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Rolling Stone®

THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN HOLLYWOOD

SPIELBERG

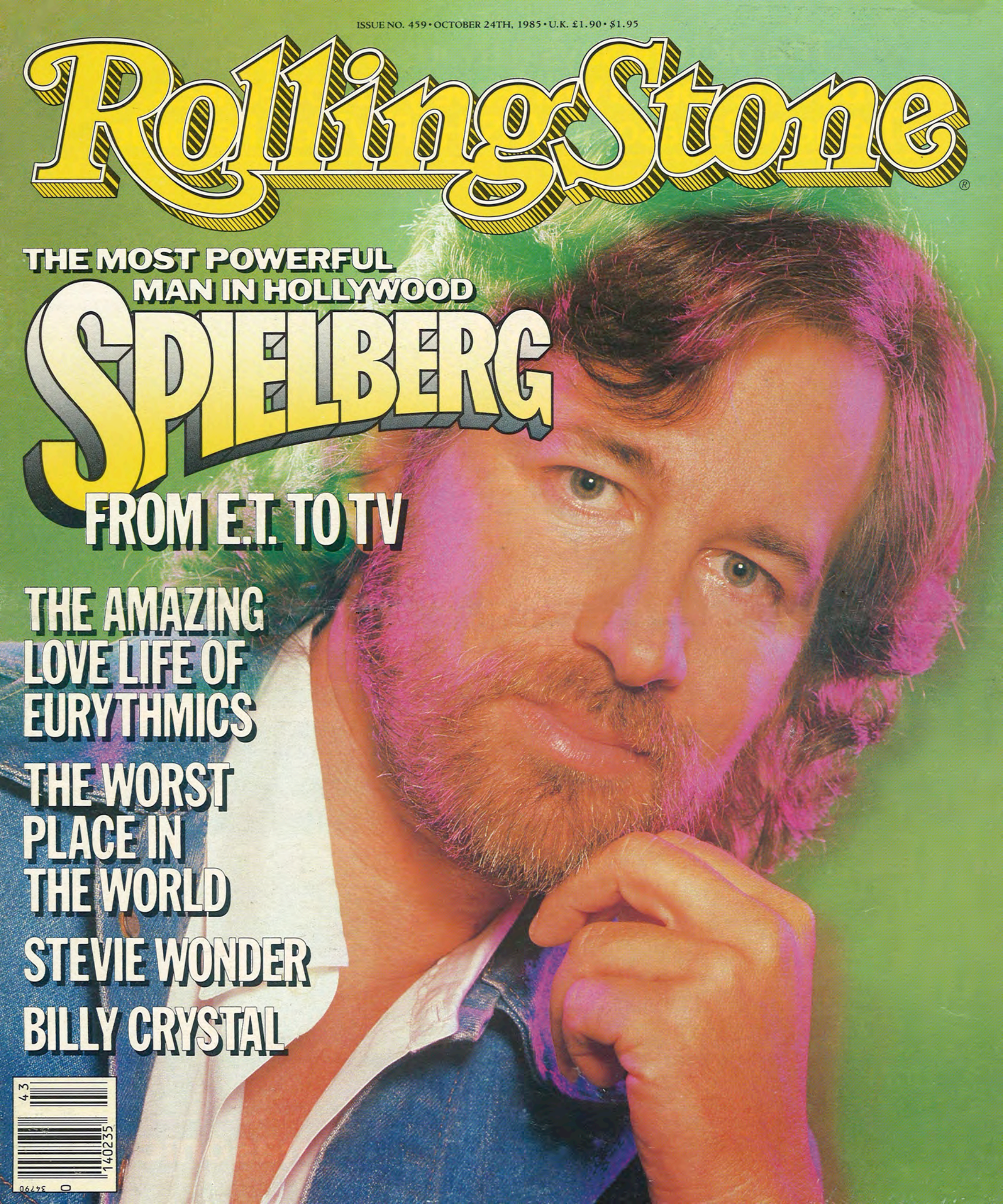
FROM E.T. TO TV

THE AMAZING LOVE LIFE OF EURYTHMICS

THE WORST PLACE IN THE WORLD

STEVIE WONDER

BILLY CRYSTAL



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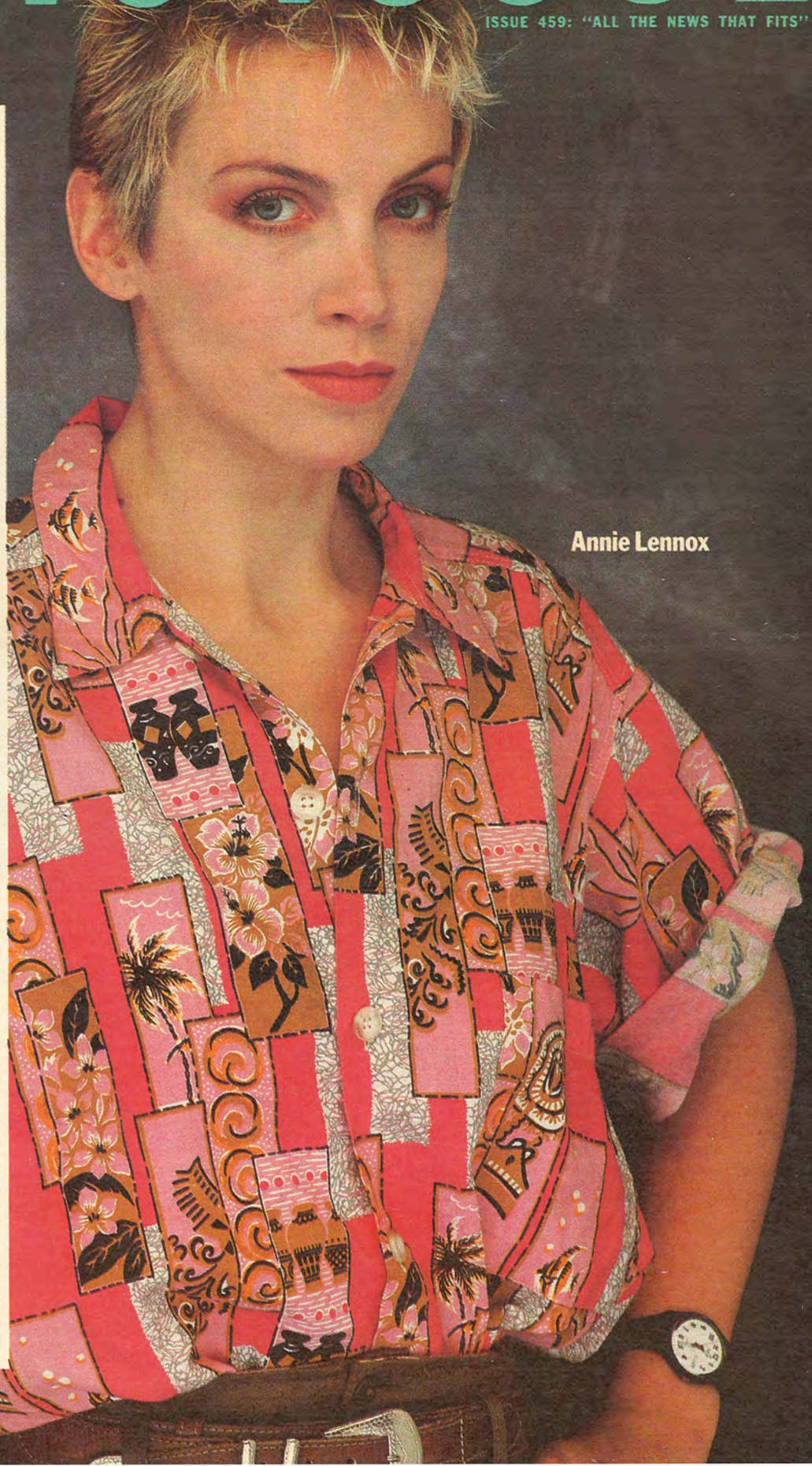
COVER: *Photograph of Steven Spielberg by Moshe Brakha, Beverly Hills, California, September 1985. Styling by Merrill Ward and Don Kaiser; grooming by Wendy Ann Rosen. Letter forms by David "Graphic Relief" Brier.*



Annie Lennox

PHOTOGRAPH BY DEREK RIDGERS

THE ROLLING STONE INTERVIEW
ISSUE 459

STEVEN SPIELBERG

BY DAVID BRESKIN

Behind the cactuses and the adobe wall and the spray of foliage above the railroad-tie steps and the stone landing, past the gardeners and the white BMW, beyond the security, both electronic and human, near the top of a hill overlooking Los Angeles, sits the house that Steven Spielberg lives in. It is half stage set, half suburban palace. It is full of wood beams, skylights, trees, knickknacks, stained glass, movie posters (of his movies), Navaho weavings and baskets, Norman Rockwells, and pink boulders at the corners of white stucco walls.

