

# THREAT!

*an independent feature film  
by Katie Nisa & Matt Pizzolo*

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"Support the arts at their rawest, most street-entrenched level."

**- Montreal Mirror**

"Unapologetically brutal and surprisingly intelligent... this film works on every conceivable level; it holds court not only as a historical document of time and place, but also as a window into the soul of American adolescence. Great art should assail the status quo, and that is what Pizzolo and Nisa's film has skillfully accomplished."

**- Film Threat**

"Visionary director Matt Pizzolo takes a harsh look at what it means to be a disaffected youth, showing that the promised land of opportunity and the American dream are relics of the past. Although it may sound akin to similar independent films (think KIDS), THREAT is unique in that violence is portrayed to a degree that would make even the most iron-stomached viewer wince."

**- McGill Daily**

"Fierce emotions have yielded a fervid film called THREAT. The film shows what adults portraying kids never seem to be able to portray: their complexity. THREAT's triumph is that it avoids scenester naivete. Every subculture is interrogated equally by the poetic script - black, white, straightedge, drinker, gangster, city kid, suburban kid - which turns the film into a whirling meditation on youth, city, and future."

**- The Long Island Voice**

"In the spirit of SUBURBIA, Penelope Spheeris' 1984 dramatization of LA's squatter punks, THREAT ignores sensationalistic commentary on youth culture with its aggressively DIY approach focusing on issues of race, gender and class articulated by the people it's written about. THREAT is a refreshing movie, unafraid to be awkward and honest about the multicultural urban experience of intelligent young adults who are pissed about being placed at the end of the food chain."

**- Urb Magazine**

"Since REBEL WITHOUT A CAUSE in the '50s, every generation has a powerful film that youths can identify to justify their rebellion and question the 'values' that the older generation holds dear. THREAT is simply the voice of this generation's youth. It is easily one of the most important films of the decade."

**- Earcandy**

"This low-budget indie flick is sure to become a micro-cult classic if for no other reason than the way it was bootstrapped into existence. There's charm to it, for sure. And knowing that the outdoor shoots were powered by jacking into streetlamps earns THREAT a few extra nods on the street-cred scale."

**- Hour Weekly**

"Genuinely unsettling, thrillingly chaotic, a tale of a cross-cultural riot that takes in philosophy, polemic and politics without taking a breath. S'like you hired private dicks to follow your kids around at night and they hired Abel Ferrara to do surveillance. Put together by an utterly untutored group of kids on 16mm cameras with discarded film stock, it's a morally complex, beautifully acted, occasionally sickeningly violent portrayal of the underground NYC hip hop and hardcore scenes without a moment of false patronisation or sociological merit. The story skewers you precisely because it's left so open-ended and realistically without closure. A genuinely independent feeling film - seemingly creating a new cinematic aesthetic from the noise that is its soundtrack and spur, and if nothing else it contains voices and thoughts (particularly about politics and 9/11) that you're not likely to hear anywhere else...  
Hear, see, never set foot in a multiplex ever again."

**- Terrorizer Magazine**

*HALO8 ENTERTAINMENT & HIQI MEDIA PRESENT*

# **THREAT**

**A KINGS MOB PRODUCTION**

Produced by:

**KATIE NISA & MATT PIZZOLO**

Directed by:

**MATT PIZZOLO**

Written by:

**MATT PIZZOLO WITH KATIE NISA**

Cinematographer:

**BENJAMIN BRANCATO**

Editor:

**BRIAN GIBERSON**

Starring:

**CARLOS PUGA AS *JIM***  
**KEITH MIDDLETON AS *FRED***  
**KATIE NISA AS *KAT***  
**REBEKKA TAKAMIZU AS *MEKKY***  
**KAMOUFFLAGE AS *DESMOND***  
**DAVID R. FISHER AS *MARCO***  
**TONY DREANNAN AS *TONY***  
**NEIL RUBENSTEIN AS *RUBY***

Music by:

**ALEC EMPIRE**  
**ATARI TEENAGE RIOT**  
**TOM MORELLO**  
**PANIC DHH**  
**NIC ENDO**  
**EC8OR**  
**QUEQUE**  
**MOST PRECIOUS BLOOD**  
**TERROR**  
**BLEEDING THROUGH**  
**ENGINE KID**  
**EYES LIKE KNIVES**  
**ENDUSER**  
**EIGHTEEN VISIONS**

## **THREAT: SYNOPSIS**

Homeless punk-rocker Jim and hip-hop artist Fred are two unlikely friends who find themselves at the nexus of chaos in this blisteringly furious film that mixes street philosophy with ultraviolence.

