

MOVIE REVIEW

Hard Core Logo 2: More flimsy than hard

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More than a decade and a half after Bruce McDonald's *Hard Core Logo*, we now have the release of *Hard Core Logo 2*, offered not so much as a sequel as an afterthought.

The new film, posited as the filmmaker's diary, is initially carried along by McDonald's amiable onscreen presence, with his cowboy hat and constant grin, as well as his light, musing voice-over.

Soon, though, the approach grows wearisome. What is intended to be freewheeling and experimental ends up scattershot: neither funny nor insightful enough to justify its self-indulgent style or unconvincing plot.

The first *Hard Core Logo*, based on Michael Turner's epistolary book, starred Callum Keith Rennie and Hugh Dillon as a pair of feuding punk rockers on a Western Canadian reunion tour.

Often characterized as a more elegiac and dark version of *This Is Spinal Tap*, the film was a cult hit both in Canada and the United States, where it was released under the auspices of Quentin Tarantino. *Hard Core Logo* ended with Dillon's character, Joe Dick, committing suicide on camera by shooting himself in the head, which made an orthodox sequel impossible.

The new film picks up 15 years after *Hard Core Logo*. This time the focus is on Bruce (McDonald), the filmmaker from the previous film, as he attempts to exorcise his residual guilt about Joe's suicide and deal with his midlife career crisis. Having profited largely from *Hard Core Logo*, Bruce is now living well in Los Angeles. He has sold out, making a good living directing a television show called *The Pilgrim*, a sort of Christian-themed version of the old series *Kung Fu*.

When the show is cancelled thanks to a Thai sex scandal involving its star, Bruce looks for a chance at personal renewal. When he hears that a young woman punk singer claims to be possessed by the spirit of Joe Dick, he decides to leave his wife and daughter, and sets out with a Wiccan video-artist neighbour, Liz (Shannon Jardine), to pursue the story. They find the singer, Care Failure (played by Care Failure of the Toronto band Die Mannequin), and her gun-toting manager Mr. Butterscotch (rock manager Paul Shull), who agree to allow them to shoot a documentary.

Bruce and Liz finally end up in Saskatchewan in wintertime at a rural dance hall where a Die

Mannequin recording session is about to take place. The band's producer is an old acquaintance of Bruce, the imperious former mentor to Joe Dick, English rock star turned producer Bucky Haight (Julian Richings). With his sardonic delivery, Richings provides the film with some acting chops, which it needs.

Bruce assures us he is fascinated with Care; but Care, behind a mask of lipstick, heavy eye makeup and a mane of hair, is hard to read, either as a character or an actress. She comes most to life when performing her songs, raw but tuneful squalls in the mode of Sonic Youth and Nirvana, but otherwise seems too shy or guarded to make much impression.

As a director, McDonald gained fame for a trio of road movies (preceding *Hard Core Logo* were *Roadkill* and *Highway 61*), in which the forward momentum was built into the plot. That kind of push is simply not available in a drama based around the repetitious business of making a record.

McDonald and co-scriptwriter David Griffith provide the story with regular doses of bizarre events – an exorcism, a drug trip, a talking animal. But there are just too many scenes of Bruce lolling about the pool at the local spa, or the camera gazing at scudding clouds overhead, for anyone watching to feel a sense of urgency, or even necessity.

Hard Core Logo 2

- Directed by Bruce McDonald
- Written by Bruce McDonald and David Griffith
- Starring Bruce McDonald, Care Failure and Adrien Dorval
- Classification: 14A
- 2 stars