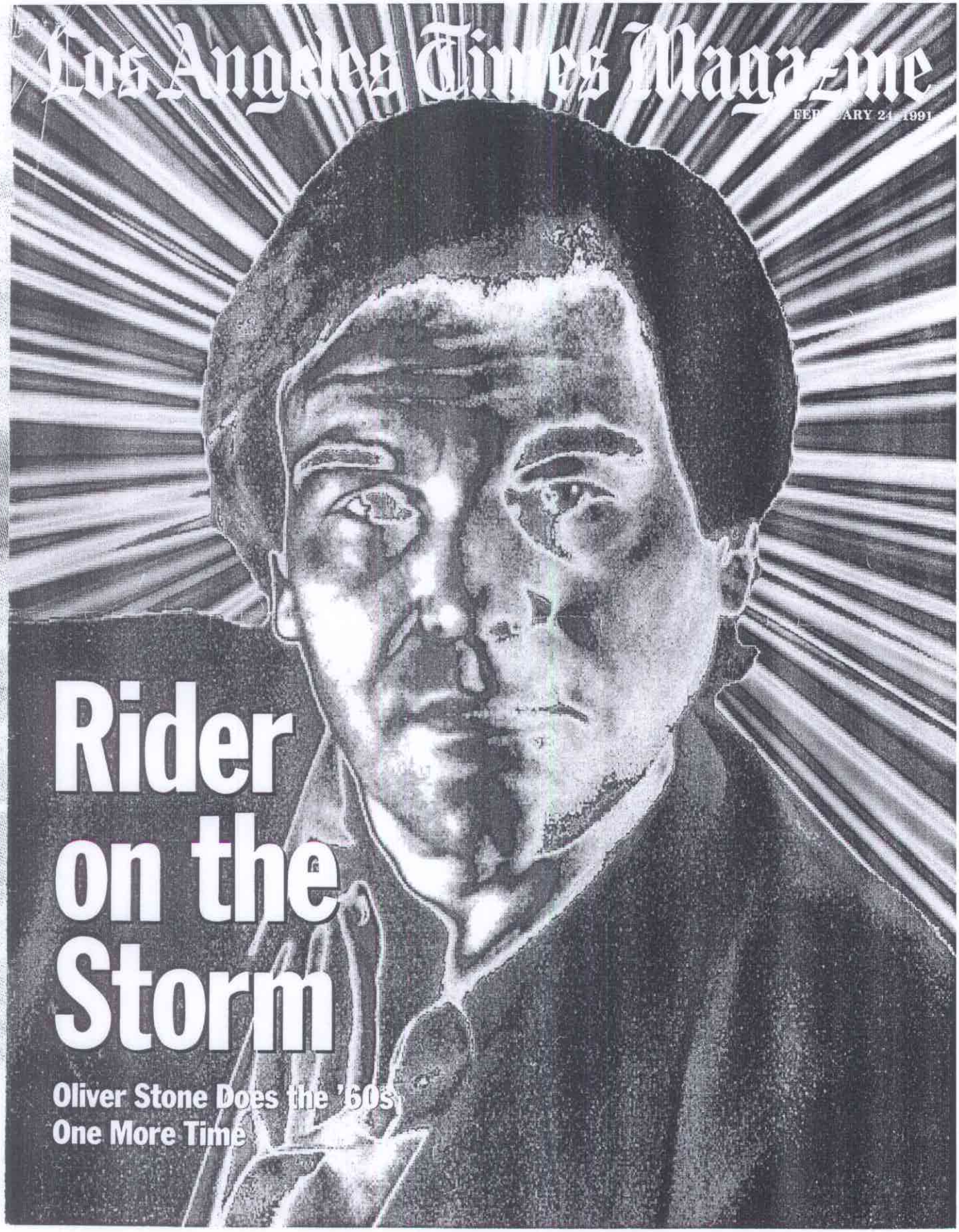
Los Angeles Times Magazine
FEBRUARY 24, 1991



Rider on the Storm

Oliver Stone Does the '60s One More Time

movies about men under pressure."

In "The Doors," Stone evinces a similar fealty to Morrison, a contemporary of the director's and a man also known for not tempering his excesses. "Jim had a thing where he went to the limits—women, drugs, alcohol, the law," says Stone, who plays down some of Morrison's excesses and recut parts of the film to make Kilmer's character more likable. "His lyrics were earthy—snakes, fire, earth, death, fear, eros, sexuality. But he was also close to the French symbolist poets—Apollinaire, Rimbaud and a little Dylan Thomas. That combination—the high end and low end, black and white, vulgar and refined—I liked that contrast."

