

Adore me, Bieber seems to sing with every inch of his body, and I will make you whole.
He is bubblegum Jesus come to lay hands on pre-pubescent pimples,
turning them into beauty marks.

when the Bieb's mom, Pattie Mallette, appeared. "It's Bruce! I love you Bruce!" They knew his manager on a first-name basis, his grandparents, his best friend, even Kenny, his security guard ("Go, Kenny!"). Before the movie began, they led a series of cheers that were well received by the rest of the Cineplex crowd (including yours truly, though not my man date): "When we say Justin, you say Bieber! Justin! Bieber!" And once it got rolling, the girls would jump up from their front row seats every now and then and dance around on the sloped concrete beneath the screen. At one point, when Bieber looked impishly into the camera and said, "I'm about to change my pants, so you're gonna hafta go," these girls — along with others in the seats behind us — yelled "No!"

It's hell being a star. No privacy, not even in the can. But you'd never know this was an issue watching *Never Say Never*, which is less a documentary than an interactive photo album designed to pull every vulnerable string in the collective psyche of teenage girls and middle-aged women. Despite all the cinematic pandering and hyped portrayal of Bieber Fever, the man-child himself seems unfazed, cool as a Canadian cucumber. He is polite and respectful, and ever ready to perform. In fact, there is nothing about Justin Bieber that approaches the morbid fascination inspired by certain other celebrities: No coked-up hookers, no heroin habit, no dark side of rage. Bieber is sweetness personified. To the extent the film allows us to bear witness, he appears to act entirely his age: playful, mischievous, mildly rebellious, cute as a button, sugary as cotton candy and enormously generalized in his sentiments ("Just follow your dream," etc).

What's more, the Bieb appears to be genuinely gracious about his elevated status and appreciative of just how lucky he is — clued into the immaculate timing and good luck that brought him eight zillion light years from Bumfuck,



Canada into the glare of the international hotlight. And, judging from the movie, there will be no future meltdowns, no Britney Spears/Lindsay Lohan-style fuck ups of colossal proportions. The Bieb is ice. The Bieb knows the game and how to play it. The Bieb, in fact, might be an android, a flexible piece of gristle and polymer dreamt up by a flailing music industry and constructed like Frankenstein's monster from all the saleable detritus of popular desire. He is, in the final tally, consumerism incarnate.

Yes, I realize I have just compared Justin Bieber to Christ, the Beatles, cotton candy, Bob Dylan and a NAMBLA-rific humanoid robot — in short, a musical cipher capable accepting and reflecting back all human longing. But of what, exactly, does that longing consist? "One day I Tweeted him 100 times," declares one of the movie's many fangirls. And in the concessions line I

overheard another girl declare to her friend: "He's so hot. I want him ... I mean, not like that ... you know ..."

Teenage girls seem genetically predetermined to form such intense attachments veering toward obsession, but there's something curiously asexual, or maybe pre-sexual, or maybe meta-sexual, about the way they squeal and hoot and shimmy and shake for the Bieb. It's all out of whack with reality, like an involuntary Pavlovian spasm that is at once bestial and highly calculated — the preening ego's equivalent of a mating call. There is incipient insanity in the Bieber scream, an explosion of unformed identity set off like a powder keg. The new Bieber movie very intentionally lights the fuse on that bomb, with close-ups, MTV jump cuts and lots of 3D Bieber finger pointing at YOU and wolfish Bieber eye contact with YOU.

The zipless fuck offered by *Justin Bieber: Never Say Never* is a tortuous tangle of abstinent desires that's all wet. It's a dry hump. Surveying the audience, I began to wonder if the passion young women feel for Justin Bieber is more homoerotic than hetero-selfish. Girls band together and bond over the Bieb's body, expressing their forbidden love through the unthreatening androgynous vicarious vessel of a pubescent pop star that remains as unattainable as an audience with the pope. People want to put Justin Bieber in their pocket like a boy bauble, a consumer talisman that bestows innocence on the precipice of scary adulthood. If that isn't the most marketable good in the world, I don't know what is.

Never say never to a chance. Never say never to a sucker. Never say never to another couple bucks. Two Twizzlers, two small bottles of water and admission for two slightly creepy older men to the Eugene debut of *Never Say Never* in glorious Real 3D: \$40.50. Never say never to a righteous profit margin.

So when I say Bieber, you say — ka-ching.

EW



THE LEVIN ENTHRALLED BY THE BIEB