When these two friends bring their vastly different street tribes together, neither is prepared for the vicious intolerance that explodes into a brutal riot. As violence tears through the NYC streets, threatening not only Jim and Fred's kinship but also their lives, the duo must find a way to quell the chaos or else be consumed by it.

*"THREAT is designed to demonstrate what we've been taught as American youth and to prove that these teachings are wrong. THREAT deals with the established concept that our different races and lifestyles separate us and that any attempt to cross those lines will only end in violence. It illustrates what we perceive to be the end result of this thinking: total destruction. However, the making of THREAT proves that what we've been taught is not true. The cast and crew of THREAT span many lifestyles of modern youth culture, and we were able to persevere together through years of rigorous conditions, working toward a common goal and finally succeeding."*

- *The Kings Mob*

THREAT is the first indie movie produced entirely within the NYC hardcore punk and underground hip hop communities to earn itself a theatrical release. Nearly 200 non-professionals in their teens and early 20s united behind the three-year effort to get THREAT's confrontational story on film. Writer/director Matt Pizzolo helmed the project as the crew's eldest member: on the first day of shooting he'd just turned 22.

## **THREAT: AUDIO TRACKLISTS**

### MOVIE SCORE

Programmed and Constructed by Alec Empire & Queque

"Rage" by Atari Teenage Riot w/Tom Morello and D-Stroy  
"Start The Riot" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"Into The Death" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"Get Up While You Can" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"You Can't Hold Us Back" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"Heatwave" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"Sick To Death" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"Fuck All" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"Sick To Death (remix)" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"Waves Of Disaster" by Atari Teenage Riot  
"Secret Surrounding The Glass Eye" by Immense  
"Anthea" by Immense  
"Cataini #3" by Patric C.  
"Cataini #2" by Patric C.  
"Common Enemy" by Panic DHH  
"Herbie Hancock" by Engine Kid  
"The Great Red Shift" by Most Precious Blood  
"Overcome" by Terror  
"One Hell Of A Prize Fighter" by Eighteen Visions  
"Suecide" by Alec Empire  
"Squeeze The Trigger" by Alec Empire  
"Silence & Burning Ice" by Alec Empire  
"Metall Dub" by Alec Empire  
"Low On Ice" by Alec Empire  
"37.2 Pt 1" by Alec Empire  
"2641998" by Alec Empire  
"Black Light Rituals" by Nic Endo  
"Drone" by Eyes Like Knives  
"Slow Distractions" by Eyes Like Knives  
"Time Sinks In" by Eyes Like Knives  
"nTropy" by Queque  
"HEvN" by Queque  
"wisDom" by Queque  
"mPathic" by Queque  
"Interstate Artery At 5pm" by Ichor Of The Ukase  
"One Two" by Hanin Elias  
"Wanna Peel" by EC8OR  
"Love Lost In A Hale Of Gun Fire" by Bleeding Through  
"Number Seven With A Bullet" by Bleeding Through  
"I Am A Threat" by King David  
"Am I A Threat" by Kamouflage