Mostly it is full of live-in actress Amy Irving and brand-new baby Max. Steven is having personal photos taken with his three-month-old son, kissing him on the head, calling him "Mad Max, the Road Warrior" and letting him suck on Dad's fingers. Mad Max is fixated on the photographer's strobe light, and every time it flashes, the baby's eyes go bonkers and his head lolls in Stevie Wonder circles. Spielberg tells Amy, "Max will become the world's first blind white soul singer."

We sit down to talk for two sessions in the den. Spielberg sprawls on a long sofa, directly beneath a Thomas Hart Benton Americana landscape and facing the original Rosebud sled from 'Citizen Kane,' which cost him $50,000 at auction and now hangs above the fireplace. In a nondescript gray T-shirt, white shorts, Polo socks and Ellesse sneaks, Spielberg is flushed and shaking and out of breath — the result of a masochistic workout with his trainer, Jake. Steven has been a bad boy: no exercise on location. He's recently returned from North Carolina, where he shot his film adaptation of 'The Color Purple,' Alice Walker's much-praised epistolary novel. It deals with family violence,

PHOTOGRAPH BY MOSHE BRAKHA

'I love *Rambo*. But I think it's dangerous.'

black people, lesbianism, the blues, racism, the rural South, feminism and adults – not exactly Spielberg trademarks. He has just finished editing this challenge while he anticipates the debut of another, his *Amazing Stories* television anthology. As we talk, a snippet of dorky electronic music shoots down the hall every ten minutes or so. It's the call of his Marble Madness videogame – begging like a dog for attention.

Tell me about the genesis of 'Amazing Stories.'

The genesis was when I made the film *Amblin'*, in 1968. It was a twenty-three-minute short – actually the same running time as each of the *Amazing Stories*. Exactly. I went back and checked. I've been in love with the short-subject business ever since I started making short films. That was my genesis: before television and feature films, I was a short-film maker. It's a fantastic genre because you have to get all your plot and character points out of the way in the first nine minutes, so hopefully the rest of the story is devoted to development and fun. I think it's great training for filmmakers who make very, very long movies and are anxious about the short format, and also for filmmakers who have not begun their careers yet, who are just coming out of film schools and have made short subjects independent from the professional business. So it's a great training ground for both old pros and neophytes.

The short film has gotten lost a bit.

It got lost a bit because running times for motion pictures have increased from 68 minutes to 110 minutes today, because the double feature is no longer a viable commodity in the marketplace. With the loss of the double feature came the loss of the cartoons – and that industry died – then you lost the newsreel to television, and also the short subject. All that is left now is commercials for coming attractions.

'Amazing Stories' comes at a time when there's more interest in anthologies and, in the literary world, a renewed interest in the short story. Have you sensed this?

I don't know if I've really sensed that, but I sensed a real need, personally, to be entertained *faster* and more economically, to make it sound cold and blunt. Remember the old pocket books that kids of the 1920s would carry around all the time, and dime novels would fit in the pocket, and they contained up to twenty short stories? And often each story was only two to three pages long? And that was the popular form of entertainment?

That was the home entertainment center.

Yes, parents would read to the kids from a rocking chair, and families were very, very close. They used to gather around the reader, or the *seer*, of the household, and in the Twenties and Thirties, usually it was the father. And then television replaced the father, and now it seems to be replacing both the father and the mother. And the short story didn't have a home anywhere except in English Lit. classes, and kids hate to be forced to do anything – especially in school. To be *assigned* something to read is not enjoyable.

You were not particularly excited to read anything in school.

I was not a reader, and I'm still not a reader. I don't like reading. I'm a very slow reader. And because I'm so slow, it always makes me feel guilty that it might take me three hours to read a 110-page screenplay that I even wrote the story for. So I don't read a lot. I have not read for pleasure in many, many years. And that's sort of a shame. I think I am really part of the Eisenhower generation of the television.

Postliterate intelligence?

Exactly, that's me: postliterate intelligence.

This concept of television as the third parent was quite prevalent in your upbringing. You were told that you could not watch certain shows, but you were constantly drawn to them. Were the roots of this huge TV project in that experience?

I often think that depravity is the inspiration for an entire career. I feel that perhaps one of the reasons I'm making movies all the time is because I was told not to. I was *ordered* not to watch television. My intake was limited solely to Disney films. I never saw anything with any violence in it. And yet when I came screaming home from *Snow White* when I was eight years old, and tried to hide under the covers, my parents did not understand it, because Walt Disney movies are not supposed to scare but to delight and enthrall. Between *Snow White*, *Fantasia* and *Bambi*, I was a basket case of neurosis. My parents didn't know what backfired. My parents tried very, very hard to screen violence from my life.

Now, thirty years later, you're about to scare the wits out of a new generation of seven-year-olds.

I guess because I like to share a good thing. Fear is not necessarily a bad thing. It can be channeled. It does not have to leave a bad taste. Amusement parks are built on fear. And yet *Amazing Stories* is not designed just to scare. Half our shows are amusing. How scary can we be at eight in the evening? Some of those that are scary will be shown later at night, later in the season.

What is your target audience?

It's really interesting. I don't know what my audience is. I would hope it would skew across the board, like my movies do. That's only a hope. I have not been involved in television since 1972, so it's been a long time. Even in TV, where I got my start, I have never considered myself a demographics or a ratings guy. The two things I never look at are the Dow Jones averages and the Nielsen ratings. I don't own a share of anything. I don't know how the stock market works. I'm the opposite of my father, who was very involved in the market and actually got hurt financially in the market fifteen, twenty years ago. And I never concern myself with the Nielsen ratings. I figure I'll make the shows; Brandon [Tartikoff, president of NBC Entertainment] can worry about the ratings.

So despite what's being gambled on a corporate level – $800,000 to $1 million for each show – you just want to make a provocative series, and if it doesn't fly . . .

Then at least we are guaranteed one more year. I did not want to enter into television unless I got a two-year guarantee. While anthologies were not new twenty-five years ago, they are new animals in the Eighties. They may take off like missiles or take time to find their audience. But I'm not concerned with the ratings, just with the quality of the shows. Are they entertaining, or entertaining enough?

What do you feel about the state of television?

I'm happy with the state of television. I'm not an evangelist coming back to save television. TV certainly doesn't need me. I'm really happy with the news – CNN, in particular. All-news television is exciting. Like the old days when Cronkite was on for twelve hours talking about our orbits or moonshots. This doesn't happen anymore unless it's a crisis that puts all of our lives in peril. I miss that.

Elsewhere, I'm a fan of *The Cosby Show*, *Family Ties*. I've always been a fan of *St. Elsewhere*, *Hill Street Blues*. I'm still crazy about *Dallas*. Every once in a while, there's a miniseries that's darn good; you wonder why it wasn't a movie first. I have nothing bad to say about TV, except that the preponderance of shows are really, really middle-of-the-road and take no chances.

You said 'Poltergeist' was your "revenge against TV." What is 'Amazing Stories'?

Not revenge so much as my elephant burial ground for ideas that will never make it to the movie screen because they are just too short form. And if I didn't exorcise them in one form or the other, they would just float around in my head and mess me up later in my life.

Has it been cathartic to get this stuff out? To open the sluice gate of your imagination?

Yeah! And it's also been a real lesson in interpretation, in interpretive directing. Because while I'd written fourteen of the first twenty-two stories – stories, not teleplays – it's been interesting for me to see how interpretive directing could take those stories to many different places, very often away from my concept. But I believe in giving directors a free hand. This is a directors' series, not a producers' series, although television is usually a producers' medium.

Is 'Amazing Stories' your film school?

Yes, right! This is my University of Universal City, without having to give grades. The critics and the public are the graders. Those are the ones who will give an A or an F. Anything but a C. Who wants to be average?

But a third of the directors for the first season have never directed on this scale before: Timothy Hutton, Bob Balaban, Don Petrie, Lesli Linka Glatter, Mickey Moore, Phil Joanou and others. This has been a great opportunity for me to give to others this opportunity. All the first-time directors have been on budget. A lot of the pros, like myself, haven't.

Some of these young guys look up to you as a deity. Does this make you uncomfortable?

I think that once people get to know me, the whole deity thing goes out the window. It's much more like a film class, where you sit around gabbing and gossiping and experimenting and speculating about shots and story concepts. It's like sitting in the hallway between classes, talking about the test we're about to take.

Maybe you've founded the television equivalent of the Left Bank in Paris among the old literary intellectuals.

Clint Eastwood feels that way. He feels strongly that this is just what you said, a very European thing – sitting around as at a café, and you finish your coffee or tea and get up to shoot a six-day show. It's a relaxed group of people, and everybody is new. We have two film editors that have never cut film on their own.

Is it ever difficult or frustrating for you to watch someone film a Spielberg story that you cannot craft? A few years back, you said you'd never allow anyone to direct a movie you had written. This was after 'Poltergeist.'