It is a marriage of opposites that also fits Stone, who is described by those who know him as intense, passionate and smart, a prodigious director and writer whose early reputation for womanizing and drug taking never hindered an equally relentless work ethic. "He has the curiosity of a child and an incredible drive," says Kenneth Lipper, an investment banker, author and consultant on "Wall Street." "Oliver uses his films as an excuse to search out the facts—the truth—of a situation."

Others who have worked for him say Stone is a masterful taskmaster who will manipulate, taunt and pressure cast and crew into sharing his commitment to the subject at hand. "He likes to do a lot of sparring to challenge you," says actor Willem Dafoe, who starred in "Platoon" and "Born on the Fourth of July." "He seduces you to care as much as he does. He can be a real smoothie." Adds Bogosian: "He expects you to be a self-starter and thick-skinned when it comes to criticism. And if he senses you can't take it, he will move away from you fast. Being on a set with him can be very punishing. But at the end of the day, everyone wants to be around him." Kyle MacLachlan, an actor best known as FBI man Dale Cooper in television's "Twin Peaks," who co-stars in "The Doors," says simply, "I miss working with Oliver."

Sidney Baldwin

tale of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll come round again in a new age of conservatism.

With so many of the director's oft-related demons so readily on the surface, so out there, it is a challenge to sift through the rhetoric. Ask Stone what he is looking for in his self-inflicted *Sturm und Drang*, and he scorns the question as "so obvious. OK, the 49ers to win." But in the next breath he turns philosophical, cribbing from Milan Kundera, the celebrated Czech novelist: "the 'Lightness of Being.' We're all looking for equanimity of our souls."

HE IS TALL, ABOUT 6 FEET AND JUST SHORT OF FORmidable, with an arresting collision of cultures—French-American, Jewish-Roman Catholic—etched into a face that is all but haggard from years of hard living and late hours. Bleary-eyed, dressed totally in black, Stone is sandwiching in an interview in the midst of back-to-back editing sessions for Friday's release of "The Doors."

Surrounded by his editing crew, he holds court in a room that seems the extension of himself as both polemical filmmaker and erstwhile Peck's Bad Boy—everything state-of-the-art and bigger-than-life. Extra-large leather sofas, screen the size of a football field, giant neon clock ticking off the frames. The sequence being edited this day is quintessential Stone. On screen, Morrison, played by Kilmer, heaves a television set at the head of Doors' keyboardist Ray Manzarek: MacLachlan in flowing locks. The result—exploding glass and screamed epithets.

Stone flashes his signature gap-toothed grin. "There was a sound vacuum, and it's making me crazy," he says about the morning spent laying down extra decibels of breaking glass. "Sound abuse. I'm accused of that all the time," he says. "But this is the noisiest film I've ever made. I have to gauge how much the audience can take after two hours and 15 minutes. I have to find moments to give them a rest, or their ears go numb."

In Stone's hands, "The Doors" is less an illustrated history of the band's genesis or Morrison's peculiarly tortured life than a visceral recreation of the world of '60s music. The approach is similar to the sensuous verisimilitude the director achieved in "Platoon," the first Vietnam War film made by someone who had served. "I don't want to reduce the '60s to a formula or say this is all-inclusive," Stone says, "but it is about the texture of the '60s . . . how music was the big common denominator."

Producer Grazer says the film is less linear and narrative than "a film made from a real rock-music point of view. Oliver has

Hilary de Vries is a free-lance writer based in Cambridge, Mass.

made a movie that shows that world as dangerous and erotic. It has a real feel for the period."

Much of that feel comes from the director's personal affinity for The Doors' music, which he first encountered in Vietnam. He found the band "visceral and mystical and with very earthy lyrics," Stone says. "The Doors were not a mainstream band like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. Jim hated that whole teenybopper thing. There were decency rallies held against him."

That Morrison's grave site in Paris still has the faithful trekking to touch the headstone has only burnished the mystique of the tortured songwriter with the Kennedyesque jaw and the black leather pants that would, on occasion, not stay zipped. A well-known abuser of alcohol, drugs and women, Morrison was arrested in 1969 on obscenity charges after exposing himself during a Miami concert. "He was a pirate, a free soul, an anarchist," Stone says. "I loved his spirit—a combination of James Dean and Brando, sexiness combined with sensitivity and rawness."

