

GREG GORMAN

johnwaters

Filmdom's titan of the unconventional is ready to expose himself to Santa Cruz audiences. We tell you why // **by Christa Martin**

a FEW WEEKS AGO I WAS A JOHN WATERS VIRGIN—pure, untouched, unscathed by the 59-year-old filmmaker. But then we met one day. In one hand I gripped a thin pencil, its eraser head erect, its lead point ready to be unleashed. In the other hand I held firmly on to a giant cup of green tea. I was nervous. I was about to be deflowered by John Waters.

I'd never imagined that sex with John Waters would be like this: Two people thrashing around on a bed, blood spewing, with a chicken between them as they—to use a Johnny vernacular—"fucked."

Thankfully, my only interaction here was as a voyeur, a bystander watching bestiality on screen—just one sexual moment of many, featured in Waters' controversial, groundbreaking if not highly praised and criticized 1972 film, *Pink Flamingos*. I figured I'd get the full service experience with Waters right off the bat. I'd start with his hardest ride.

After *Pink Flamingos*, I was no longer virginal. In fact, the images I saw visited me in my dreams: pictures of an anus opening and closing, a naked couple sucking each other's toes, a castrated man, some cannibalism and, of course, the drag queen, Divine, eating dog shit. I'd been warned that my first time with Waters would be intense, but I had no idea what I was getting into.

I had to interview Waters in just a few days to discuss his upcoming holiday show on Thursday, Dec. 15, at the Rio Theatre, where the envelope-pusher is expected to delve into his Christmas obsessions. Musician Jonathan Richman, of *The Modern Lovers* and *There's Something About Mary* fame, is slated to perform. Drag king Jack E. Strano and Babette will also be on hand. So I immersed myself in all things John Waters. I poured over interviews and discovered obscure facts. "His favorite childhood memory was seeing real blood on the seat of a wrecked car when visiting a scrap yard and fantasizing about lethal car crashes," the movie Web site IMDB.com reports. "He is obsessed with true-crime and regularly attends gory trials all over the U.S. ..." He's also quoted as having said, "If someone threw up at one of my screenings, it would be like a standing ovation." And, "Sometimes I wish I was a woman, just so that I could get an abortion."

Alongside the likes of rocker Marilyn Manson and shock jock Howard Stern, Waters knows exactly what he's doing—he loves to shock people with his art.

His movies take you captive. They either terrify you or seduce you. He can screw with your mind; warp your thoughts. But he can also enlighten, nudging people to accept the perverse, the strange, the abnormal, the uncomfortable and the rejects of our society. Sex, violence, obscenities, bizarre and unthinkable fetishes and addictions are all markers of a Waters film. Conventional he's not.

The Steve Buscemi look-alike—dubbed the "Pope of Trash" and the "Prince of Puke"—was born April 22, 1946, in Baltimore, Md. At 16, he started making movies. Always attracted to the obscure and violent, his films quickly took on those themes. He made it big with the 1972 controversial film *Pink Flamingos*.

Other popular films followed: *Polyester*, *Hairspray*, *Cry Baby*, *Female Trouble*, *Serial Mom*, *Pecker*, *Cecil B. DeMented* and his most recent 2004 release, *A Dirty Shame*. His movies always create a stir, but inasmuch as they are condemned they are also extolled. He often ridicules the religious right, and makes social commentary on drugs, sex, abortion, adoption and gay issues.

And while his movies mark him as being a wild child, in photos he looks more like a buttoned-up nerdy uncle, with his curious, almost

kind smile and peewee mustache. And over the phone, Waters is witty, intelligent, quick and quite personable. Somewhere behind his infectious laughter, is a wicked sense of humor—and a dirty mind. Meet John Waters.

GOOD TIMES: Hi John, how are you?
John Waters: I'm peachy. Hold on one second. You're two minutes early. I'm not quite ready. (He splits for a bit, then returns to the line.)

GT: You're coming to Santa Cruz ...
JW: I'm excited. The best Christmas present I could ever get is Jonathan Richman is coming.

