

'The Heck With Hollywood' painfully funny

Independent film:
Road from dream
to nightmares

By **TED MAHAR**
of *The Oregonian* staff

The truth hurts.
It hurts even as it convulses you
with laughter.

This is the effect of Doug Block's hilarious, ouch-drenched documentary "The Heck With Hollywood," which will play at the Portland Art Museum's Northwest Film Center at 2, 7 and 8:45 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and at 5 and 7 p.m. Sunday.

The Northwest Film Center is located at 1219 S.W. Park Ave.

On the same program with the 60-minute "Heck" will be the 30-minute 1969 documentary "Filmmaker: A Diary by George Lucas." It is painfully funny in other ways.

Doug Block spent 3½ years following three films made by tenacious, courageous and debt-laden independent filmmakers. Hollywood was never an option for any. Each had a personal vision and refused to compromise.

Ted Lichtenheld, 36, was a cameraman who had spent enough time in the biz to know how tough it was, but he plunged ahead (and into debt) anyway with "Personal Foul," a love triangle with no guns, nudity or onscreen sex. He returned to his hometown of Rockford, Ill., to raise money and produce the film.

Block even interviews some optimistic investors.

Then there is the irrepressible Gerry Cook, 32, a Spokane director who decided that it was time to burst from local TV commercials into his comedy feature "Only a Buck," which also played at the Northwest Film Center a couple of years ago.

The most serious of the three is Jennifer Fox, who dumped film school at age 21 to make a film called "Beirut: The Last Home Movie" about an aristocratic family strug-



Peter Hundrichs, Gerry Cook and Charlie Schmidt, makers of the film "Only A Buck," literally take their show on the road in "The Heck With Hollywood," which plays this weekend at the Northwest Film Center.

gling to maintain a sense of normalcy in a permanent war. It is also about risk and the seductiveness of peril, a process Fox learned about from making the film in Beirut.

Cutting from one director to another, Block shows how difficult it is to finish a screenplay the filmmaker can live with and how excruciating it can be to spend month after month trying to extract money from friends, relatives, acquaintances and utter strangers.

But wait! There's more!

Block also shows that, difficult as writing, financing and shooting a film is, it is all self-indulgent fun compared with getting a distributor and getting the film to the customer.

Cook bypassed the distributor —

MOVIE REVIEW

The Heck With Hollywood

★★★★

Director: Doug Block

Running time: 60 min.

Playing at: Portland Art Museum Northwest Film Center at 1219 S.W. Park Ave. with 30-min.

"Filmmaker: A Diary by George Lucas" at 2, 7 & 8:45 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 5 & 7 p.m. Sunday.

after no distributor would finally take it on — and began taking the film from city to city in a van called The Brickmobile. From The Brickmobile, Cook and his two partners sell copies in video form.

No painful, humiliating step is ignored. Every step is revealed. Every bit of it is ruefully funny, since it's not happening to us.

Lucas' film follows the disjointed production of Francis Ford Coppola's "The Rain People" on the road in 1968. Stars Shirley Knight, James Caan and Robert Duvall work with the very young director in an experimental film that doesn't quite work as it's meant to.

This film is fascinating anyway but is doubly so for any who have seen "Hearts of Darkness," the documentary about the making of "Apocalypse Now."

This double feature is absolutely not to be missed by anyone interested in film. It explains a lot about why we see what we see in Hollywood films — and why we don't see what we don't see.

And "Heck" is funnier than 90 percent of all scripted comedies.