Morrison's persona transcended not only his performances but also his death in 1971, which Stone recalls as "like the day Kennedy died." The revival of so-called Doorsmania, as Rolling Stone magazine referred to it, began 12 years ago when director Francis Ford Coppola used the band's Oedipal song, "The End," in his 1979 Vietnam film, "Apocalypse Now." In 1981, the lurid, controversial Morrison biography, "No One Here Gets Out Alive" by Jerry Hopkins and Danny Sugerman, the singer's manager, was published. That same year, "The Doors' Greatest Hits" was released and made it into Billboard's Top 10. By 1981, Rolling Stone had Morrison on its cover with the headline, "He's Hot, He's Sexy . . . He's Dead."

Hollywood chased the Morrison story for nearly a decade while the Morrison estate and the surviving band members battled over the movie rights. Eventually, Grazer's Imagine Productions held all the cards—a hefty $2-million development package—largely through the assistance of veteran rock producer Bill Graham, who shares production credit on the film. Grazer took the project to Stone—who had just passed on the on-again, off-again "Evita"—and Mario Kossar's Carolco Productions, which had signed the director to a two-picture deal.

For Stone, directing "The Doors" brought several new challenges. "It was a very complicated screenplay to write," says Stone, who shares screenwriting credit with J. Randal Johnson, who had done an earlier draft. Using his usual reporter's approach, Stone plowed through "250 transcripts from people who had known Jim. It was like 'Citizen Kane' in a way—everyone had a different point of view." Stone shot the film last spring with 30,000 extras for concert scenes in San Francisco, New York, Paris and Los Angeles, including the L. A. clubs Whisky a Go-Go and The Central, which doubled as the old London Fog.

Recreating The Doors' sound on film proved more difficult. Kilmer, a baritone like Morrison, was cast after Stone interviewed hundreds of actors. Perhaps best known as Ice Man, Tom Cruise's nemesis in the film "Top Gun," Kilmer had been so eager to land the role that he recorded an entire Doors album, substituting his own vocals for Morrison's. After hearing Kilmer's tape, Stone decided to obtain the rights to The Doors' master tapes minus Morrison's lead vocals. He then spliced the original soundtracks with performances by the actors—Kilmer, MacLachlan, Kevin Dillon and Frank Whaley, who learned to play instruments for the film. The film's final cut contains 25 Doors songs, including such classic hits as "L. A. Woman," "Crystal Ship," "Light My Fire" and "The End." The music was recorded with "a little bit of Jim Morrison's vocals—and in the concert scenes I have mixed in the actors' voices, and I defy you to find the difference," Stone says.

"Oliver has a fascinating life with great respect for art," Kilmer says. "We should pay attention to this man; he has lived triumph and horrors. And I can tell you his life does not pass unexamined. Look at his body of work. It pulls from his introspection, knowledge and vast intuition. This is a person of vision and integrity."

Indeed, ask Stone what he hopes the reception for his film will be, and he launches into another paternalistic eulogy for the '60s. "A lot of people will want to see this the way they wanted to see Tom Cruise in 'Born,' so they can be given an alternative way of looking at things," he says. "These kids have grown up with Travolta and disco, the high-tech world of the '80s, and maybe they have never even seen that there is a different, an alternative, lifestyle, a world we've lost touch with."

"WHAT WAS YOUR FAVORITE BAND OF THE '60s?"

Stone is asking this over lunch of Thai soup—hot as napalm—set out for him and his guest in an upstairs conference room. With Stone, that isn't an idle question; it's a password, a test of character, sort of like the soup he's ordered—beyond an ordinary mortal's standards. "Come on, it's good for you," he says laughing at his guest's discomfort. "It puts hair on your chest."

Shying away from risks is the ultimate sin with Stone, the only child of a privileged Manhattan couple, a stockbroker father and socialite mother. Stone wore a coat and tie every day to prep school, wrote weekly essays for his father—who paid him 25 cents each—and embarked on his well-documented fall from grace as soon as he was able. Says one old friend: "Oliver grew up with a lot of contradictions in his life—Jewish father, French Roman Catholic mother who was this semi-Regine-type character. Oliver led this sort of Eurotrash jet-setter's life—even after his parents were divorced—where nothing was normal."

"My mother was never in bed before 3 in the morning," Stone recalls. "She used to take me to France in the summers, and she was a great fan of movies, took me out of school to go to double and triple features. She was this kind of Auntie Mame person. 'Evita' would have been my homage to her."