GT: What's the name of your show and can you tell me about it?
JW: "A John Waters Christmas." I'll read you the thing I wrote up about it, the press release. Providing caustic holiday observations in a rapid fire monologue. Covering all of his Christmas obsessions, Mr. Waters reveals his compulsive desire to give and to receive perverted gifts of religious fanaticism for Santa Claus,

If you ever go home with somebody, and they don't have books in their house, **don't sleep with them.** I think that's very important.

and ... the unhealthy urge to make all of his own films into children's classics. The pope of trash will give you a joyous Noel like no other. It's an hour monologue about my obsession with Christmas.

GT: What's your obsession with Christmas?
JW: It's everything from how you should dress, what you should give, your Christmas cards, why if you're depressed it's still good. [It's] about Christmas music, about Christmas movies, about what I want for Christmas, what you should want.

GT: What do you want for Christmas?
JW: I always have a list like a registry

because people are scared to buy me presents so I always put different price ranges on things I want. [I want] books and CDs. I say in my lecture that if you ever go home with somebody, and they don't have books in their house, don't sleep with them. I think that's very important.

GT: What inspired you to do the show?
JW: Well, it started after my book "Crackpot." I have a chapter called "Why I Love Christmas." That started it. And then I have a regular spoken word act called "The Filthy World," that I do maybe 20 times a year at nightclubs across the country. It started at the Castro Theater one year.

the essential WATERS

A Waters fan? Then you must have the following films in your collection:

Pink Flamingos (top, left)

The Lowdown: Hits screens in 1972; finds drag queen Divine as the matriarch of a clan who deem themselves "the filthiest people alive." Sex with chickens happen. Dog feces becomes a delicacy.

Polyester (top, right)

The Lowdown: Hits screens in 1981; finds a suburban housewife (Divine) heading toward a nervous breakdown. The reason? Pornographer hubby admits he's unfaithful, daughter gets knocked up and pregnant, and her son becomes the prime suspect of being a foot-breaking foot-fetishist. Tagline: "Smelling is believing."

Hairspray (bottom)

The Lowdown: Hits screens in 1988; finds Ricki Lake as a chubby Baltimore teen who dances her way to liberation. Sonny Bono, Divine, Deborah Harry and Pia Zadora go along for the ride.

Cry Baby (center, right)

The Lowdown: Hits screens in 1990; finds Johnny Depp spoofing Elvis flicks and juvenile delinquency scare films of the '50s. Ricki Lake and porn star Traci Lords share screen time with the likes of Willem Dafoe, Patty Hearst, Mink Stole and Troy Donahue.

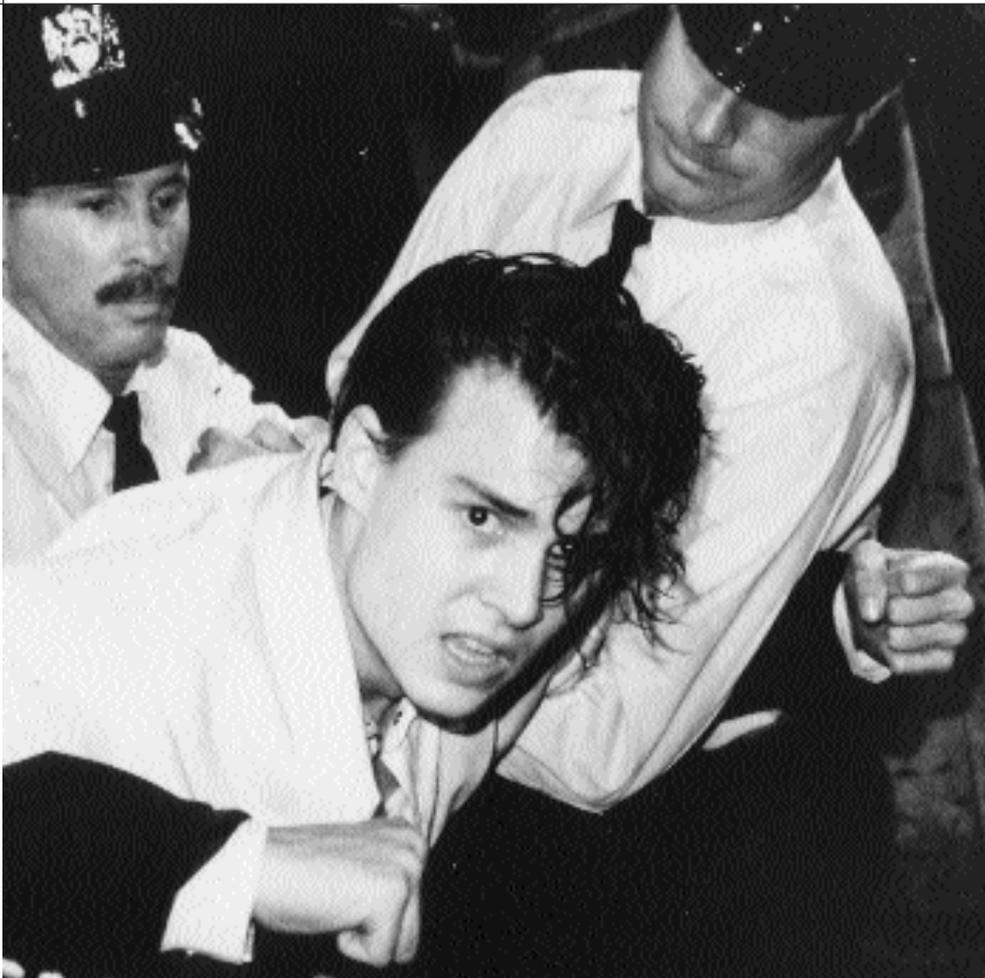
Cecil B. DeMented (center, left)

