

Grumpy Burger doc sometimes thoughtful, sometimes frustrating

By Alison Gillmor

WHEN documentarian Matt Gallagher decides to track his friend Marshall Sfalcin's efforts to film the story of his grandfather's fast-food empire, the standard "making of" movie becomes something else. *The Rise and Fall of Grumpy Burger* is a sometimes thoughtful, sometimes frustrating examination of the nature of truth, both in non-fiction and fiction films. In a fractious, funny collaboration, Gallagher and Sfalcin test the limits of family and friendship and explore the tricky ethical bond between filmmaker and subject.

Sfalcin is the indie B-movie-meister of Windsor, Ont. Usually he favours shock horror movies with Styrofoam props and topless girls, but at age 35 he decides to make his first serious film, a dramatized version of the true story of the Hi-Ho restaurant chain. According to Sfalcin, his grandfather got the idea of assembly-line hamburger production while working at a Windsor automotive plant, and his version of fast-food got the jump on McDonald's by a decade.

After his grandfather's death, the restaurants passed to Sfalcin's five uncles, who aren't very comfortable with their nephew's dramatized spin on their history. Family tensions add to the practical problems of making a no-budget epic.

As a doc about the magnificent impossibilities of independent film, *Grumpy Burger* approaches the so-sad-it's-funny (or vice versa), in which a Wisconsin hack-auteur tries to make a horror movie called *Coven*. This 1999 film involved a lot of Ed Wood-like moments, as when the filmmaker and his friends argue about the pronunciation of the title. (Is it Coe-ven or Cu-ven?)

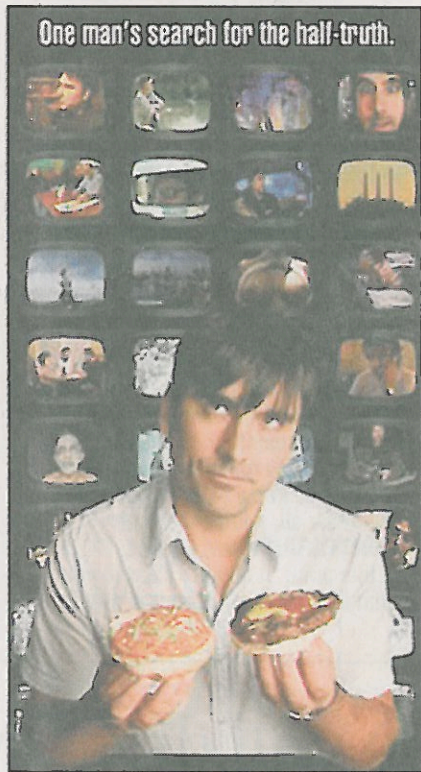
Sfalcin is too smart and too self-conscious for these kind of comic moments, but he's not sympathetic enough to be the hero of his own saga. Mostly, he's an abrasive jerk, given to bullying his hapless non-professional actors and engaging in full-on screaming matches with his older brother Christian, who invariably plays the lead in the soft-porn monster flicks. Sfalcin does love his grandmother, though, and Gallagher

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MovieReview

The Rise and Fall of the Grumpy Burger

- Directed by Matt Gallagher
- Cinematheque
- June 2-4
- ★★½ out of five



shows several scenes in which he basks in her unconditional love.

Grumpy Burger reverses a common documentary dynamic by having a subject who spends a lot of his time ridiculing the filmmaker, especially Gallagher's pretence of fly-on-the-wall neutrality. "Oh, he's not allowed to talk," Sfalcin will say sarcastically to some third person, gesturing toward Gallagher's camera.

Ultimately, Gallagher isn't that interested in the *Grumpy* saga. He's interested in what happens when one person films another person's story. Does Sfalcin have the right to transform his uncles' lives in his bizarrely re-enacted movie? How do the conventions of cinema falsify life and how do they tell higher truths?

Sfalcin is too much of an obsessive megalomaniac to be concerned with these issues, but the ambivalent Gallagher worries and worries. If he sometimes seems to critique Sfalcin, he's critiquing himself at the same time, almost to the point of inaction.

Singer Forbes leads double

Mixes solo work with regular Pink Martini gig

PINK Martini lead singer China Forbes is leading a double life right now.

Some nights you may find her dressed elegantly in a red dress with high heels standing in front of a 13-piece big band. On other nights she may be sitting on a bar stool with a guitar, decked out in jeans and fronting a small quartet.

As lead singer for the globetrotting little orchestra Pink Martini, Forbes is alight with drama, very flamboyant and confident. But she recently recorded her first solo album, and another side of her was revealed — one that is more introspective, brooding and perhaps a bit more intense and shy.

Released in March in the United States, Forbes' new CD, entitled *78*, is a project that is close to her heart. It's filled with emotion and personal sentiment, and it has given her the rare opportunity to tour apart from a band that has given her a high profile in many parts of the world.

But, as much as she cherishes her new solo project, it is still her work with Pink Martini that continues to keep her hopping from city to city and country to country, and will land her in this city again for this year's Jazz Winnipeg Festival. In fact, her appearance with Pink Martini last year at the festival caused such a stir that the band has been booked again this year for not one but two performances. So, for the moment, Forbes will have to put aside the guitar and be content to cast her spell once again with Pink Martini.

"It is a challenge to switch from one group to the other," Forbes said over the phone last week from her home in Portland. "I have a different persona with Pink Martini, and they are like a safety net for me. But with my own band I am much more exposed. Just me and my guitar, and I actually had to learn to play the guitar again after so many years."

Under Forbes and Thomas Lauderdale, the pianist, arranger and co-founder of the band, Pink Martini literally has grown from a small band that was put together to play political fundraisers to a 13-piece orchestra that has toured to international acclaim throughout North America, Europe, Asia and more.

With three CDs to its credit and sales in the millions, the band causes a



MICHAEL WOLCH
JAZZ



China Forbes will be front and centre with Pink Martini at Jazz Winnipeg Festival

splash everywhere it goes. The band's mix of cocktail music, orchestral flourishes and melodies from around the world is captivating, and Forbes sings in multiple languages, including French, Spanish, Italian, Arabic, Russian, Japanese and several others.

"I think my acting background, and I mean way in the background, years ago, helps me assume a different role with Pink Martini," Forbes said. "When I write songs on my own, for my own band, they tend to be about heartache, longing and sadness, because I feel those emotions more intensely than happiness. But when I write with Thomas for Pink Martini, it is usually more about romance, and the music tends to be livelier."

Indeed, Pink Martini is quite a diverse group. Musicians in the band come from classical, jazz, Latin and other backgrounds, and it all comes together to create a rich, vibrant and worldly sound.

The band has been so busy touring in the past several years that Forbes has had little chance to be at home or to indulge her own muse.

"I think the longest stretch I have been at home recently is maybe three weeks. I find it hard to write songs on

the road, so when I've been trying to get into a routine. I used to be a victim of the muse, and whenever some but now I don't stay and have to be more writing."

As much as Forbes is being back in her Portland starting out beautiful valley belt has also been getting Lauderdale and they ing some new mater its debut on this tou touring their CD, *Ho* a year now, and in tl they are hoping to g new songs.

"I don't think we v music from my solo meeting with Thom: we're working on so The projects are like ate lives, and for no Pink Martini takes

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