

Director-writer-producer John Hughes, known for his uncannily sensitive and on-the-mark portraits of high school teenagers in *The Breakfast Club* and *Pretty in Pink*, cuts class for a day on the town in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off, says John Hughes, "is about this high school kid who cuts class and goes to the big city for the day with his best friend and girlfriend. But, it really is about personal freedom and how different things are when you have decided for just one day to be free."

Hughes, world class creator and cutter of films ranging from *Mr. Mom* to *Sixteen Candles* and *The Breakfast Club*, is perched on the edge of a long grey couch at his offices at Paramount Studios in Hollywood. With the exception of Stephen Spielberg, no recent young filmmaker has enjoyed such speedy success. During the past three years or so, his efforts have made hundreds of millions of dollars and displayed the comic verve and range of a Charlie Chaplin or Woody Allen. Just by

making movies about kids.

Some, like *The Breakfast Club*, are tightly choreographed, literate ballets. One or two others, like the *National Lampoon's Summer Vacation*, may have had their most crucial scenes conjured on the back of a cocktail napkin.

But, mostly, Hughes' work is ambitious, smart, riveting and funny. And no current movie maker is as good at mixing belly laughs with heart and compassion. *Ferris Bueller* is his latest.

"It's about freedom from worry. Ferris doesn't worry, doesn't sweat anything. It's also about a change in reality. If you've ever stayed home from school or work for reasons other than being sick, you see how different the world looks."

Hughes looks far less like the stereotypical tanned Hollywood mogul than,

JOHN HUGHES:

Making the Movies Young People Love

BY MARK CHRISTENSEN

say, a rather bookish member of an English rock band. Tall. An explosive mane of long, dark blond hair. Glasses. A black cloth coat, thoroughly wrinkled silver slacks and a white shirt with sleeves so long that his cuffs touch his knuckles.

"I'd much rather be a musician than a movie maker, but I'm just about tone deaf. To me, tuning a guitar correctly is one of the world's major mysteries." Nevertheless, his aggressive use of new music has become a stock in trade. "Simple Minds sold 50,000 albums until 'Don't You' broke on *Breakfast Club*.

"But there will be a change with the music on *Ferris*. What I want to do is use a big sound, a state of the art production using edge bands that press the envelope—or whatever the space people call it—bands like Zig-Zag Sputnik, then, couple that with a more accessible sound.

"I want to focus my movies on bands who have the right to be heard by the great Top Forty masses. New stuff. Because, like, when I go to Chicago, I listen to three stations and get nothing but Santana and 'Layla.' It's like somebody fell asleep on the 1972 button."

A former writer for *National Lampoon*, Hughes left the magazine several years ago to write what are popularly perceived as "teen flicks," a realm previously dominated by big breasts, beer drinking and fart jokes. His efforts (usually) to elevate the genre have made for films that recreate adolescence with an energy, inventiveness and exactitude that can be drop dead eerie.

Who can forget Anthony Michael Hall in *Sixteen Candles*, the kid with the spidery hands and concave chest who, while wooing Molly Ringwald, allows, somewhat parenthetically, that his social status in the school is insured by the fact that he is "king of the dipshits." Or, later, when he wakes after a drunken night of evident debauchery and de-virginizing with his high school's brassiest sexpot, the new, rather blithely unanchored Hall asking her, "Did I enjoy it?"

Hughes' enthusiasm for these kinds of shenanigans is surprising in light of the fact that his own adolescent experience was not idyllic. "In high school, I was a serious outcast, a laughingstock. I took it. I took it and I thought, 'I'll show you; I'll show you.' This was, like, in 1967.

"I went to a jock-y school. We had a serious dress code. I almost didn't graduate, because my hair touched my collar."

"Back then, I wanted to be Picasso, Michelangelo, James Joyce or Bob Dylan. That's where I took my solace. People would make fun of me, and I'd think, 'That's okay. Picasso would like me.' I'd come home at night, and I'd sit at my window and put on my albums and read my British music magazines. I didn't want to belong, because I couldn't belong."

"The guy who was the teacher in *Breakfast Club* was my gym teacher. He didn't like me because of my hair, so he flunked me senior year in gym, which meant, to graduate, I had to take double gym and health. You know, sit in class and look at VD-ravaged genitals and slide shows about how to brush your teeth."

Were other characters in his films taken directly from experience? "Yeah. The jerk rich kid in *Pretty in Pink*. I had a guy like him haunt me all the way through high school. Money to burn. His older brother had an Alfa, the big nice one, and parked it outside with the top down in the rain. I would walk by and see the rosewood buckling on the dash. I couldn't understand how kids could live like that. I just wasn't part of that world."

