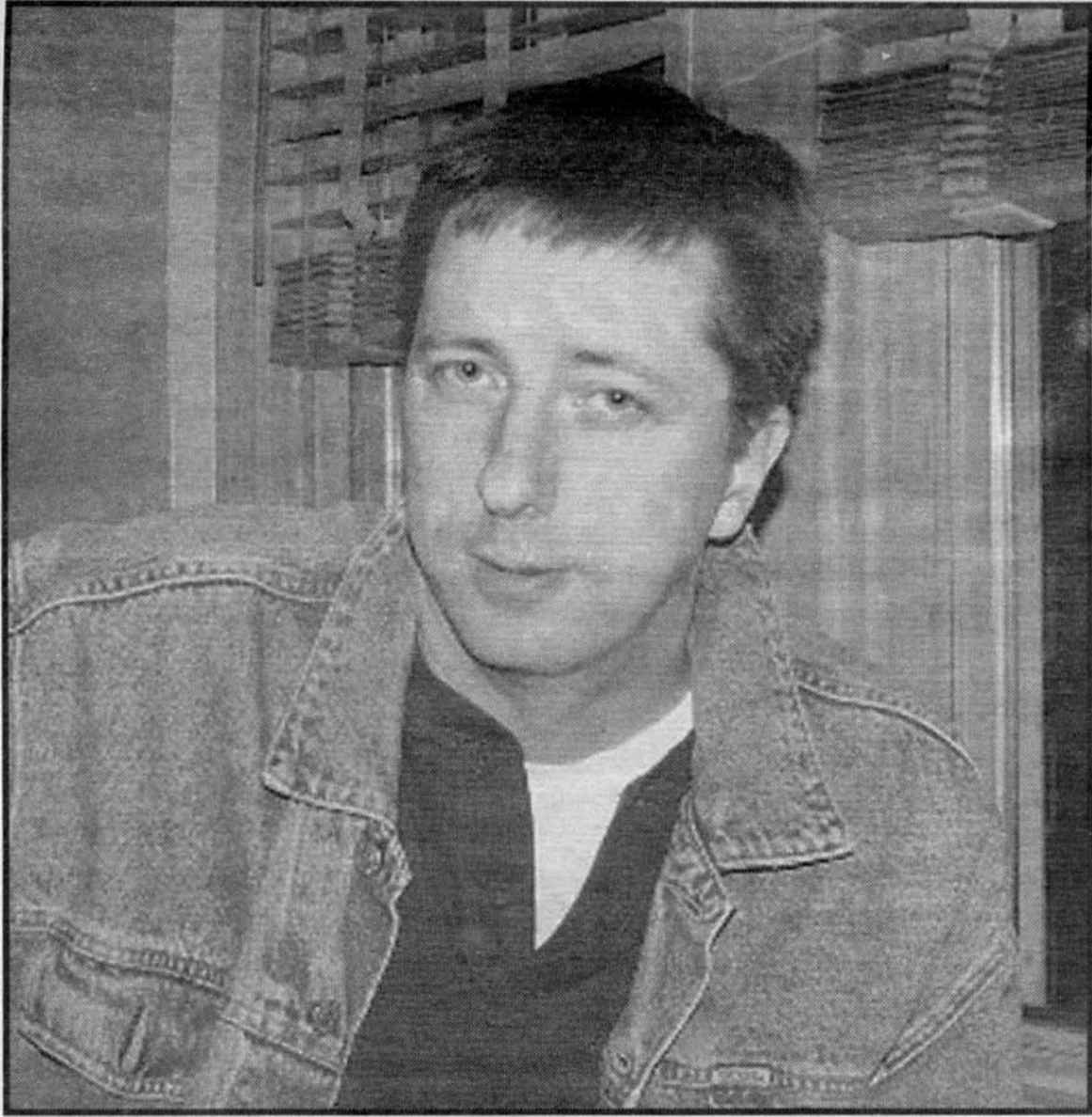


Arts



Hal Hartley, Lindenhurst native and cult-favorite director and musician, brings his *Girl From Monday* to New York for a special screening.