His parents' divorce when he was 16 years old, Stone says, "was like parting the curtains of a stage play and seeing what was really there. I found out about a whole lot of things—affairs—I had been blind to. After that, I felt I was really on my own."

The divorce also coincided with a larger rupture—Kennedy's assassination in 1963, the de facto starting gun of the '60s. "I had no faith in my parents' generation after that," Stone says. "By 1965, I was in Vietnam"—first as a teacher and a merchant marine, later as an Army enlistee.

He briefly attended Yale University, his father's alma mater, which he says he "hated, especially since it was before women

don't want to believe in generation conflict, but it's there. I feel

were admitted." Stone dropped out and headed for Vietnam.

He was wounded twice and earned a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart in a tour of duty that was later chronicled in "Platoon." "He was never a regular GI Joe," recalls Crutcher Patterson, a former member of Stone's platoon. "He was pretty green, a loner and moody, always writing things. Whenever we got a break, he would stop and write a little descriptive story about it."

During his brief Army career, Stone abandoned the idea of being a writer—he had written a novel at 18—to become a filmmaker. "Being there was a very sensual experience, and I started thinking in visual terms," Stone says. "In Vietnam, all your senses were awakened. You had to see better, smell better, hear better. It was very sensual, with the jungle six inches in front of your face. You couldn't think along abstract lines—you had to become more animalistic or you wouldn't survive."

He bought a still camera and started taking pictures even before he left for home. Once Stone returned to New York, "I got a super-8 right away and started making home movies." He enrolled at New York University's film school, where he studied under director Martin Scorsese, drove a cab, married Najwa Sarkis—an official at the Moroccan mission to the United Nations—and made "short, crude 16-millimeter films that were really screwed up," Stone says. "They were arty, kind of abstract poems with a touch of Orson Welles and the French New Wave filmmakers—Goddard, Resnais, Buñuel. I was trying to get away from a normal narrative line."

He was also pursuing a similar line in his personal life. Arrested for marijuana possession in Mexico 10 days after his return from Vietnam, Stone became well known for using drugs, an experience that later informed his screenplay for Brian DePalma's "Scarface."

"I started smoking cigarettes on the plane going over to Vietnam," says Stone. "Once I got there, the guys I liked best had been around drugs for ages, and I started doing acid and

Oliver Stone directed Tom Cruise as Ron Kovic in "Born on the Fourth of July," above; financial sharks Charlie Sheen and Michael Douglas in "Wall Street," below, and Tom Berenger in "Platoon," bottom, which depicted Stone's tour of duty in Vietnam. He earned best-direction Oscars for "July" and "Platoon."

distant, out of step with the people my age. I always identified more with the Charlie Sheen generation, that younger group, because it gave me new life.'

marijuana. I also got into the music. I had never heard Motown before then. Jefferson Airplane and the Doors. Jim was the acid king. It was all part of the *Zeitgeist*."

It was a taste for substance abuse, topped off with an appetite for pursuing women, that Stone, newly divorced, took with him to Los Angeles in the mid-1970s as an aspiring screenwriter. He soon had a reputation notable even by Hollywood's standards. "He always had a million women in his life," says one female former friend. "I don't think he missed too many."

In Hollywood, Stone wrote "Platoon," and although it would be more than 10 years before he would get it made, the script earned him attention as a writer of unusual force.

"I was looking for a writer for 'Conan' " recalls Ed Pressman, an independent film producer who worked with Stone on "Conan the Barbarian" and several films since, including

Continued on Page 31

Top to bottom: Universal/ Shooting Star; 20th Century Fox/ Shooting Star; Orion Pictures/ Shooting Star

Oliver Stone

Continued from Page 13

"Born." "His agent showed me 'Platoon,' and I was very taken with it. His script for 'Conan' was a great screenplay. Like Dante's 'Inferno.'"

The success of that film led to other screenwriting assignments—"Midnight Express," "Scarface," "Year of the Dragon" among others—all white-hot, unsubtle stories, the type that increasingly became Stone's signature. He won his first Oscar for "Midnight Express," which led to his first directing opportunity—"The Hand," a marginal thriller starring Michael Caine that failed at the box office and temporarily stalled Stone's directing career. Eventually, he was able to make the low-budget "Salvador" through Hemdale Productions, followed by "Platoon," a $6-million film that Orion picked up from Hemdale and that saw grosses in the hundreds of millions. After that, Stone was admitted to the big leagues—directing Michael Douglas in "Wall Street" and Tom Cruise in "Born on the Fourth of July." The latter film, based on Vietnam veteran Ron Kovic's life story, won Stone his second Best Director award but lost out for Best Picture to the crowd pleaser "Driving Miss Daisy"—a loss that Stone took particularly hard. "We made over $60 million with that film—an incredible success. I guess it was just not meant to be."