Exactly. So on a lot of these shows, [*Cont. on 70*]

DAVID BRESKIN's *report on high-school vigilantes appeared in RS 457.*

Spielberg

[*Cont. from 24*] I came up with the concept, but I never did physically sit down to write them. When you sit down to write something – every piece of dialogue and every scene – it's a lot different having that reinterpreted by another organism, as opposed to just providing a concept. Let's say I'd like to make a show about a film company making a mummy movie in the swamps of the Deep South, and the mummy's wife is twenty miles away at a hospital giving birth, and at three o'clock in the morning during a night shoot they tell this man trapped in a mummy outfit that his wife is giving birth, and without asking anyone he jumps in a car and takes off, and the car breaks down, and he has to walk through the swamp, as a mummy, to get to his wife, and in doing that, he rekindles the legend of the actual mummy that used to roam those woods 100 years ago. That's the concept. Now I don't feel bad about giving that concept to a writer and letting him have a field day with it. But I would if I had written every word of it and watched someone else shoot it. Most of my *Amazing Stories* are just that way: I think of the story, and I turn it over to the writer, and he makes it his house pet, and he hands it to a director – I have final say on who that is – and that director interprets it from his personality. And that becomes the show.

That said, you are still an over-the-shoulder kind of guy.

That's true. But I don't hang around their sets. I usually visit once, for about an hour, in an entire five- or six-day shoot. I sit quietly and watch. I don't see dailies. I see the rough cut, though. When I was in North Carolina shooting *The Color Purple*, they would shuttle these 35-mm rough cuts to me once every two weeks. I would watch and send my notes back to the director. Sometimes the director would take my suggestions, and sometimes he would argue and say, "No, Spielberg, I think you're wrong." If he convinced me I was wrong, I'd back off. I did not hover. I did not circle, like over carrion. I let most of the directors cast the shows the way they wanted. The network did not pressure us to put high-visibility actors in *Amazing Stories*.

I would think the younger directors would want you to hold their hand.

Yeah, they do. And then there is a point where they want you to let go of their hand. And that usually happens on the first day of shooting, when they say, "Action!" It's kind of like when your mom and dad took you to school for the first time, and you wanted them to take you the first day. But on the second day, you didn't want to know your parents existed!

Now as far as these big shots go – Eastwood, Scorsese, Peter Hyams, Burt Reynolds (Coppola may do one next year, and Peter Weir took a movie) – only David Lean turned you down?

Yes, he jokingly asked for six months to do a half-hour show. He said, "At least six months for a half-hour, plus waiting for the weather and the sun." David likes to put years into his films. I think television would be a bad dream for him. Although he came to the set one day, on the first show I was directing, "Ghost Train," and he was fascinated at how quickly it all fell into place. He couldn't help coming over to me and saying [*assuming a mock English accent*], "Don't you think on the next take that it would be absolutely marrrrr-ve-lous if the day-bree fell a beat sooner than it had on the first two takes." I immediately said, "Absolutely!" I yelled up at the special-effects guys, "*Drop the day-bree a beat sooner!*" It was the high point of the show for me.

For the second year, you hope to take the show to Britain and France?

We hope to do five shows in Britain with some of the top directors over there. I hope to work with the Pythons. I have other hopes of bringing Europeans into the series. Not in an *esoteric* way, because we have a terrible way of pigeonholing Europeans – in thinking that their films only play for the art crowd. That's distorted. There are such wonderful filmmakers overseas, like Volker Schlöndorff, who made *The Tin Drum*. I would love Bertolucci to work in America. I would love Sergio Leone to do something for us. I don't think I'll get them, but we will try.

Do you feel differently working in the different media of television and film?

I tell you, I like working fast, no matter which I work in. When I shoot an *E.T.*, which went quickly, I get more pleasure from it, and it reminds me of the pleasure I can get by directing something like *Amazing Stories*, where you wake up on Monday and shoot, and by the following Monday evening you have told a story on film, and three days later you are in a screening room watching what you started. It's sort of like winning at videogames. But by the same token, it's a very short-lived satisfaction. Television is not regarded in the same historical perspective that motion pictures are. Ultimately, movies are more gratifying and, ultimately, more profitable.

But I have a feeling we will end up seeing 'Amazing Stories' on videocassette.

Yes, you will. It's one way to make up the deficit, especially from Universal's perspective. To put four of these stories on a videocassette and release them overseas once or twice a year is a way to make some of the money back.

Now you're talking like you're going to be scrambling to get back to zero, as far as the money goes. And you say you're not looking to make a penny on this?

If the show goes for five years, I'll make a profit. It if doesn't, I'll not make a penny.

Tell me about collective dreaming.

Everybody shares the dream. Not just the storytellers. And they make it their own dream. I interpret my dreams one way and make a movie out of them, and people see my movies and make them part of their dreams. Most of the shows in *Amazing Stories* are "wouldn't-it-be-nice-if" stories. There are very few "oh-gee-I'm-glad-that's-not-happening" stories. None of our shows, at least the first year, are anything like "The Dark Side of the Day After." Possibly the second year, we will get into some weightier subjects. Perhaps some shows will be more political, some shows more cynical.

'I often think depravity is the inspiration for an entire career. . . . The horrible, traumatic years I spent as a kid became what I do for a living today.'

Joe Dante [director of 'Gremlins'] says that you don't have a dark side to your personality.

Oh, but I do have a dark side. Everyone does. I really believe that the best movies, the best stories, take you to the darkest part of your own – or the leading character's – personality and then you *rescue* him. There's a rescue mission involved in all the best movies. And that person is *saved* from his own undoing or what other people are doing to him. You have to bring people down to the bottom before you can recover in an operatic third-act finale. In every fight film ever made, the protagonist is taken out in the third or fourth round, can hardly recover by the sixth, rope-a-dopes through seven and eight. Now usually it is the empty seat in the audience – the girlfriend is not there; she's been kidnapped by the bad guys who want him to lose the fight. But she gets away from the bad guys and sits in the seat and by round nine, the protagonist pulls himself off the bloody canvas after eye contact with his girlfriend: "Kill him for me." He gets back on his feet and wins. So there is a dark side. Dark side does not have to mean *Scenes from a Marriage*. The dark side is just the worst in people. And you let everyone see it, and then effect a recovery.

But you don't have a recovery in a 'Citizen Kane,' and you don't in a lot of Shakespeare. There is tragedy, too.

Sure you have tragedy. I just haven't made a lot of movies that were tragic. As much as I admired and loved *Citizen Kane*, I guess I have a different outlook on life. I have more of a bubblegum outlook on life than I think Welles did when he made *Kane*.

You mentioned that in the second season of 'Amazing Stories' there will be more political stories. Do your films have a politics to them?

That's for other people to interpret. I don't approach a subject from any kind of political standpoint. I have never had a political conversation in my life, vis-à-vis a movie. It's been pointed out by a lot of European journalists that my films are political. The French, German, Italians and Spanish consider *1941* the most political film I ever made. They believe it is an anti-American statement, something I vehemently contest. The headline in Paris, where the film was released quite succesfully, was SPIELBERG THROWS A PIE IN THE FACE OF THE STATUE OF LIBERTY. That hurt my feelings. I'm a Democrat with Republican underpinnings.

How so?

In that I'm liberal about a lot of things, but I'm bullish about America and the strength we have to maintain in a world that is growing stronger and stronger.

To continue in a sociopolitical vein: Your films have tended not to involve minority issues or even minority cast members, and the word I get is that 'Amazing Stories' does not feature any strong black or Latin stories or casts.

Well, we have several shows with strong minority casts. "The Sitter" has an all-black cast. [Only the lead, Mabel King, is black. – ED.] I think before *The Color Purple* comes out, my greatest minority story is *E.T.* That is a minority story that stands for every minority in this country.

E.T. was a broad-based story about an ugly duckling, someone who didn't belong. Someone who wasn't like everyone else. And because E.T. wasn't like everyone else, he was picked apart and made very sick and almost died. I always felt *E.T.* was a minority story.

You are approaching 'Amazing Stories' a bit differently from the normal network barrage of hype, where the shows are all previewed for the critics and the audience knows everything about them before they see them.

I tried to avoid that, exactly. You should see what the network wanted to do. They wanted to call it *Steven Spielberg's Amazing Stories*, but I wouldn't let them. Or they wanted to say, "Spielberg Presents . . . " and [*Cont. on 72*]

Spielberg

[*Cont. from 70*] I wouldn't let them. Once the series starts, they can only use my name once for every three promos. I did not want to be the star of this series. I do not want it to sell itself. It is not a series; it is an anthology. There is no string between one week and the other, and I don't want my name to give it that false continuity.

What have you learned by doing this project?

