

## Watered down

*Hairspray is so light and silly, it wouldn't be surprising if John Waters directs Bette Midler's next flick for Disney*

BY HOWIE BAGGADONUTZ

I never thought it would happen. John Waters, director of such shock classics as *Pink Flamingos* and *Female Trouble*, has gone mainstream with his latest film, *Hairspray*. Purportedly a satire of the two most dreaded film genres today — the message movie and the teen flick — *Hairspray* is something you could take your mother to! In fact, it's so light and silly that it wouldn't be surprising if Waters ended up directing Bette Midler in her next Disney comedy. Even Pauline Kael likes it!

Set in 1962 in Baltimore — Waters's hometown and the hairdo capital of the world — *Hairspray* revolves around "The Corny Collins Show," a local TV dance party. The film's heroine, Tracy Turnblad, loves the program and eventually succeeds in becoming one of the show's featured dancers. The plot thickens when Tracy steals the boyfriend of Amber Von Tussle, the show's snotty lead dancer, while simultaneously pushing for the show to be integrated.

John Waters has come a long way since *Pink Flamingos* (1974), in which two families compete for the title of "The Filthiest People Alive," and *Desperate Living* (1977), with its lesbian glory holes and base political corruption. He took a turn for the worse with *Polyester* (1981), a comic melodrama about suburban life. But where *Polyester* exhibited a lot of Waters's trademark bad taste (the kitschy scratch-and-sniff cards, for example), *Hairspray* is content to be harmlessly goofy. Waters has cashed in his outlaw sensibilities and opted for getting caught up in the superficialities of 1962 — the cheesy outfits, zippy dance steps, garish settings and outlandish hairdos. It's fun to look at, but the script and direction are weak and the film runs out of steam halfway through, crawling toward a predictable ending.

The performers, however, have enough



spirited energy to maintain the viewer's interest. Ricki Lake, in her film debut, is perfect as Tracy Turnblad, the politically correct lead. She's extremely likable and admirably holds her own. She is ably supported by a surprisingly subdued Divine, in her last film role, as well as by Sonny Bono, Jerry Stiller, and Debbie Harry, who is stunning in her teased and ratted coiffure.

Those who have enjoyed John Waters since the '70s will probably be disappointed by *Hairspray*. Can this be the same man who directed *The Diane Linkletter Story* and numerous other cult favorites? *Hairspray* retains a trace of Waters's infamous vulgarity — a puddle of vomit, a puddle of pus — but it's self-conscious and obviously gratuitous. Sadly, it appears that Waters's glory days are over. Edith Massey and Divine, his most popular actresses, are dead. *Hairspray* seems destined to become the benign mainstream hit Waters — or Waters's producers — yearn for.

But what about the rest of us who crave the old John Waters? We'll have to be content re-reading his books, *Shock Value* and *Crackpot*, and renting and re-renting his old films on video. There's no turning back. . . .

Goodbye Baltimore, hello Hollywood. •

## Hartman's book a bundle of joy

*Be-good-to-yourself Therapy*, by Cherry Hartman, MSW (Abbey Press, \$3.95), is one of those little books that seems to creep like a cat or dog into its owner's life. Just when you need a stroke, *poof*, there's this little book looking up at you beseeching your attention.

Hartman, a Portland resident who graduated from Cleveland High School and Lewis and Clark College, is director of counseling at Phoenix Rising. Before joining Phoenix Rising, Hartman worked for eight years at Lutheran Family Services as director of counseling.

"*Be-good-to-yourself Therapy* grew out of a client's need to have a rulebook," says Hartman. "Then it became clear to me that the book had a much broader application, and through this realization came the publication."

Using 37 phrases that are simple to read and identify with, the book is structured to assist the reader, on a regular basis, with the struggle to cope.

Number 16 says, "When you need help, ask. Trust people to say no if they don't want to give." Number 27 encourages, "When you're in need of love, reach out. There are people who love you."

"Too simple," you say? Simple, yes, but after sitting with this little book for a weekend and actively becoming acquainted with it, *Be-good-to-yourself Therapy* became a



photo by Helen Lonridge

hammer that banged me over the head reminding me of things I was too clever to remember all by myself.

Cherry Hartman's book does not seem to be aimed at anyone except the person who's reading it at that moment. That is the delight of little bundles of joy like this. Put your hands on it once and every time you go to the market you'll stop by the pet-food counter wondering what the heck *Be-good-to-yourself Therapy* eats.

The book is available at Phoenix Rising Foundation and A Woman's Place Bookstore.

— Harold Moore

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