

GRAND SLAM PICTURES presents



THE INDEPENDENT WEEKLY

Winging it

Toronto director
follows improv
tangent to extremes

NOVEMBER 25-DECEMBER 1, 1999

Steve

dir. Daniel Wilson

Bloor Cinema

Nov. 26, 7:00 p.m.

box office: 204.1320

Michael Jacobs

Four women. One apartment. Open improvisation. The picturesque product: one independent film lavishly dressed with the sagacious and shrewd insights of gifted actresses.

Steve, directed by Daniel Wilson, is the first feature film ever to be shot in a single, unrehearsed take.

"We took *Steve* to a different level and said 'We're going to go completely improv. No rehearsal, no story planning, no situation planning at all,'" Wilson explains.

And, as an independent film, *Steve* exemplifies the formula for cinematic success without a big budget or polished script. "This was about as pure as it gets," Wilson says. "It was just me and four actors, with no expectations at all, trying to create a great piece of art. The five of us had total freedom. I hope people see this film for what it is—a phenomenal feat of acting by all four actors. This film is as funny as hell, and it really makes you think."

Wilson's diverse characters are placed in a fishbowl for four days,

and, like my beloved but deceased goldfish Ruprecht, are neglected by everyone. As the movie progresses through a discernible, but unrehearsed storyline, the women feed each other wine, laughs and advice while providing each other a forum for unadulterated dialogue.

The film, which was shot over a four-day period in Wilson's Toronto



(l-r) Laura Bil, Alison Minors, Pasha McKenzie and Arlea Ashcroft

apartment for \$500, creates a delicious tangent in the movie industry: it relies heavily on the personalities of its actresses and allows uncut drama

to dictate its pace. Arlea Elizabeth Ashcroft, Laura Bil, Pasha McKenzie and Alison Minors (who doubles as the producer of *Steve*) all brought personalized characters to an uncharted cinematic milieu. "We said that the only thing that we would do beforehand would be to develop characters, [and] that the characters would not meet each other before the

film," Wilson explains.

This degree of improvisation was met with some trepidation among the cast. "It was scary going into it," Minors says. "We had no script, so we were relying on our instincts. It was all about knowing your own character. Every time we thought we knew where the story was leading, something would happen that would send us off in the complete opposite direction."

As the producer of *Steve*, Minors hopes that this feature film will act as a pioneer for independent movie endeavours. "It's very hard for an independent filmmaker to be seen in the city and to get a medium," Minors explains. "This should show Toronto that we do have a great film commu-

nity that's not being seen here."

Perhaps the freshest innovation of *Steve*, which occurs by default (Wilson sought the most capable actors for his film), is that the film empowers women with a voice—a voice of reason on a sundry of sociopolitical topics silenced in many motion pictures. "You really had to think like a human being. You couldn't be a robot," Bil says. "The film had a sense of rhythm more attuned with a regular conversation."

Four women. Realistic conversation. One innovative idea. The picturesque product: *Steve*.

Michael Jacobs is a frequent contributor to *The Independent Weekly*.

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