



FAMOUS FACES

(1) The many Crowes—Michael Angarano, Fugit, and Crowe; (2) Deschanel and McDormand; (3) Hoffman's Bangs

"I said 'Omigod, please, I need it,'" remembers Hudson, 21, whose dreamy, wild-eyed performance is nothing short of shocking from someone until now best known for dreck like *200 Cigarettes* and being Goldie Hawn's daughter. "And Cameron was set on me being Anita. So I was begging, literally. Kurt [Russell], my dad, is a huge Zeppelin fan—so I grew up listening to that. The obscure music I wasn't hip to until Cameron sent me the greatest care package I've ever received: 25 CDs"—a unique bundle Crowe put together for each of the younger stars. (McDormand's response: "No way! F--- them! Where's mine?")

The shoot stretched out over six months, featuring stops at classic rock locales like the former Continental Hyatt House in West Hollywood, a Crowe haunt and major groupie hot spot ("[The lobby] got torn down, like, 20 minutes after our last shot," mourns the director of the place affectionately known as the Riot House). But the biggest headaches came from the elaborate arena-rock concert sequences.

"[Cinematographer] John Toll was always worried about the concerts," re-

members Crowe. "The key was the photos on the Allman Brothers' *At Fillmore East*. Everything was so basic—just red and yellow lights—so we designed the sequences off that back cover." The Stillwater songs were written by Crowe and Nancy Wilson (of seminal '80s power balladeers Heart) on a lark during their honeymoon in 1986. They sat ignored until Crowe was ready to start production on *Almost Famous*, when they were juiced back to life with the help of '70s rocker Peter Frampton.

"When we showed the movie to Led Zeppelin, Jimmy Page said, 'Who wrote those songs?' and I was like, 'Uh, my wife and me,'" laughs Crowe, who eventually got Zeppelin to sign off on a handful of songs for the film. "Then Page says, 'They're really quite good, quite authentic.' And I'm goin', 'Yeah! Yeah! You know, those songs were actually me...'"

The other thing the 43-year-old director wrote for himself was a happy ending, which paved the way for a real-life reconciliation as well. *Almost Famous* concludes with a shell-shocked William heading home to heal himself

and the rift in his family, but amazingly, this didn't happen for Crowe until this past July when his mother, a schoolteacher in San Diego, and his sister reestablished contact after more than two decades of estrangement. "Playing out the reconciliation was therapeutic for Cameron," speculates Deschanel, who stepped in for Crossroads School classmate Hudson to play Anita. "He always wanted it."

"So rock music, the thing that my Mom said would ruin our family, crept in beneath the door, through the window, and two weeks ago brought us together..." says Crowe, lowering his voice and considering what he's wrought. "Music was the thing that I clung to. And then when I started getting assignments and going on the road, I would hang out with people who were like me. Finally, finally. It was like a drug." He pauses again. "And people still feel that. There are little girls that listen to Britney Spears and feel that there's someone out there that understands them."

SO, WHAT WILL HOLLYWOOD MAKE OF Crowe after this love song to the power of rock & roll? *Almost Famous* is a funny, sprawling, emotionally raw, and just plain complicated piece of filmmaking from someone whom critics have called a beautiful director of superficial relationship fantasies. Crowe hiccups through an answer: "It's really strange," he says. "You're out there. You're trying really hard. And no one can hear the differences in the takes but you. The movie got directed by feeling. If it gave me the feeling of what it was like to be there, then we finished and moved on."

"But I know there were days when people thought,"—he lapses into a cool-dude voice—"Hey man, therapy would've been cheaper and we could be workin' on *Charlie's Angels*!" ●●●