

## “CORMAN’S WORLD: EXPLOITS OF A HOLLYWOOD REBEL” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold

Friday, 16 December 2011 11:39

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The longtime irony of Roger Corman’s career is that this “Hollywood rebel,” as the title of Alex Stapleton’s enormously entertaining documentary identifies him, launched the careers of so many people who became planted in the Hollywood mainstream. And it feels like almost all of them sat down for Stapleton’s camera to honor and reflect on the man who gave them their start.

CORMAN’S WORLD, opening in New York and Los Angeles today (see the [official website](#) for details) covers familiar bases for the many fans who know the filmmaker’s career; what makes it feel fresh is the wealth of points of view delivered from the remarkable number of interview subjects. The talking heads Stapleton corralled range from heavy hitters like Martin Scorsese, Robert De Niro, Jack Nicholson and Jonathan Demme to acting regulars such as Dick Miller and Jonathan Haze, not to mention Corman himself, his wife Julie and brother Gene. Their recollections take us on the journey from his early days as a nonconformist in the Army and an unfortunate brief stint at a major studio before striking out on his own, the drive-in days with American International, his transition from black-and-white cheapies to the more elaborate color Poe pictures, etc.—discovering and fostering a wealth of filmmaking and acting talent along the way.



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A rebel he may have been, but Corman’s world, as Stapleton presents it and the filmmaker happily admits, was one wide open to seizing on newsworthy trends, as he did with the biker and drug movies of the ’60s. He also addressed racism in his 1962 William Shatner-starrer *THE INTRUDER*, which has been famously cited as the one Corman production that lost money, but stands today as one of his very best movies and is given its full due and emphasis by Stapleton. She also follows him into the ’70s, when he founded New World Pictures and delivered a decade’s worth of B-movie classics, even as the studios started to encroach on his genre territory with blockbusters like *JAWS* and *STAR WARS*. His output of the ’80s and ’90s, admittedly less fertile in terms of quality, receives little attention—perhaps in part because its most noteworthy graduate, James Cameron, was one of the few who eluded Stapleton’s camera.

The many who did sit down for her provide a wide spectrum of personalities, and Stapleton follows suit by filming them in a pleasingly divergent range of settings. Scorsese holds forth in an elegantly lit screening room, Ron Howard is followed by the camera down a suburban street, ending up in a graveyard (creating the odd, perhaps unintended feeling that he’s trying to outrun his past, though he’s nothing but complimentary toward his old mentor) and Bruce Dern is interviewed while getting a haircut! The experiences they recount are many and varied, and though neither they nor Stapleton pretend that all the movies addressed are great works of cinema—even B-cinema—everyone involved expresses a fondness for the man who gave them their breaks, even if it was for little or no money.

Amidst the stellar lineup, the brightest star of all is Nicholson, whose segments give the strong impression that his Corman memories could support an entire documentary of their own (and indeed, Stapleton has said she’s got plenty more where that came from; see interview [here](#)). Beyond his mere presence, the actor is a highlight of *CORMAN’S WORLD* in the extent of the emotions he calls up; for most of his screen time, he’s the Smilin’ Jack we know and love (gleefully chiding Corman for missing out on taking part in the huge hit *EASY RIDER*), but toward the end, he gets choked up during his summation of what Corman meant to his career. It’s a strikingly candid moment.

The five years Stapleton spent on the project allowed her to not only catch up with so many famous faces, but to capture both sides of Corman himself. She’s on the scene when Corman receives his long-overdue honorary Oscar, a veteran being feted for his many contributions to cinema. And she also traveled to Puerto Vallarta to show us Corman the still-working producer, on the set of his Syfy original movie *DINOSHARK*. Not only is there a pleasing coming-full-circle vibe here (since his first movie was another aquatic creature feature, *MONSTER FROM THE OCEAN FLOOR*), but what we see of him here reveals why he had such a long and successful career: Even on a schlocky project like this, he’s taking the work seriously and has a solution to every problem.

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