## **THREAT: AUDIO TRACKLISTS (cont.)**

### THREAT: ORIGINAL MOTION PICTURE SOUNDTRACK CD

Executive Produced by Alec Empire, Queque, Katie Nisa, Matt Pizzolo

1. "Night Of Violence" Alec Empire
2. "Start The Riot" by Atari Teenage Riot
3. "Into The Death" by Atari Teenage Riot
4. "Rage" by Atari Teenage Riot w/Tom Morello and D-Stroy
5. "Sick To Death" by Atari Teenage Riot
6. "Get Up While You Can" by Atari Teenage Riot
7. "Gotta Get Out" by Alec Empire
8. "Common Enemy" by Panic DHH
9. "Wanna Peel" by EC8OR
10. "Number Seven With A Bullet" by Bleeding Through
11. "The Great Red Shift" by Most Precious Blood
12. "One Hell Of A Prize Fighter" by Eighteen Visions
13. "Overcome" by Terror
14. "Drone" by Eyes Like Knives
15. "mPathik" by Queque
16. "hevN" by Queque
17. "I Am The Threat" by King David
18. "Kids Are United" by Atari Teenage Riot

### THREAT: MUSIC THAT INSPIRED THE MOVIE

Executive Produced by Matt Pizzolo, David R. Fisher, Brian Giberson, Kerry Weber

1. "Pandemic" Most Precious Blood vs. Alec Empire
2. "World At War" Agnostic Front vs. Schizoid
3. "Ghost In The Machine" Inside Out vs. Dalek
4. "World Ablaze | Threat mix" Killswitch Engage vs. Edgely
5. "Overkill" Terror vs. Enduser
6. "Champagne Enemaz" Eighteen Visions vs. Otto Von Schirach
7. "Zolobovine" Gorilla Biscuits vs. Defragmentation
8. "Cannibal Kitten" The Icarus Line vs. The End
9. "Slapped With An X" VOD vs. The Tyrant
10. "Bring It" Judge vs. Bill Youngman
11. "Stalwart Carapace" Youth Of Today vs. Edgely
12. "Deathbed" Bleeding Through vs. Hecate
13. "I Know That You're Lying" Today Is The Day vs. darph/nadeR
14. "Star Buried In My Yard" Glassjaw vs. Enduser
15. "Don't Step" Minor Threat vs. Holocaust

## **THREAT: ONESHEET**

THREAT

"A Nasty Little Film About Hope"

THREAT, a bleeding-edge new indie film by first-time filmmakers Matt Pizzolo and Katie Nisa, is coming to theaters nationwide. The brooding, urban indie that mixes street philosophy with ultraviolence is produced by NYC "multimedia militia" Kings Mob Productions and distributed by Halo8 Entertainment in association with HIQI Media. Hatched from the NYC hardcore punk and underground hip hop communities, THREAT's movie release will be joined by two soundtracks and a comic book series spin-off.

Down & dirty, "truly independent" filmmaking may seem anachronistic by today's Indiewood standards--but to Kings Mob, NYC punk filmmakers with street cred to spare, it just makes good sense. Nearly 200 creative misfits in their teens and early twenties agreed with the nu-maverick filmmakers and joined the massive Do-it-Yourself effort to create a film for, by, and about disaffected youth. Writer/director Pizzolo helmed the project as THREAT's eldest crew-member: on the first day of shooting he'd just turned 22.

THREAT's scathingly nihilistic worldview is articulated against the backdrop of a street riot in NYC's Lower East Side. Homeless punk-rocker Jim (*Carlos Puga*) and hip-hop artist Fred (*Keith Middleton*) are two unlikely friends who find themselves at the nexus of chaos when they try to meld their worlds and discover the deep intolerance that divides them. As violence between the vastly different social groups threatens not only Jim and Fred's kinship but also their lives, the duo must find a way to quell the chaos or else be consumed by it.

With a blisteringly furious score produced by Atari Teenage Riot frontman Alec Empire and a cast of notorious punk-rockers and hip-hop artists, THREAT's earliest rough cut played to sold-out audiences at music venues across the US and Europe. These early shows served as test screenings for Kings Mob, who used the feedback to guide additional shooting and a finer cut.

