



Country: Canada
Year: 2009
Language: English
Runtime: 85 minutes
Format: Colour/35mm
Rating: 18A

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Description

Reginald Harkema's incendiary new film *Leslie, My Name Is Evil* (the follow-up to his celebrated 2006 feature *Monkey Warfare*) focuses on the trial of Charles Manson and his followers, but it's far from a conventional rehash of the grisly details. *Leslie* is a charged, intensely stylized, postmodern analysis of one of the key battles in the culture wars that consumed America for much of the sixties.

The ostensible hero is Perry (Gregory Smith), an earnest, sexually desperate young chemist engaged to Dorothy (Kristin Adams), a devout Christian who refuses to sleep with him until they get married. "I love you, but I love Jesus more," she explains. When he's called for jury duty on the Manson Family trial, Perry is exposed to a completely different world, one defined by drugs, rock 'n' roll and, most importantly, free love. He's especially taken with Leslie Van Houten (Kristen Hager), who appears to be the least overtly indoctrinated member of the family.

Though the filmmakers adhere to the facts, the film is fundamentally anti-realist, mixing camp, agitprop and the devices of both courtroom dramas and true-crime shows – a combination that makes for numerous moments of fiercely intelligent and spectacularly uncomfortable comedy. The film forces the viewer to confront both the trial's sordid celebrity aspects and its political-cultural connotations.

Leslie, My Name Is Evil poses two central questions: will Perry's experience change or affect him, and how can a society engaged in massive slaughter in Vietnam (an effort that involved many people other than soldiers) justify its judgement of individuals' crimes? Of course, the latter question is the most troubling, since it is put forth by Manson in response to Richard Nixon's mid-trial pronouncement that he was obviously guilty – a blatant disregard for due process that might even have bothered Dick Cheney.

But in our current epoch, it is Perry's response to the events that is most significant. His reactions raise the possibility that we may be incapable of learning from history, or even our own experiences, in any meaningful way. Though the film never explicitly mentions it, the motor impulse here isn't Vietnam so much as Iraq. And this is possibly the gutsiest and most troubling exploration of the subject to date, allocating responsibility to the individuals who make up a society as much as to its leaders.

Steve Gravestock



Reginald Harkema was born in Burnaby, British Columbia, and graduated from the University of British Columbia's film production programme. He has edited many notable features, including Bruce McDonald's *Hard Core Logo* (96) and Don McKellar's *Last Night* (98) and *Childstar* (04), all of which earned him Genie nominations. He has directed *A Girl Is a Girl* (99), *Better Off in Bed* (04), *Monkey Warfare* (06) and *Leslie, My Name Is Evil* (09).

Credits

Production Company: New Real Films
Producer: Leonard Farlinger, Jennifer Jonas
Screenplay: Reginald Harkema
Cinematographer: Jonathon Cliff
Editor: Kathy Weinkauff
Production Designer: Mark Gabriel
Sound: Steven Munro
Music: Paul Kehavas
Principal Cast: Kristen Hager, Gregory Smith, Ryan Robbins, Tracy Wright, Don McKellar, Kristin Adams, Tiio Horn

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