I've learned that I liked college more than I thought I did. I learned I like social activity more than I thought. This has become a family activity. To see all these actors and directors walking up and down the halls reminds me of the old days when Louis B. Mayer was head of MGM and they had a whole stable of contract actors and writers and directors and film composers and technicians. *Amazing Stories* is like an old studio. The way films are made today is not like that old system, where the mills were there to grind out the sets, and there was a makeup department – which was an actual building with MAKEUP DEPT. over the door – and all that stuff, which to me is very glamorous and romantic. Which is why my headquarters is on the Universal Studio lot and not in an office in Century City. I like being at the factory, working at the factory.

Speaking of the old studio bosses, might you in the near-to-distant future become a new studio boss of that very same factory?

It's not an ambition. I think I'd rather be a film composer first, like John Williams. I have more ambition to compose music than to become a studio head. I've already tasted what it's like to be a studio head, since my company, Amblin Entertainment, produces three to five movies a year. I've tasted what it's like to juggle films and executive-produce them, and it's not a lot of fun. I'm having more fun on *Amazing Stories* than I had all year long executive-producing five feature films.

You, unlike Lucas, would rather direct.

Any day! And twice on Sunday. I don't like business. I don't like the financial side of things. I don't like being the bad guy. I don't like saying no. Some producers in this town love saying no. They live to say no. But as a result of saying no, a lot of movies don't get made that should get made. And when you are an executive producer, you wind up saying no a lot. That's one of the reasons I am cutting back with this. I am cutting back my entire production of motion pictures from about five films a year to about two films a year, one of which I will probably direct.

Does it hurt you to say no to people?

It's tough to say no because I do not like being said no to myself. I don't mind nature saying no, because I can always find a better, more creative way to do something, but when a producer said no to me, I didn't take it that well. When I was a young director in TV and had no real pull and the network came in and would say, "I don't like that, do it over again," it was real tough for me. That's why I didn't do television very long.

And you were too avant-garde for early-Seventies television.

Yes, I was very avant-garde then. One producer of mine said no every day and recut a whole show of mine. That pretty much killed the incentive to work for anybody again. The person I enjoy working for more than anybody is George Lucas. He's the best boss I ever had, because he is the most talented boss I ever had. The other one is Sid Sheinberg, who is no longer my boss but my partner, in control of the money. So I know how hard it is to be said no to. I'll only do it if I feel the whole project is at stake. If someone comes to me and says, "I'm turning your mummy into a runaway cocker spaniel," then I will say no.

'Because I'm so satisfied having Max,' says Spielberg of his three-month-old son, 'I don't think I'll make any films with kids for a while.'

Better yet, let's take a real-life example. You replaced Eric Stoltz with Michael Fox long after 'Back to the Future' had begun filming.

That was a real hard call. That made me miserable. And I'm still miserable – not about the decision, which was right, but what I should have done, which was allow Bob Zemeckis and Gale to wait until the first of the year, when Michael was available. Michael was our first choice. He was not available due to *Family Ties*. I should have waited, and yet I wanted the film out for the summer. And for the record, I think Eric Stoltz is a marvelous actor, in the same league with Sean Penn, Emilio Estevez and Matthew Modine.

Who do you look forward to working with?

I've got to work with Dustin Hoffman. I think he's one of the greatest actors working in America in many decades. Not unlike the best of Spencer Tracy in the Thirties and Forties. I'd love to work with Meryl Streep and Judith Ivey and John Malkovich. I want to do another picture with Whoopi Goldberg. Working with her was a good experience for me personally. I'd like to work with Dreyfuss again. Those I'm leaving out know how good they are. By the way, I'd like to work with Amy Irving, my lady, and do it in a way that would not be a husband and wife working together out of a domestic necessity.

By the same token, I get real excited starting out a Michael J. Fox in motion pictures. That is almost as exciting as the opportunity to work with Dusty on a film. It's the difference between being a young kid and making love with an experienced woman over thirty, and being a man and making love to a girl who has never made love before.

Let's talk about some of the 'Amazing Stories' shows. "Amazing Falsworth" has been moved to a Tuesday at nine. Why?

Because it's too intense for the Sunday eight o'clock time slot. It's one of the most *intense* things I have ever sat down in a dark theater and watched. Forget television. This is frightening.

Tell me about your teleplay that Eastwood directed, "Vanessa in the Garden." A newspaper said, "Short on laughs . . ."

[*Laughs*] Look, if it does get laughs, we're in big trouble. If you laugh, that means the show is a disaster. I'm real proud of it. I read that same article. I think everyone knows what the *apple* is. A lot of anger is created if you try to keep a secret, be a bit elusive. The anger turns into: I've got to figure this out and invent what this is, and it will be denied, and through the denial we will discover what it really is. So that "short on laughs" is media manipulation.

People are troubled by things they can't name. You almost can't think about something unless you have a word for it.

Right, you can't think about it. I like the surprise. When something comes into the theater or over the airwaves, let the audience and the press discover it hand in hand. I think that everyone likes to be surprised. I do. I can't stand to hear what a movie is about before I see it. I have been in restaurants and heard people talking about a movie, and I've gotten up and moved to a different table. I walk around with fingers in my ears on Monday after people have seen movies on the weekend I haven't seen yet. When *Rambo* first came out, I hadn't seen it, and I didn't want to hear about it.

And what did you think of 'Rambo' when you saw it?

I think *Rambo* is great. I love *Rambo*. But I think it is potentially a very dangerous movie, because it's a this-is-the-way-it-should-have-been motion picture, which is very, very frightening. It changes history in a frightening way. But it's a helluva well-made picture. It winds you up inside, and when it lets you go, you spin around like a top, and the darn thing is just so much fun to watch. Even bleeding-heart liberals walk out trying desperately to deny that they were entertained. I was entertained and angered at the same time.

Should television be taken more seriously? You know, every university has 341 courses on American Literature, i.e., "The Short Story from Poe to Raymond Carver," but so little about television, which is what our culture has really been up to the last thirty years. Should we put the same lens of analysis on 'Amazing Stories' as we do the latest hot novella?

Actually, thirty years ago, I would have said, "Yes, television should be taken more seriously, and we should put more critical weight on each thing that comes out because it is becoming a part of the whole body politic." But it's different today, with satellite and cable and forty-five channels of opportunity. You can't take all of it that seriously, because it's too spread out. It's no longer three networks and Ted Turner. It's three networks, Ted Turner and thirty-nine other channels of opportunity. The choices . . .

Yes, the world of narrowcasting. I personally look forward to the Time Channel, where you'll be able to turn on the TV and find a station showing nothing but the time changing.

[*Laughing*] Exactly! Exactly! Watch the time change for a good hour or so. I mean, when you have a weather channel, an all-sports channel, an all-exercise channel, and when you can watch whatever you bloody well please – watch the *National Geographic* until you drown, turn the channel and learn a foreign language, turn and watch hurricane footage – it becomes rather amazing. And it becomes hard to take all that seriously.

Are you worried about people's attention spans? We've just hit the moment where fifteen-second commercials have been sanctified as gospel according to Madison Avenue. Down from a minute, down from thirty seconds. And we seem to be losing our ability to concentrate for any length. There will be an 'Amazing Stories' show called "Remote Control Man," in which a guy will be able to change his life from one scene to the next by pushing the remote control for his TV, and you've even said you're a bit like that – you watch thirty shows in a night but only eight minutes of each one. What about the attention-span issue?

I've heard about the fifteen-second commercial. I'm not a psychologist, so it's hard for me to talk from a medical standpoint about how damaging this is going to be for our brains over the years. How will it affect Max, my son, when he starts watching commercials that are fifteen seconds and rock videos that are two and a [*Cont. on 74*]

Spielberg

[*Cont. from 72*] half minutes? Everything is becoming *stimulation* more than *story*. And stimulation is a product of conditioning. If they can give you something furious in fifteen seconds, and give it to you enough times, when you are shopping at the local market, you are automatically going to float over to the stand and buy the product that has been tattooed on your occipital lobe. I don't know if this is psychologically damaging more than just outrageous. It's essentially Orwellian.

On the other hand, there is that button that says "on" and "off." We have the choice of turning that stuff that America is made of "on" or "off." But if you take a survey right now, you'll probably discover that ninety-nine percent would rather leave it on and worry about the damage later.

There's a lot of fast, fast cutting in movies today. I'm not just talking about *Footloose*, *Flashdance* and the breakdance pictures. Musicals will always be cut like videos. But there are movies like *Terminator*, which is storytelling by rapid visual impressions, machine-gun-like impressions thrown your way. And because we are now so conditioned, because of commercials, rock videos and videogames, our reaction times have improved. Now we are able to retain things that, I guarantee you, thirty years ago would have given you a headache.

This conditioning is making us anxious in the face of anything that is slowly paced.

Yes, people fidget. And light cigarettes. Eat more candy. To me, hurray for slowness! When you watch a Bergman movie, you actually taste the food that's on your plate. A lot of movies today are like bad eating habits: we don't quite know what we ate after we've finished. I love slower movies.