The fine cut emerged for a sneak preview at the Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival, where THREAT caught the eye of Oren Bitan, former Seventh Art Releasing Sr. VP Acquisitions & Marketing who'd previously displayed a taste for music-driven indies with his acquisitions of Radiohead's "Meeting People Is Easy" and The Hughes Brothers' "American Pimp." Bitan acquired THREAT for his newly founded specialty distribution company HIQI Media, making THREAT the first indie film produced in the "punk scene" to earn itself a nationwide theatrical release.

THREAT is an incendiary film made by a team of impassioned filmmakers bent on transforming youth violence into class consciousness. Although the young punk-rockers and hip-hop artists paint a portrait of bleak intolerance, their unified struggle to create the film proves that this doomsday is avoidable... making THREAT a nasty little film about hope.

## **THREAT: MAKING OF**

### **FORMATION OF THE MOB**

Kings Mob Productions was founded by Katie Nisa and Matt Pizzolo. They met in NYU's Tisch School of the Arts and soon realized that they were likeminded both politically and artistically. The two shared an intense DiY (Do-it-Yourself) attitude based on Matt's history in hardcore punk and Katie's history in political activism. Their goal with Kings Mob was to create new, dangerous, and thought-provoking media.

At the time, Matt had just dropped out of NYU and was living out of a backpack. Nonetheless, he managed to publish several independent zines and write a rough first draft of THREAT, a dark screenplay about racial tensions leading to a violent street riot that shakes the survivors into aggressive social consciousness.

Matt and Katie decided to collaborate on THREAT, drawing from their experiences coming of age in a violent, urban environment. They gathered material from the diverse group of friends they encountered and the experiences which shaped their world.

All of those experiences painted a stark picture of modern society and the potential fate of America.

In the story, Jim, a homeless white straightedge kid, and Fred, a young black father/revolutionary, work together in a comic book shop. One night, their friends meet and an argument ensues. The argument explodes into a club brawl, which, when mistaken for being racially motivated, pours out onto the streets and escalates into a full scale riot. Jim and Fred try to stop the violence and maintain their friendship, but are pulled into the riot's maelstrom. In the end, the survivors realize that, instead of fighting each other, they should be focusing their anger against the establishment that pits them against one another.

Unlike standard one-location talking-heads indie films, THREAT's script blueprinted a renegade movie involving more than 50 locations, a variety of effects, and scenes that demanded as many as 100 extras.

Taking their cue from independent filmmakers like Jim Jarmusch and DiY media outfits like Ian MacKaye's hardcore label Dischord Records and Ani Difranco's Righteous Babe Recordings, Matt and Katie formed their indie film army Kings Mob Productions.

### **THE MAKING OF THREAT**

Matt found an internship at the downtown NY film co-op Film/Video Arts, the same co-op where Kevin Smith edited CLERKS. Matt's internship involved cleaning up after classes and managing rentals of the co-op's 16mm cameras and lighting equipment. The internship gave Kings Mob free access to the equipment whenever it wasn't in use.

## **THREAT: MAKING OF (cont.)**

While Katie and Matt had strong enough DiY reputations to pull together a team of reliable and intelligent young adults, they knew that, no matter how committed the team was, a functional Kings Mob would still require at least one crewmember with the technical prowess needed to instruct the entirely untrained crew on the rudimentary skills of filmmaking. Katie recruited Benjamin Brancato, a student at NYU Film School. Though only a junior in the undergraduate program, Benjamin had already shot over 20 short films and knew the production equipment inside and out.

With a youth crew made up of non-professionals entirely in their late teens and early twenties, the Mob set out to cast THREAT.

They started by auditioning professional actors, but quickly realized that casting would have to be as non-traditional as every other aspect of the project. The nature of the script required authentic performances from non-actors who could relate to the characters. The Mob began auditioning friends, acquaintances, and people they ran into on the street. They posted flyers in record stores and held open casting calls after shows in area clubs.

In some cases, characters were loosely based on real people (i.e., Katie/*Kat*, Rebekka/*Mekky*, Neil Rubenstein/*Ruby*). There was no favoritism in casting, though. Even Katie had to audition three times against a range of other candidates for the role of *Kat*. In most cases, people didn't pass the auditions to play their own namesakes.

