

One pimpin' documentary

Despite its unnecessary commentary, *Tales of the Rat Fink* is still a phat film

Tales of the Rat Fink

Directed by Ron Mann
Voiceovers by John Goodman, Jay Leno, Brian Wilson, Tom Wolfe and Matt Groening
Runs 20-23 October
Metro Cinema

JASKARAN SINGH
Arts & Entertainment Writer



Before it was socially daring for hip-hop star Xzbit to take your beaten up automobile and have a gang of professionals fit it with rims, hydraulics and the odd goldfish tank, there was Ed "Big Daddy" Roth—the pioneer of the dome-top car, pinstriped hot rod, airbrushed T-shirt and, most importantly, the tongue-and-cheek jab at Mickey Mouse commercialism via the character of the Rat Fink.

Tales of the Rat Fink is a film that chronicles the life and times of Ed Roth, an artist, hot rod designer and pop-culture architect. The man was an icon, and his artwork and visions have ingrained themselves within North American culture.

With that in mind, it's important to mention that the movie is not a biography, but rather a brief documentary about the life and impact of the iconoclast. The subject of the work is his art, not his life—which, in turn, is equally fascinating, as hinted by the minor details dispersed throughout the movie. By maintaining this focus, director Ron Mann keeps the spotlight on Roth's automobiles, caricatures and unique perception of individualism through expression.

Many unorthodox directing liberties are used to help describe the eccentric impact Roth has had on North American culture. For example, there are speaking hot rods—by which I mean cars with voice-overs—and they seem more distracting than informative. Most of these brief interludes are dull, and act as a bookmark

between the illuminating biographical sections, and the brief Rat Fink interludes. Aesthetically, these approaches give off the impression that they come directly out of the mind of Ed himself—but they don't, and these liberties often get in the way of the pace and the storytelling.

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However, the welcome addition of having John Goodman do a first-person voice-over as Roth livens up the technique. His voice fits together, like a missing puzzle piece, with the man we see in the pictures. It helps to engross the viewer, as if the movie were a conversation rather than an objective view of a subject. Goodman's voice-over, along with the bizarre Rat Fink animated shorts, comprise the

strongest features of the film.

Most of the screen time is shared between slideshows of Roth, Rat Fink shorts, and television clips which range from commercials for Rat Fink model kits, to *Leave It To Beaver* episodes in which the latest fad among the children are T-shirts that coincidentally resemble club shirts for hot rod clubs designed by Roth in the '50s. Save for the Rat Fink shorts, none of these snippets are spared from voice dubbing. In the case of John Goodman's narration, it works, but at times, it's hard to discern between what's legitimate footage what has been tampered with by the production companies.

It wouldn't be a stretch to say that Ed Roth's hot rods and cartoons have had as big an impact of our culture as Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup, or John Wayne's macho demeanor. *Tales of the Rat Fink* gives a full, yet brief, overview of Roth's accomplishments, even though it's often bogged down by storytelling preferences. Aesthetic may be emphasized over narrative, but when the subject matter is someone such as Ed Roth, following one's artistic preferences only seems like the right thing to do.



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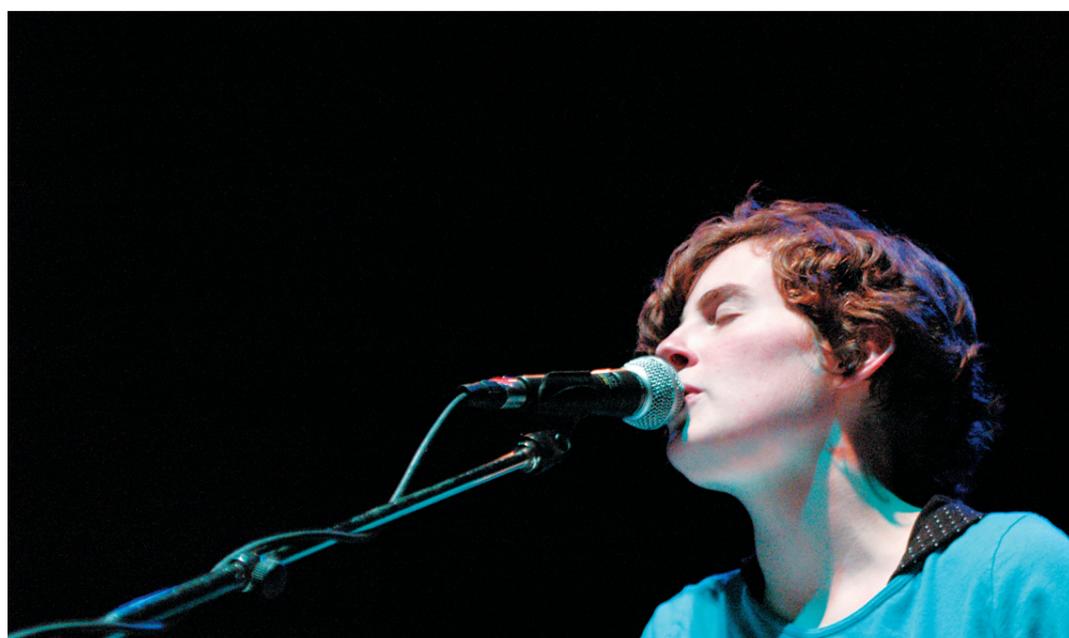
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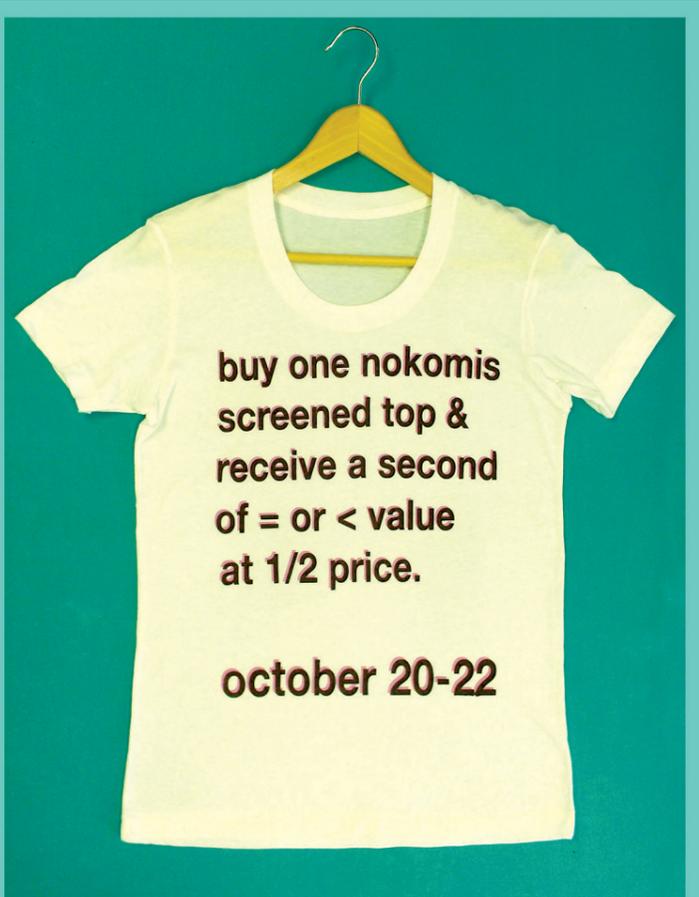
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Friday, October 27th
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AMANDA ASH

SING ME SPANISH TECHNO Katherine Calder took Neko Case's spot in The New Pornographers' show Tuesday night.



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