Which brings to mind 'The Color Purple,' which I assume is a slower movie.

I'm not ready to talk about it yet. Not because I'm doing my political thing about waiting till the last minute, but literally because I just finished making the movie and I'm cutting it now. And when you're cutting, you can't think about it; you just have to go in and do it. I can't separate myself from the film to say anything about it until it's finished.

You have said a few things about the movie.

All I've said is that it's really scary to make this movie at this time of my life, and I was happy that I'd been able to get myself to take this kind of a chance. This is a new genre for me. There are directors, like Sidney Lumet, who have spent their entire lives making movies about people. There are directors that can tell a story through the acting of their cast. I have never had to tell a story through acting, until this movie – with the possible exception of *E.T.* and *Poltergeist*, in which the acting was really the special effects.

Perhaps not coincidentally, 'E.T.' was the only other movie you did not completely storyboard, before 'The Color Purple.'

Yes. I did not storyboard *Color Purple* at all, because I wanted every day to be a new experience for me. Usually, I make my movies in my head, as you would design a house, and I come onto the set with the blueprint, and I build the house. And sometimes the best sequences – the best rooms in the house – were those that I did not have designs, or storyboards for, because of a crisis, someone got sick or we had to change plans. I've enjoyed the "winging it" parts of my movies more than the planned ones.

Because you were bored by the time you got to shoot them. You knew them already. There was no discovery.

[*Laughs*] I often say that. And for a long time I did it that way [everything preplanned, storyboarded] because that's the way Disney and Hitchcock did it, and it worked for them. And yet Hitchcock never liked making movies. He didn't like the process, because he had already made the movie in his head. You never make a movie as well as you make it in your head. I've never made a movie as good as the one I planned. So on *E.T.*, which I didn't do any planning for, I didn't know what it would be. *Color Purple* is the same way. I just came on the set the first morning and worked with the actors and shot the sequence according to how I felt that day.

Whoopi Goldberg says she never knew what was going to happen because you were giving the script only one day at a time.

Because I was changing the script with the screenwriter, Menno Meyjes. We changed the script every single evening after dailies. Changing lines every day. But Whoopi had the script and she was very well prepared.

Let me at least ask you about your decision to do the movie. The book made a heavy impression on you – you cried after you read it – yet the story is a radical departure for you. It's about people very different from you and from a background very different from yours. What made the emotional connection to you?

It's because *people* are not radically different. All of us are part of some minority. I was Jewish and wimpy when I grew up. That was a major minority. In Arizona, too, where few are Jewish and not many are wimpy [*laughs*]. So I made a lot of connections. I never looked at *Color Purple* as just a black movie. I looked at it as a story for everybody.

You used to be afraid of movies like 'The Color Purple.'

I was more afraid of myself. I was afraid of discovering my limitations. I was afraid of discovering a wall that said: Go no further! This is as far as you can ever go in life! Stay in the area that you do best and do not wander! Go back! Warning! BEWARE! DO NOT CROSS THIS LINE! ELECTRIFIED FENCE! HIGH-VOLTAGE! CONTAMINATED! BIOLOGICALLY DANGEROUS! All that sort of stuff. That's what I was afraid of. And that fear began with *E.T.* Because *E.T.* was a very personal story.

'Torturous!' says Spielberg on the making of *E.T.* 'You should see how wrinkled my insides are. My pubic hairs turned gray!'

Even though E.T. was a creation of today's cosmetics and technology, E.T. was still a very human, real character in a very human, real story. And I felt that wall as I was making that movie. And so for every movie I am making now, I want to see how far I can push that wall that says, Don't go any further.

You had gotten into a mode where you were trying to top yourself, and I'm sure it was easy to fall into, with those movies being so successful, but it's limiting. If you're a cook, you don't just want to make something everyone can agree on; maybe you need to make something a bit spicy.

Yes, and I'm in the kitchen making something just for me to eat. Sometimes Julia Child goes in the kitchen and cooks for her and her husband. I think both with *E.T.*, which I had no idea would be so popular, and *Color Purple*, the first inclination was to cook a meal for myself, and maybe for the people I knew who liked what I'm cooking. *Color Purple* is not meant to be a massively popular entertainment.

And yet your associate Kathy Kennedy indicates you want to make this story as accessible as possible.

I would like a lot of people to see the movie. But I know in my heart of hearts that this is not everybody's cup of tea. This is not a populist film. But right now, I am in the forest and can't see the trees.

So if it does not play in Peoria, you will not be upset?

[*Laughs*] I don't even think we are booked in Peoria. We will only open it in 100 to 150 theaters. When it comes out around December 18th, it will not be competing against the big boys that are in 1100 to 1700 theaters. I didn't even want to go into 150 theaters; I wanted to go into 35. The studio prevailed upon me to open in more because my name will be on the film and we have a chance for more word of mouth. I want this picture to start slowly and finally find its audience.

Everybody thinks everything I do needs to be part of a kind of Spielberg definition of who I am. That's hard to fight.

Why? Does everyone think you're so insecure you need the pat on the back that a $250 million gross provides?

No, I just think people feel that you can't have one without the other. I'm not trying to prove anything to anybody except myself here. I'm just trying to respond to something I responded to emotionally when I read it. So in a way it's very selfish. I read a book I liked a lot, and said, This will not be very popular, but I want to make this movie.

As far back as 1982, there was talk of a collaboration between you and Quincy Jones.

Oh, that was for a musical, which might still happen.

Yet he was instrumental in this project.

Luckily for me, the movie came attached with Quincy Jones. When I was given the book by Lucy Fisher at Warner Bros., she said, "Look, if you like this, understand that Quincy is already involved." Quincy is learning a lot on this movie. He was on the set every day, watching, and hopefully gathering impressions that will translate into musical impressions when he does the score, which he's doing right now.

The person that was most responsible for my saying yes to this was Kathy Kennedy, and that's personal. Kathy said all the right things to me at a certain point in my life. And Quincy also said all the right things. And then in one meeting with Alice Walker, I pretty much knew I was going to make the movie.

Did anyone approach you along the lines of "Steven, you need to do something like this"?

[*Laughs*] Nobody *dared* say the word *need* to me. Not even Kathy, who calls me every name under the sun, has ever said I *need* to make something.

You are beginning to work less hard these days, shorter weeks, shorter hours.

I look forward to decycling, debriefing myself. To getting into my family career as much as my movie career. It was extraordinary for me to be able to direct a movie and have Max in my arms. So I'm interested in getting back to my family, a lot of vacationing, resting, relaxing.

Is the family career as exciting to you as the film career?

It's great. I wake [*Cont. on 76*]

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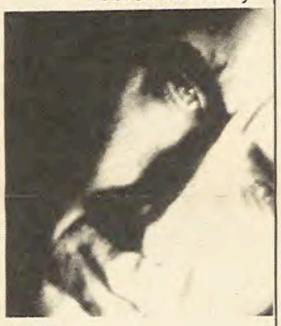

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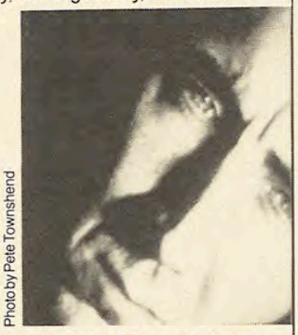

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Spielberg

[*Cont. from 74*] up in the morning and look down at Max, and every time he sees me he smiles. I'm starting to wonder why he does that [*laughs*]. Maybe he knows something. But the smile makes me forget *everything*. I miss appointments. I don't get to the office at 7:45 anymore. I come in at 9:30. I take an extra day off a week, either Friday or Monday. This is nice and this is necessary. *This* is what's needed, and only I can say that about myself.

Artists go through amazing things when babies enter their lives.

This is changing me, but I don't know how yet. For one thing, I don't think I'll make any films with kids for a while. Because I'm so satisfied having Max, I don't have to substitute surrogate children in my pictures to be a surrogate daddy. So I think the ages will increase in the movies I make.

Your childhood has been so important to your films.

I use my childhood in all my pictures, and all the time. I go back there to find ideas and stories. My childhood was the most fruitful part of my entire life. All those horrible, traumatic years I spent as a kid became what I do for a living today, or what I draw from creatively today.

Do you think having the baby may make you grow in a way you haven't grown since that really creative childhood period?

Or it might do the reverse: it might keep me younger. It might make me relive my childhood. Perhaps as this little thing becomes a young boy and the young boy becomes a young man, I may recall even more clearly all the fun and scary times I had growing up as a child. And hopefully I will be able to help Max more than I would if I hadn't had a childhood so ripe with experience and adventures. I better be able to tell him some things. I'm a daddy now.

Will there be others after Max?

Yes. A small clutch of kids [*laughs*].

From what I understand, the delivery-room scene shook you up.

