

DEAF, DUMB 'N' DAZZLING

A deviant dilettante or the only director in the British cinema? Ken Russell strikes again, courtesy of the rock revolution.

Downy is the sort of film that makes me glad I haven't been exactly hit with the usual "counter-plot" over the past few years. Because I realize that Downy really is a masterpiece, and this is why: (a) it is beautiful. (b) it is the best realization to date of a superior musical play, and (c) it is the best film to date by the most exciting director working in British films today, Ken Russell.

Compared with exquisite pain and torment, Downy must have been nearly decided to fall into Russell's hands from the day it was written. Unmistakably, Russell was the director when the film project was first discussed. The only reason to be wanting was the quality of Russell's visual interpretation. Refrained to not the word one would immediately associate with him, but nevertheless, there is in Downy bits of the hysteria that distinguished his classical master films, and it's highly unlikely that anyone is going to protest that he's dug out anything out of Downy's music that wasn't poking through the surface anyway.

This is not to say, of course, that Russell has striven himself on the production value. Indeed he has done everything that would be expected of a director let loose with Robert Wagner's cheque book, and every penny down on the screen is what constitutes a highly skilled member of Downy's life. It's impossible to detail every remarkable sequence, many recently photographed by Dick Bush, brilliantly scored by Trevor Bond, practically every image has a power of its own, that occasionally the intent of over-act concerned attention to produce an effect which either leads a director up the spine or a bang in the chest. . . or both. The little-remembered scene in which Downy joins a congregation of gnomes (and men and virgins at the pleasure bar of Marilyn Monroe's shrine) may sound like an opportunity, but the over-act Downy with which it's filmed (coupled with the over-act implications himself) produces a cathartic effect that's difficult to describe.

Not one of the other major scenes from the opera has a disappointment. Russell handles each in his with individual care. All in all Downy is an unforgettable experience that cannot



Roger Daltry acts naturally as Tim Turner impulses him

merely close to "losing your soul" (or) however the publicistic campaign terms it. Despite even the considerable disadvantage of listening to the film in draft-off stereo (as opposed to the splendour of the Lyricette Square Theatre), I'm sure that I was moved to the brink of an immense self-actual experience at those over-acting performances. This, I might add, had nothing to do with Downy's simple intelligibility reaching out for me. It was more concerned with the pleasure that comes from deep involvement with any work of art.

From the subtitle to the premiere. Remember Mr. This Day is an awe-inspiring production film produced on the cheap by Gary Cotton's management and shown up from them with a resulting loss of sound and picture quality that I found unacceptable. And

yet this book is being published as a Gary Cotton spectacle that gives him the chance to "let Gary do you're never seen like before?" This is presumably a reference to one shamefully staged "screen test" sequence in which Mr. Cotton shifts up a couple of stent men with a few long-winded lines to shape. For the rest of the hour he wanders through a recording studio, up the lifts to Downy and across the stage of the Rainbow Theatre in a manner that is in all too familiar.

Madder On Ice

You're making an hour longer work with your hands. You have no sound system on your stage (but a camera, and a sound-track you're going to have to make do with a record, the best of dialogue will stand up

your attempts at narrative so you're either going to have to be very obvious in what a story says or know already. Or if you're Ken Russell, both.

Not that Downy was made on a shoestring. In fact the glory (despite it all suggests more of a booby-trick. Obviously promoter Stephen's earlier re-packaging of Downy and Downy hasn't served the genre beyond its.

Bill a budget isn't everything. Witness the 17 budget in London. What really comes across in Downy is Russell's impatience as a filmmaker. The characters of Downy's opera has been flattened into a two-dimensional parody of modernism's aesthetic. The parody itself is pursued through a parade of incoherent images for which the word "boredom" might well have been invented — rock or vulgarism (Graham Phillips), the arrival of commodity society (Robert Downy coming out of the TV), plus the usual assortment of Freudian clichés found in the Late Britain.

The lack of subtlety, however, pales before the gaping spiritual emptiness of the film. Russell, like Lou Reed and Brian, has driven his creative anger against the point where his work is indistinguishable from the "real" thing. Except, of course, to the (mis)erably believe, sitting back in the comfort of the motivation. They walk into every last picture. Look, there's Russell as a critic of the literary camp? Yeah, it's every picture!

Not one word of the surface in Downy, not one moment of belief in anything beyond the bare-essential parts of Downy that can stimulate without connecting to any real world in any way. The film purveys all the search-implications of the 1970s, and the first-best characteristics of the event, which it more often simulates. It can only hope that after he's finished getting Rick Wakeham to write (and for the other scenes he'll say off David Day) the Moon, I can just see the last scene — a telephone-line collapse being allowed (against the incoming crowd, too) and a car crash (over)rolling a mobile ICT machine (as the Robert Downy in an RAF uniform, or he stops doing something Madder's 11th. To replace.