A Simple Man

LINDENHURST AUTEUR HAL HARTLEY TRIES HIS HAND AT MINIMALIST SCI-FI

BY JESSE SERWER

Hal Hartley didn't have to look far to find inspiration for his latest film, *The Girl From Monday*, a science-fiction story about a world where humans are stock options whose value is based on their sexual activity: He just peered out his window.

"That's the Evil Empire of Triple M," Hartley says, pointing from his 15th-floor Manhattan apartment, across the Hudson to Jersey City and the newly-constructed Goldman Sachs Tower. It's a dark, somewhat sinister-looking structure he chose to cast as the headquarters of *The Girl From Monday's* world-dominating "Major Multimedia Monopoly."

"I don't reach too far for subject matter," explains the 45-year-old writer/director, who first rose to international acclaim in the early '90s with *The Unbelievable Truth* and *Trust*, a pair of low-budget art-house favorites shot in and around his hometown of Lindenhurst. "I like to be part of the immediate world that surrounds me, even when I'm working in a genre like I did here with sci-fi. *The Girl From Monday* didn't feel like science-fiction when I was writing it."

Hartley, whose demeanor can best be

summed up as straightforward and atypically unpretentious, highlighted by mostly hushed tones unless something of personal importance arises, had a broader inspiration for *Girl's* bizarro-world vision of New York City: the out-of-control consumer culture that increasingly invades every aspect of Western life, from sleep to school to death. While the overlying story may seem a little remote, many aspects of his scenario aren't far off from our very real world of inescapable advertising.

"It never ends," Hartley comments on corporate culture's sprawl. "We're getting ready to take this film to Sundance, and I've never had a cell phone, so I finally got one of these easy Virgin mobile phones. If you look at the book, it's like, having this phone will definitely get you laid. Everything's just 'happy.'"

Hartley's apartment (shared with his wife, Japanese fashion designer/actress Miho Nikaido) is plain and clutter-free—almost curiously so, as he's actually converting it into the office of his production company, Possible Films. It's a good representation of the man, though, and where he's going with his work: Ever committed to minimalism, Hartley shot

The Girl From Monday on a single digital video camera.

"The smallness of it helps me get into the city more," explains the director, who also shot 1998's *The Book of Life* on DV. "I don't like to make movies in a studio. I don't even like to go to real places and redress them a certain way. It is more fun for me to find a particular alleyway or street and say this is the place to shoot my film. There is something about it being an organic document."

For Hartley, realizing his scripts is an intensely personal visual art, and not to be confused with commercial filmmaking. Typified by blunt, 1940s-type deadpan dialogue and ruminations on life and truth, his films almost always star leading men with a slight resemblance to the tall, slender Hartley, such as *The Girl From Monday's* William Sage or his good friend and frequent star, Martin Donovan.

"If the work doesn't help me grow individually then I might as well work at the post office," Hartley says. "Some work affirms how a broad part of the population wants to feel about themselves. This is the case with truly popular movies, but I have always found it hard to affirm everything. I feel more like questioning everything. It may not be comfortable but it is a true confrontation with life."

As anyone who's seen Hartley's films will note, his soundtracks (only a handful of which

saw release on CD; of those, all have gone out of print) have a distinctive, eerie feel. In true auteur fashion, Hartley's made most of that music himself or with his band, Ryful. So it makes sense that the latest development in Hartley's method is making music before shooting the film.

Growing up in Lindenhurst, music was "the ultimate, the thing I totally identified with," says Hartley. "On any given day sitting around smoking pot with my friends we would listen to hard jazz, British prog rock and American guitar rock, the Allman Brothers, Jimi Hendrix."

While it will tour the festival and museum/college circuit beginning at Sundance this month, there are no plans at the moment to give *The Girl From Monday* a conventional theatrical release. Instead, Possible Films will issue it on DVD in April.

"We doubt that there is a popular enough interest in it for what it costs to release a film theatrically," he says matter-of-factly. "But we have more alternative means of distribution available now. I think it is the kind of movie that is appropriate for this type of release. It probably needs to be seen more than once." ■

Hal Hartley will introduce a screening of *The Girl From Monday* at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) on Jan. 30 at 5 PM. For more information, visit www.moma.org.



Bill Sage as Jack and Tatiana Abracos as the title character in Hal Hartley's latest, *The Girl From Monday*.

GO TO PAGE 99 FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN \$1,000 OF FREE GAS