The Lowdown: Hits screens in 2000; finds Melanie Griffith being kidnapped by an indie film director and a gaggle of renegade teens. Patty Hearst and Ricki Lake co-star.

—Greg Archer



I'd never imagined that sex with John Waters would be like this.



Johnny Depp, circa 1990—post 21 *Jump Street*, pre-*Pirates of the Caribbean*—in Waters' *Cry Baby*.

I did it there and started doing it other places.

GT: Are you touring across the county?

JW: To eight or nine cities. None in the middle [of the country].

GT: Why Santa Cruz?

JW: I've been there before. I like it. That roller coaster. That post card [with the roller coaster]. I sent Andy Warhol one. It was the week after there was a hideous accident on that roller coaster and we went to Santa Cruz to ride it the day they reopened it. I always go to the worst things that the Chamber of Commerce is trying to hide.

GT: I'm wondering what else you've been up to lately. I went online ...

JW: Well, it's always wrong online.

GT: I hear that you're in pre-production for a remake of *Hairspray*?

JW: No, not correct. I will tell you everything, my product line. I just had a book come out, "Hairspray, Female Trouble, Multiple Maniacs," which is the original shooting scripts for those

three movies, which I guarantee will never play in a triple feature. It's filled with lots of pictures that you've never seen. Even me, pre-mustache, which is scary to me.

GT: How long have you had that mustache?

JW: Since 1969. Then I have the *John Waters Album*. It came out last year, and this year *A John Waters Christmas*. And I have the John Waters Christmas tour. I have a show coming out on the Here! Network, which is premium cable and cable-on-demand, Feb. 3, called *John Waters Presents Movies that will Corrupt*. It's filmed entirely in my house and I answer the door every week in a different outfit ... and give an eight-minute monologue on the insane films that they're allowing me to show like *Irreversible* and porn theater and movies you can't imagine you're allowed to show on television. It's on one of the gay channels. ... I just filmed the pilot for this Court TV show, which is called *Till Death Do Us Part*, and each week it's based on a true crime where the bride and groom kill one another. It's acted out. Each week starts at their wedding and I play