Today, Stone has remarried and divides his time among homes in Santa Monica, Montecito and Colorado with his wife, Elizabeth, a former nurse, and their 6-year-old son, Sean, who plays young Morrison in "The Doors." Stone hasn't lost his concern for current events: "I'm praying for our soldiers, who are making the ultimate sacrifice in the Gulf War, but I don't think Bush ever intended to negotiate. There was a military-industrial complex that pushed us into this." Friends add that the director's only real interest these days, in addition to making films, "is trying to set up other films."

Have Stone's demons finally gone AWOL? "I didn't say I didn't miss my old life," he says with a half-smile. "I love the concept of suburbia, but I also love going to New York and Europe and Asia, meeting new people. My wife and I are different that way. I have a restlessness that never stops."

Indeed, as soon as "The Doors" opens, Stone is off to Dallas to begin shooting his version of the Kennedy assassination, a film that Stone describes as "the untold story of a murder that occurred at the dawn of our adulthood. It's a bit like 'Hamlet.' You know, the real king was killed, and a fake king put on the throne." Suggest to Stone that some of Camelot's luster has tarnished since 1963, and the director says quietly, "There has been an incredible disinformation campaign put out about him. A lot of misinformation. I am using everything I have to get this film made."

Ask Stone if he likes where he is positioned now in the industry and he laughs. "Oh, this is the part where you're going to quote me, right? The outlaw director."

If Stone is cagey about self-definition these days, friends seem equally divided. Some, such as Pressman, who produced "Blue Steel" and "Reversal of Fortune" with Stone, say the director "is at the top of his game. I was always mesmerized and excited by his personality, but now he is much more comfortable with himself and a lot easier to work with."

But another Hollywood executive suggests that "Oliver has not changed much. He really hasn't mellowed. He is conflicted about his 'financial' success. But that's how Hollywood respects you—they pay for what they respect, and his movies now make money."

Stone does seem to be a man with his eye fixed perpetually over his shoulder, one who keeps a daily diary and who describes the art of filmmaking as giving vent to "that other person that is in you. The shadow self, the one that is always walking behind you. The real you, the deeper you.

"I'm not going to say I'm a lone soul here, wandering through my own soundtrack," he says. "I enjoy the community of people who love movies. And I like using the power that I have to make things happen. But will I be doing this forever? Maybe I'll be working in Eritrea or the Sudan, or maybe I'll become a journalist for Rolling Stone."

Stone has spent several hours over lunch, repeatedly waving off his crew, but now his impatience is tangible. "I still don't like the answer I gave you about the '60s, how this film relates to this current generation. I felt stupid. I was doing a lot of 'ums' and 'ahs,'" he says, suddenly obsessed with his image.

"I don't want to believe in generation conflict, but it's there. I feel distant from my own generation, out of step with the people my age who went to college. I always identified more with the Charlie Sheen generation, that younger group who came up, because it gave me new life. I was able to act out my own history through them, skip a generation and go back to it again. Believe me, that's exciting, and I'm grateful for that chance because our tribal rituals are the same. It doesn't have to be Jim Morrison or Vietnam; it's about going out there and finding yourself." ▬

Art

Continued from Page 23

Angeles County Museum of Art opens an exhibition re-creating this landmark cultural blot, in a version reassembled by curator Stephanie Barron, which includes 175 of the original paintings, sculpture and graphics. Titled "Degenerate Art: The Fate of the Avant-Garde in Nazi Germany," it runs until May 12.

It seems that the Nazis had good taste in art they regarded as decadent. The LACMA re-creation includes such masterworks as Max Beckmann's "Descent From the Cross" and Kandinsky's "Composition 'Silence.'" There is even an American artist—Lyonel Feininger—represented with "Street of Barns." Kirchner's "Self-Portrait as Soldier" acts as an unintended symbol of the Nazis' castrating intentions in putting on the degenerate exhibition. In the portrait the artist shows his wrist symbolically severed from his hand.