Early in the shoot, the Kings Mob truly became a collaborative effort. Divisions between cast and crew dissolved as the team pulled together. No crew member specialized in one department, no cast member spent the below-freezing nights in a heated trailer. The producer, director, and stars could all be found gaffing wires and serving meals.

With no budget for things like permits and insurance, the THREAT shoots were complete run-&-gun renegade filmmaking. Crew members would sneak into illegal locations and tap electricity from lamp posts. In order to attain high visual impact, Benjamin and the camera were strapped to the hood of a moving car, strapped to the side of a moving van, carabineered to a fire escape, and braced atop a 15 foot pile of industrial garbage. In a neighborhood flooded with big budget movie shoots, the Kings Mob established such a respected reputation that locals would come out and lend a hand when they saw the Mob was filming on their stoops.

One particularly unlawful late-night shoot, which involved 30 people, a generator, and several guns on the rooftop of a 15 story building, went sour when a fire alarm was accidentally tripped. Since the film co-op was located in the same building, Matt lost his internship. As a result, the Mob lost their equipment.

The shoots became even more rigorous when Katie and Matt turned to credit cards to finance short-term equipment rentals. Average shoot schedules ran 22 hours a day for weeks at a time. Since no one had time to commute, Katie

## **THREAT: MAKING OF (cont.)**

and Matt filled their small East Village apartment with mattresses and the principal cast and crew moved in.

Every step along the difficult road of DiY production helped THREAT evolve from the expression of two people to the joint expression of 200 people. The cast members began coming to set with script ideas that would be workshopped and often end up influencing the scenes being shot. The entire cast and crew worked throughout production on developing every aspect of THREAT to create a film like few before it: a portrait of a generation of youth by members of that generation, not adults attempting to portray youth.

When the shoot was done, Katie and Matt snuck into a two-day video editing workshop and learned the basics of Avid editing. Kings Mob had established its reputation enough for local editing facilities to donate Avid time to the young renegade filmmakers. Matt and Katie also rallied interns at a post-production sound facility to do late night foley and music sessions for THREAT.

### **ON THE ROAD WITH THREAT**

When THREAT's first rough cut was completed, 8 Mobsters piled into a van and drove to the Sundance Film Festival. They didn't have time to learn the ins and outs of submitting to film festivals, they just knew Sundance was about to begin and it seemed like the right place to go next. Once again, the Kings Mob reputation preceded them: not with the festival, but with the locals.

At the time, a Doc Marten's shoe store happened to be located right across the street from Sundance's flagship Egyptian Theater. The punk rock kids working in the shop convinced their bosses to let the Kings Mob turn the shoe store into a renegade movie theater for two nights. Taking advantage of Wal-Mart's 30-day no-questions-asked return policy, Kings Mob transformed the shoe store into a screening room and sold out all four shows, mostly to young people in Salt Lake City who'd learned about THREAT and the Mob through the internet.

The renegade screenings at Sundance scored THREAT glowing international press, which the Mob used as a springboard to launch test-screening tours across the US & Europe. After each screening, Katie and Matt ran DiY Filmmaking Workshops. Those workshops developed into the Kings Mob produced DiY-Fest, a touring independent media carnival that featured a range of artists including Kings Mob inspirations Jim Jarmusch, Ian MacKaye, and Ani DiFranco.

By taking THREAT's rough cut on tour, Katie and Matt learned a lot about the film's strengths and weaknesses, but most of all they learned that all the hard work had not been in vain. The film had an activating effect on its audience, and that inspired Katie and Matt to return to the grindstone and do the long, painstaking work of honing the rough cut into a solid piece of independent filmmaking craftsmanship.

## **THREAT: MAKING OF (cont.)**

While they put the final remaining pieces together for a polished final cut, Matt and Katie presented a short mini-preview of THREAT in the film festival tent at Goldenvoice's Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival. In attendance at the preview was Oren Bitan, the accomplished film distributor who'd previously acquired and released Radiohead's MEETING PEOPLE IS EASY and The Hughes Brothers' AMERICAN PIMP.