You have to be there. Everyone told me what it was like. I listened to all the stories with fascination, and I thought I would be jaded and would not react when it happened. But when that baby was born, it was as if he was the only child ever born in the history of the world. Max is certainly the broadest change I've ever made in my personal life.

All those people out there who profess to know what Spielberg needs to do, most of them critics who loiter in shopping malls, probably think that you need to grow up and that a child is certainly a step in the right direction.

[*Laughing*] Yes, I'll grow up, and I'll be doing *Scenes from a Marriage: Part II* in a few years. I'll be getting into Bergman, Fellini, Herzog. I'll be pulling boats up mountains because they are there.

For the gestalt.

For the gestalt of it all. Who knows? But just as I've stopped *planning* my movies, I feel the same way about my life. I no longer want to storyboard the next few years of my life. When it happens, it happens. I've retired from storyboarding professionally and, more importantly, personally.

Do you think it took the sheer weight of your success and the security you have financially, and perhaps now personally, to get to this point?

I think that's fair to say. Some people can make one big movie and they have so much confidence that they can run off and make anything. I admire Richard Donner, who after *Superman* went off and made *Inside Moves*. That's great. It took me a lot more hit movies before I had the guts to turn around and do a *Color Purple*. Or, in fact, an *E.T.* People keep thinking I knew it was going to be a hit, but for me personally that movie took the same sort of guts *The Color Purple* takes.

Were there times when you were making 'E.T.' when you thought you had a ridiculous oddity on your hands?

Oh, yeah. At first I thought I was making this personal statement about the effects of divorce on children. Which is, to me, what *E.T.* was really about. And other times I thought I was making a kiddie show that would be unreleasable in motion-picture theaters and would have to be released on Saturday-morning television, next to *He-Man* and *Transformers*. So I vacillated radically on that one.

So the emotional up and down of that must have been torturous.

Oh, torturous! Torturous! You should see how wrinkled my insides are from all that stuff. My pubic hairs turned gray! That was a real traumatic thing. But *E.T.* helped me with *The Color Purple*. If I hadn't made *E.T.*, I wouldn't have had the confidence to make *Color Purple*.

But in a certain way, 'E.T.' was more of an intuitive movie for you than the others.

E.T. was very intuitive for me. Which is why I didn't need the storyboards. *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, on the other hand, was much more of an exercise in physics, in science and logistics and pure flashiness, than anything else. That was a slide-rule movie.

Let's talk about your ambitions. You indicate you are not as happy being a mogul as being a director, and yet here you are, saddled with mogulhood.

I'm a minimogul. A minimogul is someone who makes five films a year, or less. I run a ministudio, and we make minimovies, and we hope to make maxiprofits. Since I'm cutting back on producing, I will soon be a micromogul. Myself and my colleagues have found producing and executive producing less than a satisfactory experience. I have found myself putting my name on some movies that I may have gotten started but otherwise had little to do with. With *Young Sherlock Holmes*, which has been shot in England, I had virtually nothing to do with it. However, we were very involved with *Back to the Future* and *Goonies*. It's just too much for anybody to work on. I always fashioned myself as a chief of surgery: I would go from operating room to operating room, consulting, ever so often leaning over the surgeon's shoulder to make a cut or to suture something or to clamp something else or point something out. And what I discovered as the chief of surgery is that you really never have your own operation. And I miss that.

Tell me about your patients, starting with 'The Money Pit.'

It's done, and it's very funny. Richard Benjamin did a wonderful job directing, Tom Hanks and Shelley Long are quite good, and it will be out this Christmas or late winter. It's a story about remodeling a house. It's a restoration comedy. I've remodeled three houses now, and as exaggerated as some of the humor is, it's not far-fetched.

'Young Sherlock Holmes'?

Coming out this Christmas, it's directed and produced by Barry Levinson [*Diner*, *The Natural*] and Mark Johnson, and it's about the first encounter between Holmes and Watson at a boarding school and their first adventure.

'American Tail'?

It's an animated film I'm producing, which Don Bluth [*The Secret of NIMH*] is directing. It's sort of in honor of the Statue of Liberty, and it's a way to show kids what our grandparents went through coming to this country from all over the rest of the world. It's about Ellis Island and the Mousekawitz family – Russian mice – who were chased away by the Katsacks and, on the premise that there were no cats in America, came over on the boat.

I love animation, and I'm executive-producing three animated features in a row with the Don Bluth group. Each animated film takes three years, so we're talking about a nine-year process. *American Tail* we will show in 1986. My family came over from Odessa and Austria, and the main character is named after my grandfather, Fievel. He's a six-year-old mouse.

'Peter Pan,' and not with Michael Jackson?

Well, it never was with Michael Jackson, but the press spread rumors.

Perhaps it was wishful thinking on the part of the public. It will be made the way it was intended to be made: with a boy instead of a girl, a prepubescent boy. I start shooting it next September.

And 'Raiders III'?

That will be shot after *Peter Pan*. So my next directorial job is undecided; it might just be a couple of *Amazing Stories* and a lot of time with Max and Amy. I like that plan. So it might be a quasi year off. *Raiders III* will be shot shortly after *Pan* and will probably come out in the summer of 1988.

'A Guy Named Joe'?

I'm developing it as we speak. The original was a wonderful movie, a love story set in World War II. One of my favorite late-late-show love stories. A bit of fantasy, a lot of truth – about how people are to each other when they're not with each other – and it's a little bit cynical. I've been working on the script since 1980.

You've resisted the temptation to do an 'E.T.' sequel?

Yeah, the people at K Mart who are busy buying Jaclyn Smith clothes and discussing what I should be doing next talk about this one, but while I've thought about it, I still feel that all an *E.T.* sequel could do is disappoint people. Nothing will be as innocent. A sequel would be a business decision, and I am not prepared to make such a decision, using E.T. as the trump card.

It would be a nasty thing to do to the little critter.

I have personal feelings about this. I've gotten a lot of things from him in my life, beyond the commercial success. I'm not sure I want to trade on that – just to do a movie that would bring in $300 million. I'm not chasing dollars now. I would love *E.T.* to be handled the way Disney used to handle their feature films. I would like *E.T.* to be released every five to seven years in movie theaters for another generation of children. *E.T.* is not a home cassette or cable experience. It has to be shared in a theater.

You mention "chasing dollars." Were you ever a dollar chaser?

Yeah, exactly. When I was doing television, I was living in a $130-a-month apartment, and I was looking to eat dinner at night, looking to go to restaurants. It was hard dating because I did not have enough money to date. Even under contract as a director to Universal, my take-home pay was just a little over $100 a week. Not quite enough to live on. I did have a lot of close calls with shooting schlock to make a living. I had many chances to make sleazo, exploitation movies. That was all I was being offered then. You know, you meet the producer and you wind up buying *him* lunch. I played that game for a long time. And at other tables there were other producers with other young neophyte directors buying *those* producers lunches. And we knew each other pretty well, we knew the game we were playing. Lucas got his break from Coppola first; Scorsese got his break from Roger Corman. We all knew we were gonna make it in Hollywood. We just didn't know when. It was like waiting to get your pilot's license. Marty [Scorsese] got his first with *Mean Streeets*, Lucas got his second with *THX*, I got mine third. De Palma got his before all of us, 'cause he was making movies in New York City by raising money from doctors and lawyers.

Is there anything else you have a finger in right now?

I'm developing *Schindler's List* from the Thomas Keneally novel. It's a difficult write. I will direct it.

Let's move to a different side of the brain now. There is a strong metaphysical, spiritual, almost religious element to your pictures. You haven't had much to say about this, and I wonder if you would discuss it now.

[*Pauses*] It's just that I've always believed there is a center to the universe, and everything sort of blasts off from the center in all directions. I've never felt that man was alone in the universe or that any of us were alone within ourselves. I believe that everyone has helpers. We are all tied together by the belief that there is something greater than us. It is collective dream. I go outside and look up at the stars and I know: we are not alone. It's almost mathematically impossible. And that's why I was always interested in films and ideas about alien life forms, life off the planet. Since I was a child, my number-one fascination has been: what's out there?

What about on this planet? As you fall asleep watching 'Nightline' and the latest from South Africa or the Middle East, how does it enter your life?

I see all that stuff, and it's frustrating, because I want to help everybody. To watch the African famine, to watch the apartheid in South Africa, to watch Lebanon reduced to rubble as thousands of innocent people lose their lives, or even something *technical* like all these planes falling out of the sky – a malfunction here or there – and there's almost nothing that can be done. Yes, you try to raise money to help the starving. But what about the people starving in the hinterlands, the people that the press does not cover. I do my share. I cannot tell you who I make contributions to. But that's all I essentially do, fight it with money. I have tremendous admiration for a guy like Bob Geldof, who stepped back from [*Cont. on 78*]

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Spielberg

[*Cont. from 77*] his career to do something for strangers.

