

# REVIEWS

## Dennis Hopper's Out of the Blue

Movie fever is a remarkable phenomenon. By the time the World Film Festival swung into its home stretch, you could swear people were lining up downtown to watch traffic lights change. This, no doubt, played a part in the box office success accorded *Out of the Blue*, paired with Dennis Hopper's accreditation as director and the picture's 'Canadian' label on the Festival schedule. And that last, in turn, was enough to jar a few memories; three years ago, a production shuffle, nearly snuffed the film's chances for Canadian certification altogether. That wasn't a central issue in Montreal, though, because people were 'buying blind' at the wicket, snapping up handfuls of tickets in the fervent belief that at least one in the bunch could land you a good movie. They didn't luck out on this one.

*Out of the Blue* has a pretty grim story to tell and spins it out with particular attention to texture and detail. But as a portrait of the social underclass, it's missing some parts. The picture wants us to feel the dirt under its nails, but it has passed up any attempt at new insight for an ultra-heavy dose of sleaze and hard edges. Despite the collection of genuinely solid performances at its core, that central, 'conceptual' problem short-circuits the whole movie.

The extraordinary Linda Manz (*Days of Heaven*, *The Wanderers*) plays Cebe, a streetwise baby punk with some significant problems. Her mother (Sharon Farrell) is a soft-brained junkie, and her apparently alcoholic father (Hopper) has just about finished a jail term for manslaughter; five years before, he steered his semitrailer right through the centre of a packed schoolbus. Cebe's a two-fisted baby greaser on the outside whose 'movie tough' posture, language and costume all conspire to hide the love-starved little girl within - when the defenses are down, she curls up with her teddy bear and sucks her thumb. She doesn't want to be a woman, it seems, because women are victims of men, and she dons all the masculine trappings she can find: rock 'n' roll drumming, her daddy's leather motorcycle gear and a verbal delivery that recalls Richard Gere in *Bloodbrothers*. She's one of those kids you find wandering around downtown at three a.m., and she's there because the street ambience is better than the one at home. Her father's return to the domestic scene only makes things worse, and although Cebe tries to plant herself between her parents like a kind of emotional magnet, her efforts are wasted. This family is on its way to hell in a rollercoaster, and it's a matter of time before they perform their rite of passage in a gruesome and fiery denouement.

The film appears to have undergone some heavy recutting; the rhythms get awfully jagged towards the end, and a climactic scene that suggests some past incestuous encounter between father and daughter is close to incomprehensible. None of that, however, explains what's principally wrong with *Out of the Blue*. There is a cockeyed aspiration



● A prison visit in *Out of the Blue*

here toward the dizzying heights of full-scale tragedy and, given a context, Manz, Hopper and Company might have made the leap on performance strength alone. But there's no new vision, no justification for this rereading of some well-worn movie paths. Hopper as director has employed a tight, stark style to make his point; there's an admirably gritty quality to the cinematography, and he doesn't move in for close-ups in some of his most dramatic scenes, leaving them instead to play out in a single master shot. And his point is particularly well made by Linda Manz, whose exquisite, almost-androgynous face holds the camera with terrific conviction. Cebe may be a victim, but Manz never plays her for pity, and she manages to carry the whole picture.

It's Hopper's point that is the problem here. Is *Out of the Blue* trying to re-explore the awful truism that anyone can have kids? It does that, but without enough discovery; you've seen the point made with more conviction elsewhere. As a profile of the underclass, it fares no better, because the neon streets and slimy back alleyways are almost stockshots from other movies. *Taxi Driver* did this to death. Even the sequence in a punk rock club has no immediacy; the whole picture tastes slightly dated. This *déjà vu* sensation is underscored - but not literally - by a soundtrack overflowing with Neil Young and other assorted artists that tries to expand and explain

the thematic material. It doesn't work. Rock 'n' roll scores have traditionally posed a danger to films because they can spill over everything and drown it out. That's what happens here. Quite incidentally, Young's voice on the soundtrack and Raymond Burr's cameo as an 'understanding psychiatrist' in the Judd Hirsch tradition (the Festival audience actually burst out laughing when he turned up) constitute the only visibly 'Canadian' elements in the picture; Vancouver rides by nicely disguised, as 'Anywhere, U.S.A.' But *Out of the Blue* is not an intrinsically Canadian movie. It's a Dennis Hopper movie, and that is a genre in and of itself.

He has never made 'middle of the road' pictures nor, with perhaps the exception of *Easy Rider*, has he really enjoyed commercial success. But that's never been his objective. Now into his forties, he radiates the same kind of barely suppressed fury that first established his style, and he's got a face that knows how to work to a camera. That explosive quality sears right through the film, transformed into a visual metaphor at the end that gets its poetic kick from Young's 'better to burn out than to fade away' line in the title song. Movies can thrive on that rage if it burns fresh enough, but *Out of the Blue* spins a lot of graphic nastiness into a tale that's got no new slant on a very old story. Enough of that stuff, and the film begins to look like one massive cheap shot trying to pass

itself off as social comment. All it generates is audience resentment. The Montreal crowd booted over the closing titles and - coming from a bunch of people who'd spent days watching anything that moved just for the love of film - that's one hell of an indictment.

Anne Reiter ●

**OUT OF THE BLUE** d. Dennis Hopper sc. Leonard Yakir, Brenda Nielson d.o.p. Marc Champion ed. Doris Dyck p. man. Paul Tucker 1st a.d. Jacques Hubert 2nd a.d. Bob Akaster p.a. Jon Drake p. co-or. Patti Allen loc. man. Mark Desrosiers p. sec. Mary Monaghan sd. mix. Larry Sutton boom Graham Crowell steadicam Joel King gen. op. Tim Atkins asst. cam. Tim Sale, Tom Fillingham stills Phil Hersee art d. David Hiscox sp. eff. Jon Belue set dec. Peter Young driver cap. Jake Callihoo mus. Tom Lavin theme song Neil Young cam. op. John Holbrook key grip Fred Ransom dolly grip Paul Abrams best boy grip John Brinson gaff. Bill Newbery elec. Roger Huyghe sp. eff. asst. Stephanie Nolin trans. cap. Ian Urquhart drivers Rocky Zantolas, Peter Lassen, Brian Boyer Alos Stranan, Gary Kennedy, David Bove, Scotty Irvine payroll Joan King pub. Julia Frittaion craft ser. Leslie Beale asst. ed. Jack Hilton titles Nancy Akester p.c. Robson St. Productions Ltd. exec. p. Paul Lewis p. Leonard Yakir, Gary Jules Jouvenat exec. post. p. Jim Nelson post p. asst. Julia Frittaion cast. Lindsay Walker sc. clerk Christine Wilson props. Mark Gildemeester ward. Maureen Hiscox make-up Phyllis Newman hair Sally Bailey auditor Pauline Thompson lp. Linda Manz, Dennis Hopper, Sharon Farrell, Don Gordon, Raymond Burr, Eric Allen, Fiona Brody, David Crowley, Joan Hoffman, Carl Nelson, Francis Ann Pettit, Glen Pleifer, David Ackridge, Jim Byrne, Glen Fyfe, Louis Gentile, Murdine Hirsch, John Anderson, Howard Taylor, Ron Harter, Ray Wallis, Trevor Wilkins colour 35mm running time 94 min