Startled and excited by the audience response to THREAT's short mini-preview at Coachella, Bitan approached Matt and Katie about putting THREAT in theaters nationwide through his new HIQI Media outfit. Matt and Katie were familiar with Bitan's previous releases, so they excitedly closed a deal right there at the music festival.

### **THE FUTURE**

With THREAT's release imminent, the Kings Mob founders are still hard at work.

Katie is focusing all her attention on acting, which she is pursuing full-time. She most recently appeared on the LA stage in Patrick Marber's CLOSER.

Matt has two new movies in production at Kings Mob and is taking the Dischord/Righteous Babe model a step further by forming the indie DVD & soundtrack label Halo8 Destructions, currently distributed by Sony-BMG's RED Distribution (known for aggressive music labels Victory Records and Metal Blade Records as well as DVD labels Eagle Vision and Crash Cinema).

The rest of the Kings Mob team is also focused on the future. Some of the crew members have taken office positions within the company, while others have continued on with other creative pursuits. Several Kings Mob alum are making waves musically, such as Keith Middleton with his HYDRA hip hop crew, Rebekka Takamizu with her EYES LIKE KNIVES post-rock band, Neil Rubenstein with his THESE ENZYMES hardcore band, Kamouflage with his solo rap career, and David R. Fisher with his new acoustic project THE LOST WEEKEND.

Creative members of the Kings Mob team have also made unexpected multimedia contributions to THREAT. Actor/rapper Kamouflage wrote and produced the THREAT theme song "Am I A Threat?," which was written from the perspective of his character in THREAT. In response, actor/punk-singer David R. Fisher wrote and produced his character's hardcore punk response "I Am A Threat." Both theme songs will appear on the soundtrack to be released by Matt's Halo8 Destructions label.

In even more multimedia news, THREAT animation illustrator Robert Anthony Jr. has begun work on a THREAT comic book based on Matt's newest script THREAT: SILENT WAR. Also in the pipeline is a "THREAT: Music That Inspired The Movie" CD. Illustrating THREAT's cross-subcultural nature, the album will consist of hardcore and metal songs remixed by hip hop DJs and electronica producers

# **THREAT: FILMMAKER BIOS**

## **KATIE NISA**

**THREAT** is not only the big-screen acting debut of **KATIE NISA**, it also marks her debut as a creative force in the world of independent filmmaking: Nisa performs triple duties on **THREAT** as actor, co-writer, and co-producer.

Born and raised in Woodstock, NY, Katie got her start as a performer at a young age dancing with the **Catskill Ballet Theater**. Katie danced there for 14 years, most notably as Clara in "The Nutcracker."

Katie moved to NYC and attended **NYU's Tisch School of the Arts** as an undergraduate. In NY, Katie honed her producing skills by working on Sarah Skaggs' "Altogether Different" series at **The Joyce**.

It didn't take long before Katie dove headfirst into renegade filmmaking. She developed the screenplay for **THREAT** and navigated the young crew of non-professionals through years of independent film production.

Katie often had to supervise production from the other side of the camera as she performed the role of *Kat*. **Microfilm Magazine** had this to say about Katie's performance: "Nisa is disturbingly liberating as a woman who empowers herself into an object no longer to be ogled, but to be feared."

With **THREAT** on its way to theaters, Katie has placed her focus on acting full-time. She studied at the **Stella Adler Acting Conservatory** and was seen most recently on the LA Stage in Patrick Marbur's **CLOSER**.

## **MATT PIZZOLO**

**THREAT** is the directorial debut of **Matt Pizzolo**, a member of **Ensemble Studio Theater's *Youngblood: Young Playwrights Program***.

Matt wrote the first draft of **THREAT** after dropping out of **NYU's Tisch School of the Arts *Undergraduate Dramatic Writing Program*** while living out of a backpack in NYC's Lower East Side.

He was still in his early twenties when he helmed the production of **THREAT** and navigated it through the long hard road of independent filmmaking.