Do you ever feel you might politicize your own work? Even something as minor as not letting your work be shown in South Africa, which is something Woody Allen had written into his new contract?

I've written a letter to each of the studios that have films of mine which have not yet been released overseas, and the letter states exactly that: I do not wish my films to be seen in South Africa until there is a solution to the tremendous racial segregation and violence. I have no control of this, but from now on this will be in my contracts. It's some real dry kindling for a major studio to take all their films and withhold them from South Africa. I'm not sure which studio head wants to step up to talk to Ted Koppel on *Nightline* and say that their entertainment will not go to South Africa unless something is done.

What makes you the angriest you can be?

What makes me the most hurt and upset is drunk driving. I lent E.T. to do a major anti-drunk-driving campaign. But that's not enough. I believe in anything anyone can do to stop it; from indiscriminate stopping of cars to holding people who serve alcoholic beverages responsible for patrons getting in a car drunk and driving home.

The New Jersey Supreme Court agrees with you.

Yeah, but they are the only one of fifty. I just don't understand it. I saw someone last night driving down Hollywood Boulevard through three lanes, one of them oncoming traffic. I fantasize when I see that. I wish myself into a severe L.A. sheriff's uniform, with all the stuff that jingles and dangles and the .357 Magnum and the hat and the sunglasses and a motorcycle with the bright blue and red light, and I would love to take that person off the road.

The flip side is what makes you happiest, and has this changed in the last few years?

What's changed is that now what makes me happiest is coming home to Max. Being a part of his life. And believe me, he's not a part of my life yet; I am a part of his life. He's only three months old, and he has me trained. That is the ultimate happiness.

What do you still struggle with, what weaknesses?

My workaholism is a real weakness. Because I nourish it, and when I don't have to work, I do anyway. It's a problem, and I'm working on it, trying to be a little of a househusband. It's not a disease, though: I love to make movies so much that it takes quite a big distraction to get me to leave the office at a decent hour. And that's the one thing that Max did. Pre-Max, I left the office every night at ten, and post-Max, I come home at a normal hour.

You had a disturbing dream about Max coming into the world spouting articulately, wanting to go out to dinner and the like. I'm curious about what your dreams are lately, since they usually show up later in your movies.

I had the same dream two nights ago. I heard this little voice ask me a question, and I turned, thinking it was a joke, and I saw Max walking and talking to me. He was wearing his baby clothes. I looked at him and said, "How can you be talking? You are just three months old." And he gave me some quite philosophical answer.

What kind of dreams did you have in North Carolina shooting 'Color Purple?'

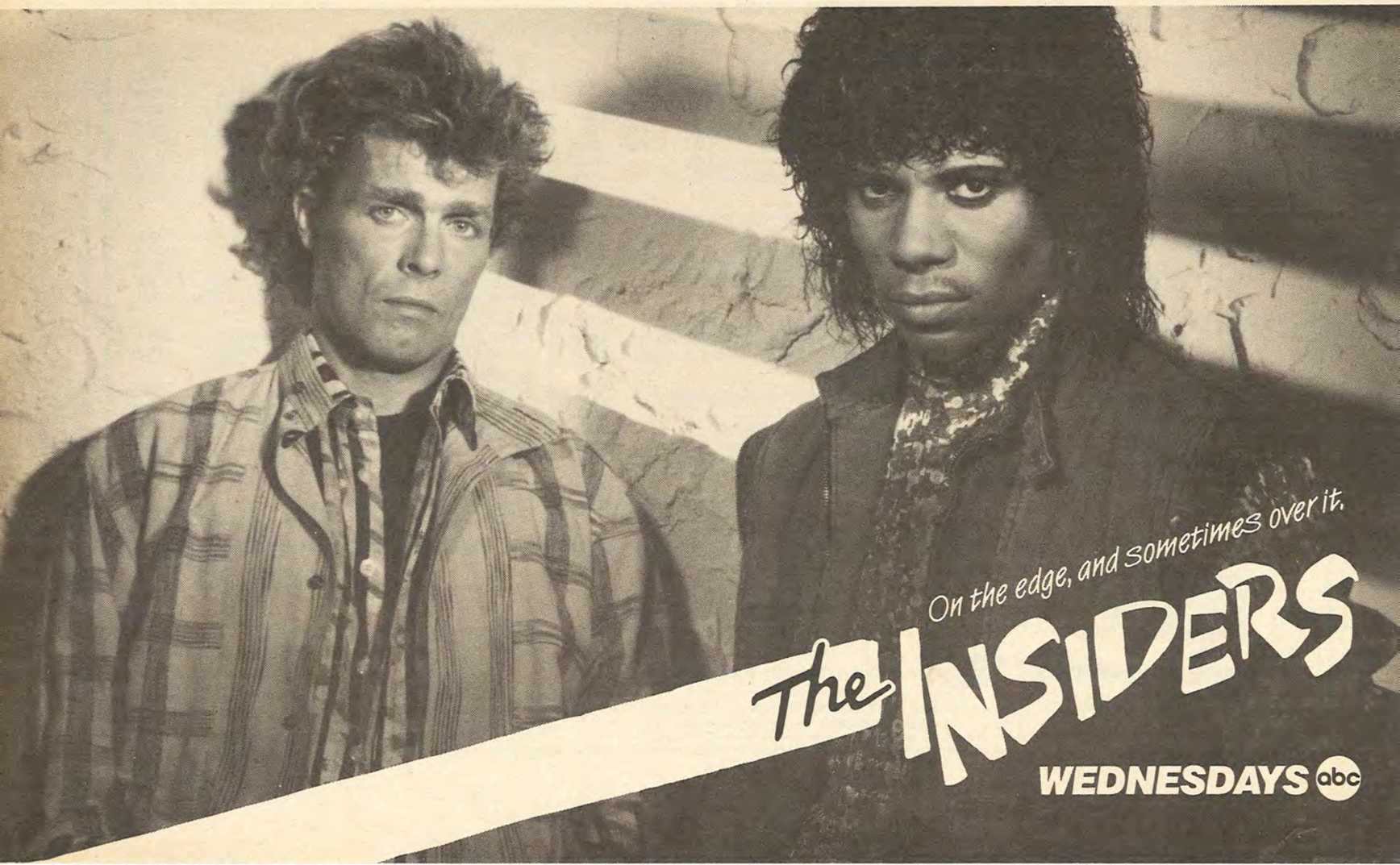
Being attacked by large gnats. There were bugs everywhere. You ate twenty to fifty gnats every lunch in the gravy, the cream sauce or the butter of the mashed potatoes. You would look down and think it was pepper. It was a very nice shoot, and I had Max and Amy there. So I came in like a regular husband and father.

You know, us average Joes out in the real world start to wondering: Gosh, what could be wrong with Steven Spielberg's life? We all read about him making a million bucks a day the summer of 'E.T.' and he's got a beautiful, talented lover and a healthy young baby and his own company as a vehicle to realize his dreams. Say, are us average Joes right?

I can't pick it apart. Whatever is wrong with my life isn't so wrong that the solution is my major obsession. Perhaps the only thing wrong is that I'm not married. Not a problem for me, but when it starts getting uncomfortable for parents and family and especially Max – when Max becomes aware of the status of his parents, it will be something to consider. But I don't think about these issues unless I'm in an interview in which someone asks me a question like that. 'Cause usually, I am dealing with the day-to-day treachery of getting a movie made or getting the diapers changed.

That's the one thing you did not want to do, vis-à-vis baby.

Yeah, and I ended up doing it. I am more of a character of the immediate. I do things as they come up. I often work better with three or four things happening at the same time. I'm not too good



with a one-track mind. I like having a lot of diversions. I work better when I'm scattered. I don't think about the problems. And I don't have a lot of problems in my life that take a psychiatrist and a lot of couch time to solve. I've never been through psychotherapy or psychoanalysis.

Well, you would be paying your therapist for something that your audience should be paying you for.

[*Laughs*] Yes. Well, I solve my problems with the movies I make. When there is a character in conflict in a movie, some part of that character is part of me that needs to be straightened out. I let Harrison Ford as Indiana Jones or Henry Thomas as Elliott straighten out some of what I'm about.

I feel fortunate that I've lucked into an art form that allows me to make life as perfect as I can within the time parameters and the amount of money I'm given to spend on a picture. I can make life as perfect as I want through that movie. I can collaborate with a crew of a hundred, and twenty actors, and fifty postproduction experts in making my life – which is the story I am trying to tell – as perfect as it possibly can be.

The auteur theory strikes again?

It's *auteur*, but with a lot of help. I don't really believe in *auteur*, which is a dangerous theory, because it essentially negates the contributions of everyone else – which it took to make this movie. Painters, novelists, golfers, are *auteurs*. When you are doing something by yourself for others, that's the *auteur* theory. But I don't think there's any room for that in filmmaking. It's an unfortunate term.