And college was scarcely an improvement. "I hated it intensely. I was enormously homesick and felt completely displaced... I went to college in Arizona, a big party school, a big fraternity school. The anti-war movement was very small, and the cops were very tough..."

"I was desperately in love with my wife, who was then my girlfriend. She was still in high school. I spent \$1,000 first semester just on phone bills.

"I had problems with the social nature

of the school. I wasn't a fraternity type. And I had a knack for attracting hostile authority figures. I mean, during the Revolutionary War I would have been over at Tom Payne's house saying, 'Hey, let's get some boats, cross the Atlantic and make them live under US for a while.'" Finally, after two or three and a half years, Hughes got a belly full of academia and, on hearing John Lennon's "Working Class Hero", decided to head back home.

Conditions did not improve immediately. "Nancy and I—she was 20, I was 21—lived in a converted boxcar. The rent was only \$110 a month. But, we couldn't make it and ended up living in my parents' basement for eight months." But things got better. After failing the "writing tests" of half the ad agencies in Chicago, he got a job at Leo Burnett where he finally found a niche.

"I went to work in the day and came home in the dark. I started at \$8,500 a year, doubled my salary within six months and doubled it again a year after that. I just kept eating up bosses. One time the guy above me did an ad the company didn't like. I asked for a shot at it and stayed up all night doing sixteen variations on the idea I had. They liked one and, the next thing I knew, I had his job. I was a creative director at 25 or 26."

Then came *National Lampoon*, where Hughes filled upwards of 120 magazine pages a year with stories like "Sexual Harassment: How to Do It." The rest, as they

say, is history.

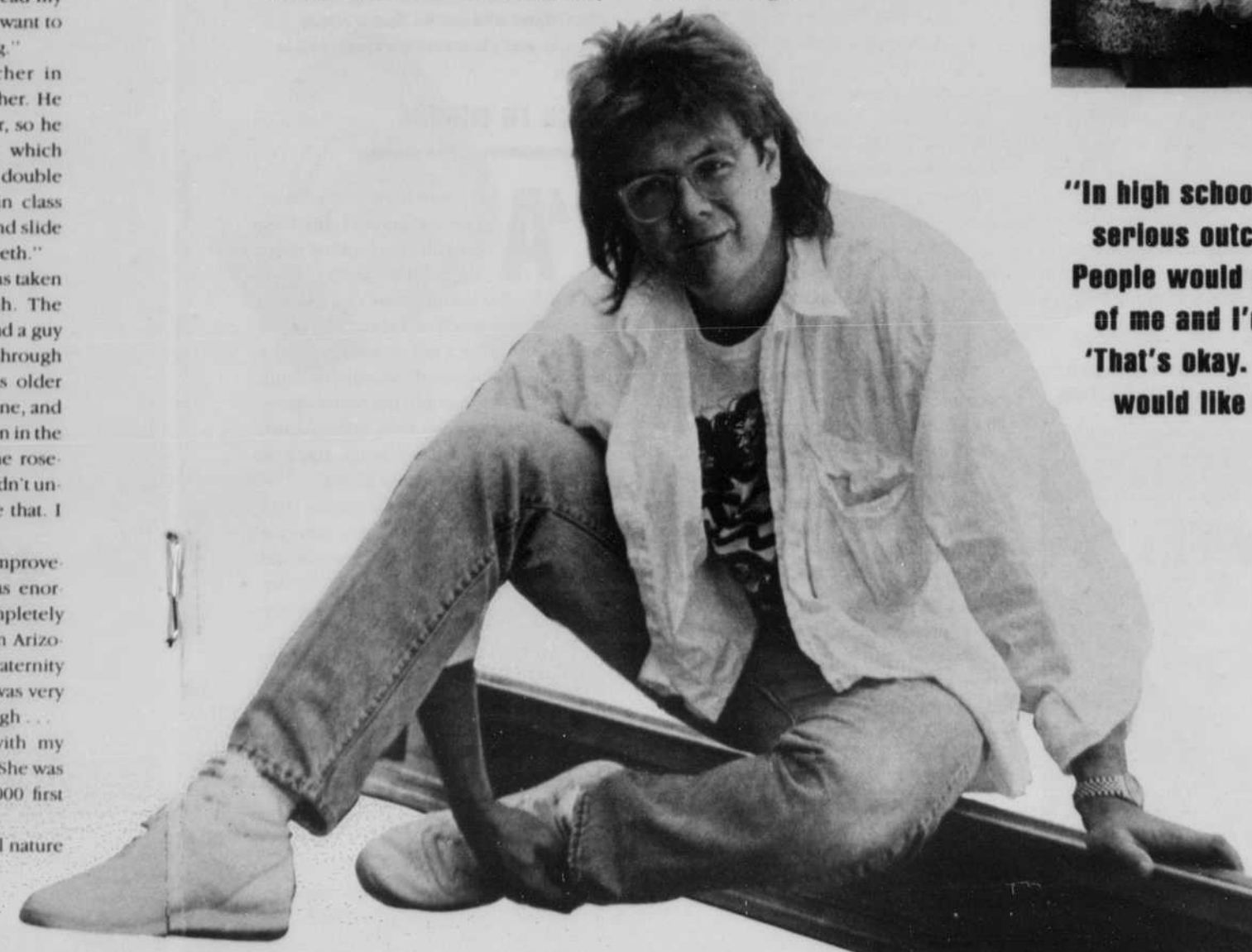
So, has success changed John Hughes? Evidently, not much. Hughes still spends as much time as possible back home in Chicago. "I still own a house there. I just put a new roof on it, so, if there are winos living there while I'm gone, they won't get wet. I don't mix much socially out here. I've only gone to two so-called 'Hollywood' parties in my life, one because P.J. O'Rourke made me, and the other because it was an MTV premiere for *Pretty in Pink*."

