

Rev. Billy preaches to anti-globalization choir

by Paul Sherman

Friday, May 2, 2003



Whether you love him or hate him, Michael Moore's politicking at the Oscars at least roused people into thinking. Joining Moore at the rant-against-the-machine barricade is the grassroots hero and title "character" of the documentary "Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping."

The creation of New York performance artist Bill Talen, Rev. Billy fights the good fight against the loss of our neighborhoods - and, in a sense, our way of life - to corporations and greed.

During director Dietmar Post's hourlong movie, we see Rev. Billy at work on three protests: against Starbucks (for its malling of America and poor trade practices), the Disney Store (ditto the malling, plus the sweatshop conditions under which its goods are made) and New York University, which sought to knock down the Edgar Allan Poe House and put up a tower in its place.

Like the offspring of Abbie Hoffman, Andy Kaufman and media prankster Alan Abel, Rev. Billy mixes theater and message and makes his points in amusing and effective ways.

For instance, during one street demonstration in Manhattan's Astor Place, where Starbucks occupies three corners of one intersection, Billy preaches, "We all have become tourists in our own lives" because of globalization. Then he rails against Starbucks because "this is the place where they turn Bob Marley music into Muzak."

Of course, there's truth in both points, but the reverend doesn't let the performance get in the way of the message. Perhaps the deepest thing he says about Disney is "when (sweatshop companies) abuse people on the other side of the world, they abuse us."

The overriding notion in Billy's preaching is the importance of neighborhoods, cities and a world where people have a personal stake in their interactions with others and aren't just taking the money and running. He asks us to think before we spend.

I'm sure people in any major city can relate to how their hometown has become a little more like everywhere else, and a little less interesting. In Boston, Jordan Marsh was bought out by Macy's, the Coffee Connection was swallowed by Starbucks, and every new stadium prostitutes itself with a corporate-bought name.

Can we get Rev. Billy up here?

("Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping" includes no objectionable elements.)

"Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping." Not rated. At the Coolidge Corner Theatre.

<http://www2.bostonherald.com/entertainment/movies/reve05022003.htm>

Copyright by the Boston Herald and Herald Interactive Advertising Systems, Inc.

No portion of BostonHerald.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. Privacy Commitment