

Let the Revolution Begin

For Hollywood, *Bubble* means trouble: a new way of releasing films. Oh, and the movie's good too

SCHIZOPOLIS IS THE NAME OF A META-weird movie that Steven Soderbergh once wrote, directed, photographed and starred in (playing two roles, of course). It might also be the name of the artistic fiefdom he has created. Few Hollywood directors have such a distinct signature—or, rather, two of them. One part of Soderbergh's brain makes can't-miss caper films and weepie dramas (*Ocean's Eleven*, *Erin Brockovich*) with the town's priciest talent. Another part is indelibly indie: he will shoot an ad-lib HBO series about lobbyists (*K Street*), or remake a mystical Russian sci-fi art film (*Solaris*). Not everything works, but it's more than cool that he tries.

Bubble is, in a few ways, Soderbergh's most radical and invigorating experiment yet. He made it for peanuts in blue-collar towns on the Ohio-West Virginia border, casting in the leading roles locals who had never acted before. He shot it (himself, under the name Peter Andrews) in three weeks with digital cameras. And if you're wondering where you can find *Bubble*, the answer is kind of everywhere: on Jan. 27 in the Landmark theater chain, on the HDNet Movies cable-TV channel and on Jan. 31 on DVD. It's the first film with a three-media premiere.

Small it may be in scope and budget, but *Bubble* is a big blast at the antiquated way movies get to people. The film is the first of six that Soderbergh plans to make in a deal with the Broadcast.com billionaires Todd Wagner and Mark Cuban. Although

commitments to more traditional movies will delay his other HDNet projects till next year, *Bubble* marks a grand beginning.

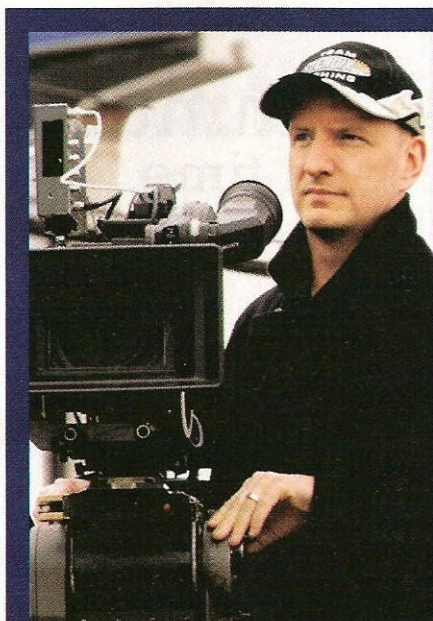
Coleman Hough's spare, perceptive script is set in what must be one of the last doll-manufacturing plants in the U.S. Hefty, fortyish Martha (Debbie Doebereiner) and her winsome young friend Kyle (Dustin Ashley) pass their lunch breaks eating

fast food and making slow talk. Rose (Misty Wilkins), a young single mom with a bit of a past and some bad habits, joins the workforce and upsets Martha's and Kyle's placid comradeship. Pretty soon there's a death.

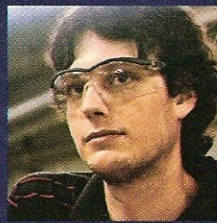
The dialogue is time-filling conversation you might hear anywhere (but in a Hollywood movie). The film doesn't judge or prod its characters, just watches the long fuse of the plot dwindle, then explode. The "actors" bring an authenticity to this strip-mall, strip-mined area. Ashley is a student, Wilkins a beauty-salon stylist, and Doebereiner the manager of the Parkersburg, W.Va., Kentucky Fried

Chicken. All are good, but Doebereiner's a real find. With eyes as blue as those her Martha presses into plastic doll faces, she brings a fresh look to a decent person who's addicted to the emotional status quo.

Martha won't get what she wants. Neither will studio bosses and movie exhibitors, if Soderbergh and his fellow incendiaries have their way. But forget for the moment the promise and threat that *Bubble* holds for The Future of Movies. This is a fascinating drama for Right Now. —By Richard Corliss



TREY BARTHELOM—MAGNOLIA



EXPERIMENTAL: In addition to commercial hits, Soderbergh, above, directs chancier indie tales; this one stars first-time actor Ashley, left