club's Silver Anniversary season, into the range of films shown by the club, and was amazed to see that in the 3rd season the film *Pink Flamingos* was screened. Made in 1973, this is a film I have never seen, but is even now renowned as a "shocking" film that broke almost every rule of filmmaking and good taste,



culminating in an infamous final scene - suffice to say that I will not spell it out for fear of putting you off your interval cakes!

Would we have the courage to include such a film now, which perhaps could be a criticism of a more conservative selection process?

Since then, without doubt, Waters has mellowed. As he freely admits -- and perhaps with regret -- "People have not vomited in my films for quite some time."

In undertaking my research for these notes, I found myself thinking that one could make a comparison between Waters and Spain's Pedro Almodovar, whose early films contain many shock elements, but who has now "mellowed" to the extent that he won in 2000 the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film for *All About My Mother*.

If John Waters' last few gentler and slightly more commercial movies ("Serial Mom" and "Cry-Baby") had his fans thinking the "once-warped director" had lost his edge, that perhaps he was inching toward mainstream repeatability, they need not fear. It was all a ruse. It seems Waters was only lulling the cinematic establishment into a false sense of security so he could turn around and bite them with "Cecil B. Demented," a hilarious -- and very much old-school John Waters -- anti-blockbuster romp that chews up and spits out the kind of pandering Hollywood conventions that to toothless, cookie-cutter box office hits.

Melanie Griffith gives her most assured performance since 1991's "*Paradise*" – which was



the Hollywood adaptation of "*Le Grand Chemin*" shown by WNCC in 1999. Ironically such Hollywood adaptations are lampooned in tonight's film, with in one scene a director, defending his inferior remake of a foreign film, asserting, "American audiences won't watch subtitles." (Actually I thought that *Paradise* was an enjoyable film and certainly an acceptable adaptation of the French original).

Griffith has always had a gift for comedy (see "*Something Wild*" or "*Working Girl*" for further proof), but to my mind her career appeared to go into decline around the time that her off screen publicity was at its height with frequent tabloid coverage of her domestic life. Certainly in this film she makes the most of her frequent acid-tongued remarks.

The inclusion of Patsy Hearst in the film is interesting, since the fictional tale of Honey's kidnapping and re-programming bears more than a passing resemblance to her own real-life story.

The movie is certainly flawed, if for no other reason than that Waters' budgets have outgrown his trashy tastes. The movie just looks too polished for all its clumsy, screwball scripting and deliberately ham-fisted acting.

Yet for all its shortcomings, "*Cecil B. Demented*" is intoxicating, impudent fun for anyone with a healthy loathing for Hollywood's profit-driven pandering to the lowest common denominator. It misses a lot, but the hits make it worthwhile.



One of the things that really comes across in this film is the energy and obvious fun the director and ensemble cast had while shooting. Something that may be giving them that extra boost of energy and fun are the sets by production designer Vincent Peranio and the costumes designed by Van Smith, both of who have worked with Waters since *Pink Flamingos*.

Waters has made a work which says what practically no one else will admit out loud: that Hollywood is turning out bland and conformist films and that the movie studios, dominated by large financial interests, are operated by philistines and cowards.

On the subject of people who have rented his movies and afterward prosecuted them as obscene, Waters recently told Elvis Mitchell of the Independent Film Channel, "Why didn't they just turn [the movies] off? I didn't call the cops when *Forrest Gump* started running."

In Waters' films, life is definitely not "a box of chocolates!"

Iain McGlashan