During the course of that grim year of 1937, dozens of liberal art professors lost their posts; 20 museum directors and curators were sacked, and their institutions were stripped of 16,000 works of advanced art, many of which were sold to foreigners to raise hard cash for the Reich. There were echoes of the present in Nazi complaints that public funds had been spent on this junk. There was more confusion. Objects by George Kolbe and Gerhard Marcks were confiscated from museums, but the artists went on working openly because the Nazi brass liked them.

Literate Americans have good reason to remember the fate of creative German writers, composers and film people under Hitler, since they flocked to these shores in relative droves, seeking shelter from the storm and enriching our own cultural life. The treatment of painters and sculptors was ruthless, and yet their destiny has received less attention, even though—along with Stalin's suppression of the Russian avant-garde—it was quite simply the worst case of art censorship in modern times.

As a master of propaganda, Hitler should have known that his infamous exhibition would ensure the fame of its artists. Jesse Helms should have considered that before he started in on the NEA, Robert Mapplethorpe and Andreas Serrano. Made martyrs of the whole lot.

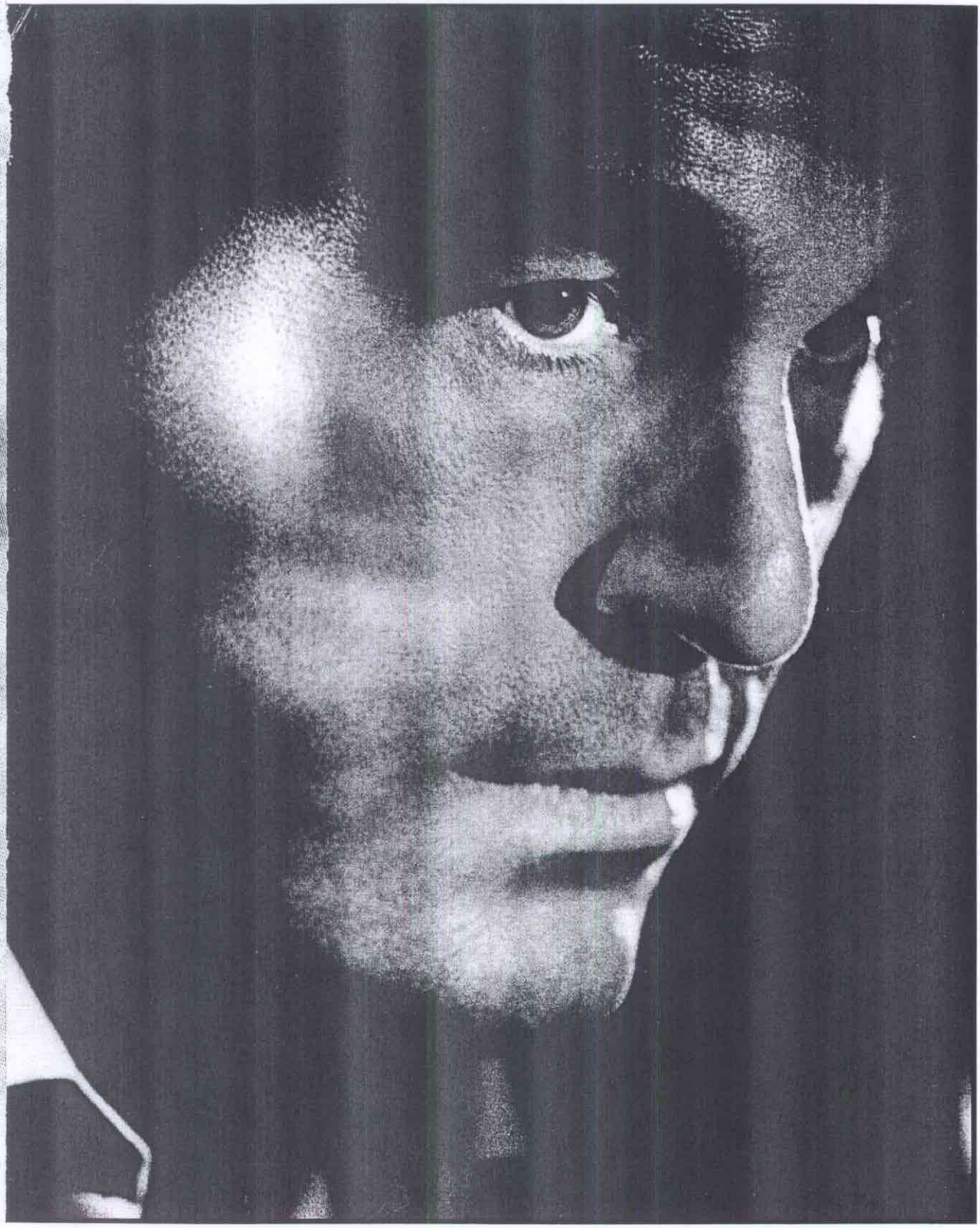
Ever since Adam and Eve, people have found the forbidden simply irresistible. ▬

RIDER ON THE STORM

With 'The Doors,' Director Oliver Stone Exhumes the '60s in All Their Lurid Excess.