Big Money doesn't seem to interest him either. "I've got a business manager I haven't seen in a year and a half. Basically, I know I'm better off now because I can afford to buy lots more records."

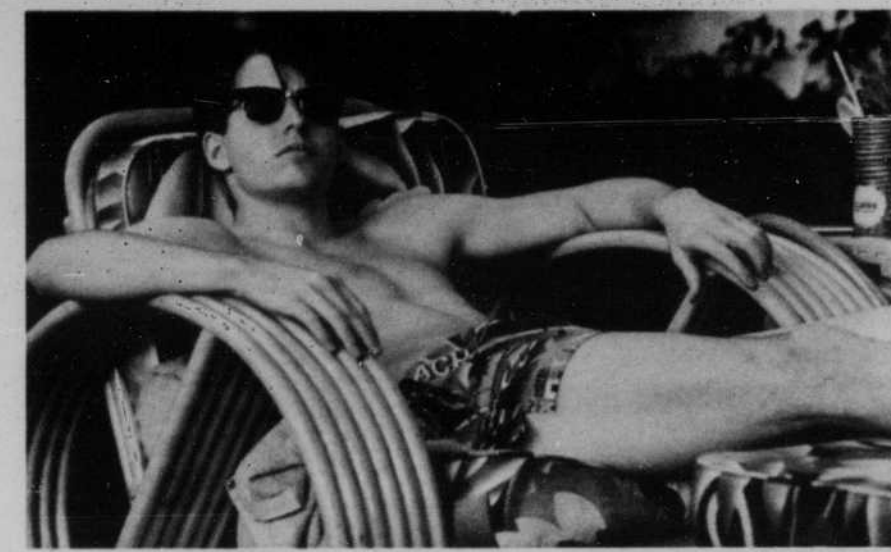
But what about the future? "I'd like to have my own building, my own operation. I'm not that nuts about movie lots. I'd like to write a book, maybe a novel, but I don't think I've mastered that form yet. I'd love to do some 9,000 page thing."

"I've got another film scheduled to start shooting this summer, *Some Kind of Wonderful*. It's college, my first foray into college. It's about the difference between the first year and the last, the struggle for dignity and identity.

"Right now, I'm making two movies a year with very direct involvement. But I could do three a year, produce two and direct one. The thing is, I've got a million ideas. It's choosing which ones to execute that's tough."



"In high school, I was a serious outcast... People would make fun of me and I'd think, 'That's okay. Picasso would like me'."



Above: As the class-cutting lead in *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, Matthew Broderick indulges in some serious relaxation. Hughes describes his film about the high schooler's day on the lam as "about personal freedom," and "a change in reality. If you've ever stayed home from school or work for reasons other than being sick, you realize how different the world looks."



Left: Annie Potts, who stars as a funky record store manager, relives some of her senior prom memories with Molly Ringwald in *Pretty in Pink*. Below: Andrew McCarthy (Left with *Pretty in Pink* costars Molly Ringwald and John Cryer) plays the "jerk rich kid" inspired by a real-life Hughes high school classmate who parked his Alfa "outside with the top down in the rain. I would walk by and see the rosewood buckling on the dash."



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