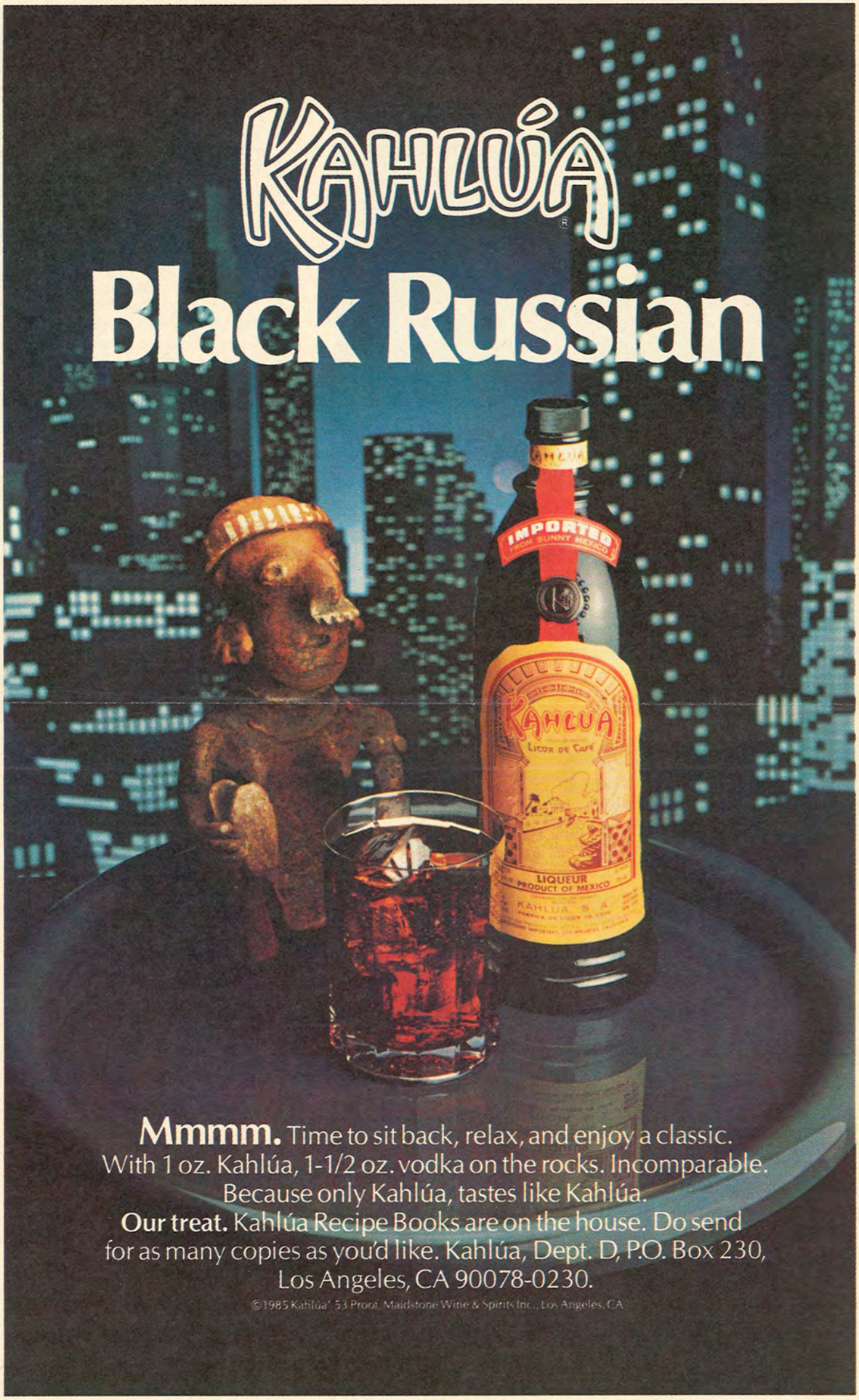
Cutting is your favorite part of filmmaking. Why?

Because I have complete control. I sit in a room with my film editor and the can of film and the Moviola. And I can change what I shot. I can change whole concepts. I can rewrite an entire sequence through film editing. I can juxtapose lines. I can change expressions around. I can get someone to react "happy" when it was written for them to react "sad." It's a lot of marvelous experimentation and manipulation, which only happens in the cutting room.

It's the ultimate manipulation.

Yes, the ultimate. I can't take the time to experiment in front of a crew of a hundred people and many actors. I'm not that kind of director. I don't shoot that many takes. When I like something, or it feels right to me, I go on to the next shot. In the editing room, I take a lot more time. I also correct my mistakes, which unabashedly rear their ugly heads in the editing room. I'm always faced with my shortcomings as a filmmaker in the editing room.

You mention your interest in film composing. Are you playing around with key- [*Cont. on 80*]



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Spielberg

[*Cont. from 79*] **boards now?**

No, not that. I play clarinet. I wouldn't pretend to be a film composer. But I love music so much, especially classical music. If I weren't a director, I would want to be a film composer. I feel lucky to be born in the same lifetime as John Williams. He's made a lot of my movies more successful than they would have been without him. He's in large part responsible for the suspense of *Jaws*. And he made the bicycles fly in *E.T.* They almost flew when I got through with them, but he really made them fly. I can put the tear in the eye of the audience, but Johnny makes the tear spill.

This is the first movie you have done without John Williams. Will you be looking over Quincy Jones' shoulder on the music?

As much as he allows me to. As much as I allowed him in the editing room, every single weekend. He kept saying, "I need to feel what you're doing so I can feel the music better." I had never let anyone do that before.

There was talk, speaking of music, that you were going to direct a Cyndi Lauper video.

No, I never wanted to do it. Richard Donner did *The Goonies*. I never want to do any rock video, because it doesn't tell enough of the story. I've got to tell a story. Videos are long montages. I'd rather make a musical and get my video impulses out of the way doing a sort of middle-of-the-road classic musical. Better that than a three-and-a-half-minute advertisement for a rock & roll song.

When we look back at the Seventies, Eighties and Nineties, will Steven Spielberg be thought of as a giant of film?

Part of me is afraid I will be remembered for the money my films have made, rather than the films themselves. Do people remember the gold medal, or do they remember what the gold medal was won for? That's why I'm not anxious to turn *E.T.* into a small eight-by-four-inch box that is indiscriminately tossed next to the TV set along with every other picture that is being mass-marketed on plastic and videotape.

I'm sensing some hostility from you against the videocassette boom.

I am not crazy about it. For one thing, I like to know that it takes two people to carry a film to a movie theater because the cans are so heavy. But when I sit down upstairs and just pull out a cassette of *Close Encounters* – and I know what went into it, tears and blood and four years of my life – and I can hold it in one hand, and hold it for two years without my hand getting tired because it doesn't weigh anything, there's something about that that bothers me. I think what I am trying to say is that I believe in showmanship.

Movies as a communal experience?

Yes, that's what showmanship is all about. Movies should be seen in dark, hallowed halls. And the thing about movies being seen whimsically and capriciously and often stopped right in the middle so you can see another cassette, all that bothers me because it cheapens everything that went into the making of that movie. Videocassettes are the same size as paperbacks.

When I go to the theater, I sit in the fifth or sixth row, and I want the movie to overwhelm me. I want an environmental experience, one that I cannot get from watching television. The sad thing is, as good as our *Amazing Stories* look on film, they will lose about thirty percent, forty percent, of their poop by being on television.

There was a point in your flaming youth where you were regarded as avant-garde. Can you imagine now trying a nonnarrative or structurally avant-garde film, or a documentary, or anything far left of center?

I do love the experimental format. The minute I would say I can't imagine that, I would wind up doing it. They almost talked me into doing the Michael Jackson performance film for Disneyland, and at the last minute I just couldn't. Coppola is doing it. I just didn't feel I could be true to the form. It's going to be rock video in 3-D, 70-mm film and Storraro filming. I like to change with the times, but I just didn't feel it.

I want a broad-based body of work. I don't just want to make one kind of movie; I want to make all kinds of movies. Even with *Silverado* last summer not finding an audience, I still want to do a western. The more and more terrified people get of making westerns, the more I want to do one.

I'm open to anything. But I'm not a director for hire, and I don't read scripts. *Color Purple* was a very special situation, triggered by special circumstances and people who were close to me. That's a rare case. Mostly I like inventing my own movies.

You mentioned you want to travel. Where to?

I want to see Israel, Greece. I would like to go to the Outback, and I want George Miller to take me. I can't go to the mountains because I get nosebleeds at high altitudes. I have no sense of perilous adventure. I do not want to climb the seven highest mountains in the world. I do not want to raft down the Amazon. I have absolutely no interest in seeing how many Middle Eastern countries I can get through safely. I am a good tourist. I wear a straw hat, a crazy shirt, I have a camera around my neck, and I take a lot of pictures. ●