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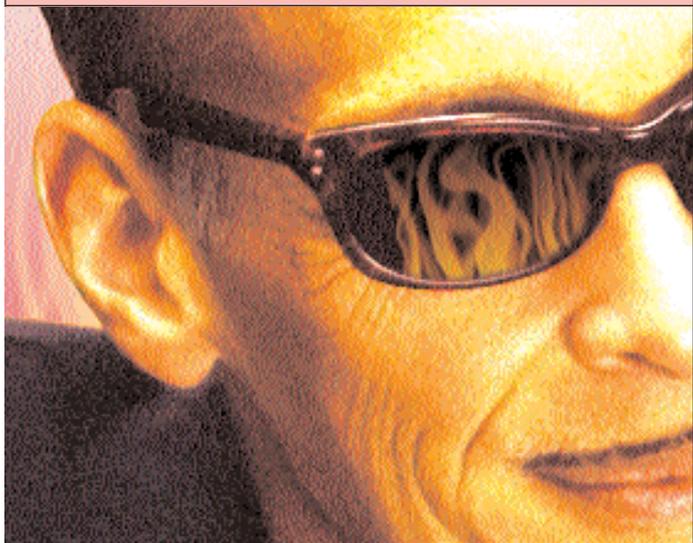
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& words & waters

Quotables from the "Pope of Trash"

... humor is how you change people's opinions and if you can make somebody laugh they'll listen, even if they hate you. So I've gotten through life with humor.

I think the terrorists would kill me in a second. I'm every single thing they would like to offer up.

I'm trying to hijack Vincent Price's career with the Court TV thing and, after all, I was in a Chucky movie.

I think in the beginning people thought I lived in a trailer and ate dog shit. They thought Divine was really a transvestite. Divine was never in drag except in the movies. I certainly never lived in a trailer and I take that as a compliment that it was so badly filmed that they thought it was a documentary. So I think that by now people know that I couldn't have been this character they thought I was.

Some call me director, producer, filmmaker. I prefer to call myself pube-king.

I pride myself on the fact that my work has no socially redeeming value.

I've signed dicks, asses, parole cards (that's my favorite), a colostomy bag while it was still pumping. A couple of years ago, I signed a bloody Tampax. That's one you don't forget. I'm not asking for someone to top that!
—www.geraldpeary.com

Nobody thought those were real testicles in *There's Something About Mary*. Nobody thought that somebody really shot semen in (Cameron Diaz's) hair. But they all know that Divine really ate dog shit, so I'm sorry, I still feel like Muhammad Ali.
—www.flakmag.com

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Parents bring me their ... kids ... like an overweight girl with like 13 bolts in her face, a big scowl. And I say, "You know what, maybe she should open a tattoo shop." Work with what you've got. That's the thing. You can't order up the version of your child that you want.

GT: Britney Spears.

JW: You know, I don't even know who she really is.

GT: Scientology.

JW: Creepy, but it surely isn't hurting any of the stars that are one. You know, maybe it teaches you to not be gay. I don't know.

GT: Censorship.

JW: Well, it's been my best press agent my whole life. I still fight it. The Catholic Church attacked my last movie (*A Dirty Shame*). The motion picture association gave it an NC-17 and caused me a lot of trouble. I thought an NC-17 couldn't hurt me. I was wrong. Even art theater chains in some cities wouldn't play it. You always fight it (censorship) but try to use it in your favor.

GT: Marilyn Manson.

JW: I like Marilyn Manson. He called me when he was very young and we talked. He was coming to Baltimore and I couldn't go to his show and he said when he was young [he had watched some of my movies]. I was a good influence. I think he's smart and funny and certainly has a great career.

GT: For all those wannabe John Waters filmmakers out there, what's your recipe for successful independent filmmaking?

JW: If it's your first movie, always put some sex and violence in it. But think of a new way to do it that might scandalize or laugh at the generation right before you that had success.

GT: Why do you like pushing the envelope?

JW: You know I don't even realize that I am. To me, humor is how you change people's opinions and if you can make somebody laugh they'll listen, even if they hate you. So I've gotten through life with humor. So to me, by pushing the envelope what that generally means is, what can be funny? Almost anything can in a movie if it's told in the right tone and coming from the weird politics of humor. Is the roller coaster open this time of year? Maybe I'll get to go on it.

John Waters performs at 8 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 15, at the Rio Theatre. Jonathan Richman will be performing music. Also featured: Kenny Larkins, Drag king Jack E. Strano and Babette. Tickets are \$25/general; \$75/for the VIP meet-and-greet. Tickets can be purchased at www.TicketWeb.com.

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