BY HILARY DE VRIES

DISAGREE WITH OLIVER STONE and the judgment is swift and unmitigated. "You missed the '60s." • Oliver Stone—Hollywood outlaw, cinematic high priest of the lost generation, America's reigning Angry Young Man—has dismissed the haplessly out-of-touch: those within earshot as well as those not in sync with his favorite decade. • "Get out there! Take a chance! That's what the '60s were—the cutting edge! Ride the snake! Now! Now! Remember that? Go to the limits! Challenge authority! Challenge your senses!" • That fusillade is being delivered by arguably Hollywood's most successful protester. Yale dropout, drug-taking, decorated Vietnam vet turned *auteur*, Stone has delivered take after take on the '60s and their children—"Salvador," "Platoon," "Wall Street," "Talk Radio," "Born on the Fourth of July"—coming at his theme every which way. Drugs! War! Money! Politics! Stone has made movies to exorcise his and his generation's demons, annoying the industry with his excesses, filmic and personal, earning a round of grudging respect for ballyhooing a 20-year-old *Zeitgeist* all the way to the bank. He is even a producer these days, taking home a nice percentage of the gross. The Outsider has become Establishment. Hey, Oliver, what's that sound, everything going round and round? • After nearly two decades in the business—writing or directing about a dozen films, earning five Oscar nominations, including two awards for Best Director—Stone has mastered the art of turning the counterculture into a mainstream, bankable product. Today he is Hollywood's most consistent practitioner of point-of-view filmmaking, yet one who just as consistently falls on his own sword. • His films, lofty in their intent to capture the New Left values of the '60s, frequently come up short, with undistinguished if competent craftsmanship and an in-your-face moralizing. Critics regularly fault his work. The New Yorker's Pauline Kael wondered in a review of "Platoon" whether Stone was "using filmmaking as a substitute for drugs. . . . There are too many scenes," she wrote, "where you think, It's a bit much. The movie crowds you; it doesn't give you room to have an honest emotion." If Stone disdains such caviling as aesthetic elitism—"Critics say that; audiences don't. I won't ever make boring movies, ever!"—he nonetheless has his sharpshooter's eye trained on his place in American film history. Stone still hungers for the imprimatur of artist. • "We don't practice repression in this country, we practice triviality," says the director, standing in a Hollywood sound stage on an early winter afternoon. "I try to make films that are bold and on the cutting edge, with ideas that are greater



Michael Tighe/ Visages

than me—and I try to serve those ideas."

Now, Stone is set to unveil his latest homage to his generation—"The Doors," the much-anticipated movie about the legendary '60s band, starring Val Kilmer as Jim Morrison, the band's charismatic lead singer and lyricist. It is Stone's first film since "Born on the Fourth of July" won him his third Oscar three years ago, and at $30 million it's his most expensive production to date. It is also his least overtly political—something of a first for this filmmaker who is regularly accused of being anti-American—but one that is not without risks.

With few exceptions—such as "The Buddy Holly Story"—movies about the music industry are notoriously poor box office. And with "The Doors," Stone is bringing to market a glossy tale of sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll come round again in a new age of conservatism. It is a film for the '90s, with a controversial protagonist who practiced a particularly lethal brand of hedonistic nihilism; Morrison died of an apparent heart attack in Paris 20 years ago at the age of 27. Stone has taken a calculated risk in opening "The Doors" in today's sexually nervous and unexpectedly jingoistic climate—the AIDS crisis and the country embroiled in its first real war since Vietnam. "I think we all feel on the edge of imminent disaster," says Stone about his film's upcoming release. "One always has that feeling."

Even by the '60s' break-the-mold musical standards, the Doors were considered sui generis—a home-grown Los Angeles band whose organ-rich, Eastern-sounding melodies, combined with Morrison's vicious but poetic lyrics and undeniable stage presence, captured the growing alienation of an entire generation.

With 'The Doors,' Oliver Stone is bringing to market a glossy

From their first album—"The Doors" in 1967—to their last—"L.A. Woman" four years later—the band's raspy mysticism and intellectual lyricism embodied the dark side of the '60s.

At the center of the band's appeal was Morrison, the pouty, drug-ingesting "Lizard King" who became something of the Prince of Darkness in an era that did not lack for antiheroes—a figure extolling themes of undeniable attraction for Stone. "Look, I'm in my 40s," the director says. "So I suppose this film is about the formation of our generation—the values we shared. People were out there, experiencing things, changing things. There were no limits, no laws. . . ."

Brian Grazer, an executive producer of "The Doors," perceived two outlaws well-matched. "Oliver was my first choice as the director," Grazer says. "He does what nobody else does—he takes dark, difficult subjects and turns them into hits."

But hit making, as Stone likes to maintain, is not his goal. Rather, he single-mindedly goes after what he thinks of as the truths of his generation, wherever that search takes him: Vietnam, Wall Street, rock 'n' roll, even the Kennedy assassination. He describes the J.F.K. murder, the subject of his next film, which he will begin shooting this spring, as "the most covered-up crime of our era." Although risk-taking and possibly radical in their intent, Stone's films are increasingly mainstream, made with ever-larger budgets and more prestigious producers—Hemdale, Carolco and now, with the Kennedy film, Warner Bros. Success, for Stone, is a double-edged sword.

"Success?" asks the director, slightly startled. "That didn't become popular as a concept until the '70s. Yeah, I have much more freedom to make the subjects that I want, but I don't see myself as Darryl Zanuck. I would feel bad if I got indulgent. All good films come from people with an independent spirit, those who push. But the power of perception in the world is such that fringe ideas, when they are accepted, become mainstream—that because of their success they become a cliché.

" 'Platoon' was a major innovation in our perception of what that war was. I thought 'Born' was a fairly radical statement; it took 10 years to make that picture—everybody passed on it. Once it was made and got eight Oscar nominations, it became a successful Hollywood movie. If it had not been successful, it would have been considered an outlaw film. Now, with the Kennedy film—why haven't they made that already? Because people were fearful that it was uncommercial. I hope I was destined to make that picture."

Those who know him suggest that Stone is indeed struggling to reconcile his renegade past with his current role as emerging power broker. "Oliver is conflicted about his success," says one industry executive. "He hasn't allowed his political sensibilities to get in the way of taking large amounts of money, and he struggles with that."

"It isn't about getting successful and having a career," Stone says. "Going against success as a formula and embracing failure, like Morrison, where death becomes the last limit. . . . You mustn't let money or power corrupt. I don't feel in any way that I have compromised. I want to stay truthful to my era."

STANDING HERE IN THE CAVERNOUS SOUND STAGE, Stone is putting the finishing touches on "The Doors." While ostensibly another '60s film, "The Doors," colleagues say, is actually a further cinematic echo of the director's own persona as self-exiled prodigal son. As one actor puts it, "Although Oliver's films seem to be about social issues, they are really about him."

In conversation, Stone is by turns boyish, combative, thoughtful and overheated, one who seems to delight in spewing hyperbole as much in person as he does in his films. A husband and a father, he insists that his one regret is, "I didn't sleep with all the women I could have." A former drug addict once busted in Mexico, he now calls cocaine "the biggest killer I know" but still salutes hallucinogenics as "fascinating." A relentless advocate of the '60s, he disparages Woodstock as "a bunch of Boy Scouts getting together." A most famous veteran, he is nonetheless disdained by some members of his old unit as a self-righteous blowhard with little sense of humor and a skewed perspective. ("He is very opinionated, over-generalizes the facts and bad-mouths people who have different points of view," says Monte Newcombe, who served with Stone in Vietnam.)

As is well known, Stone made his mark as a movie maker five years ago when he turned his own life into film—"Platoon," the 1986 Oscar-winning Vietnam War film that chronicled the director's 1967-68 tour of duty. The movie won Best Picture and Best Director and grossed more than $160 million. Stone has made similar connections in his other less overtly biographical films. James Woods in "Salvador," Charlie Sheen in "Wall Street," Eric Bogosian in "Talk Radio," Tom Cruise in "Born on the Fourth of July," all played characters close to the director's "male, Type-A personality," says Bogosian. "Oliver makes