During **THREAT's** post-production, Matt founded **DiY-Fest**, the touring festival of Do-it-Yourself mediamaking. Matt designed the festival to help support young artists and spread the word about new, dangerous, and thought-provoking media. Once the festival had built its reputation, Matt integrated it into the popular **Van's Warped Tour** where it could reach an even larger audience.

Matt also directed the acclaimed music video for Atari Teenage Riot's **RAGE**. The video compiled footage from the WTO protests in Seattle, WA and the World Bank protests in Washington DC. The award-winning music video played at the **Chicago Underground Film Festival** and **Berlin's Global Ghetto Festival**.

Matt is now hard at work on his upcoming film **THE LONG KNIVES**.

## **THREAT: PRESS**

### **THE LONG ISLAND VOICE**

THREAT: A Nasty Little Film About Hope  
by Andrew Friedman

Matt Pizzolo wasn't really living anywhere then. He was technically homeless, the kind of homeless that a hardcore kid from Plainview falls into when he's just dropped out of an NYU dramatic writing program. He crashed on friends' couches, slept under Ping-Pong tables in dorm buildings after hours, fell asleep in East Village diners and, once in a while, curled up on a park bench.

Ever since he'd dropped out, things had been tense at home and he didn't want to come back to the Island. His friend Katie Nisa was thinking about heading up to Toronto for a while, to figure out things in her head. College was over, high loans looming, and she still didn't know what she wanted to be.

This was about three years ago. Their lives -- caught in that formless whirlpool of the early 20s, ages that don't really matter on a grand scale but seem to be setting the course of your life forever -- were played out upon the backdrop of the East Village in gentrification turmoil and the hardcore scene out of ABC No Rio and CBGB. Suburban kids hanging out amid the dustbin of race, gender and worldview that defines the city streets, they started to think about where they'd come from.

Pizzolo took Nisa to the stretch of Clinton Road that divides Hempstead and Garden City, where Garden City's beautiful overhanging trees face off against Hempstead's semi-urban shops, sidewalks and low-rises in stark reality. Pizzolo says it's the eeriest street he's ever driven down -- one of those testaments to racial segregation that could only be rationalized by a place like the suburbs. "The most disturbing thing is that every day people drive through that and it does not affect them," says Pizzolo, 23. "It freaks the hell out of me."

In the city, meanwhile, they'd see kids getting in fights and shopkeepers harassing homeless men near their stores. They'd go to hardcore shows filled with mostly white kids, shouting politics. Then they'd pass black kids on the street, sometimes talk, sometimes not. Locked in their own confusion about the future, it started to feel like the world was reaching some kind of desperate critical mass.

More than a year later, these fierce emotions have yielded a fervid film called Threat. Set on the streets of New York -- with occasional trips to suburban homes -- among the lives of people in their teens and 20s, the film shows what adults portraying kids never seem to be able to portray: their complexity. It chronicles the lives of a homeless white hardcore kid, an HIV positive suburban girl, a philosophical black comic-book store security guard and their friends as they manage life in New York. For the young, in the trenches of society, life has a hyper-real quality, and so does this lyrical film. The day scenes are shot in a drab black and white, and the color literally comes out at night. The plot boils from an incident at a hardcore show into a city-wide race riot.

"Basically it came out of our feeling that the wrong people were fighting each other," says Nisa. "It was to show that we shouldn't be fighting each other. We should be fighting who pits us against each other."

For three months, the crew moved into the apartment Nisa and Pizzolo had started sharing on East 10th Street. She would feed them with espresso-bar leftovers from

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

her job at Dean & DeLuca. Pizzolo mopped up a film center so they could use its ancient equipment for free at night. Nisa crashed law symposiums and business seminars at local colleges and stalked NYU film professors, begging advice. They blasted out here on the LIRR to shoot footage at Sons of Abraham vocalist Kneel Rubenstein's house. They froze in short sleeves on winter nights, stealing a few hours sleep in broken-down vans with no heat. Bike messengers grabbed Threat stickers and papered telephone poles and parking signs. Innocent neighborhood residents returning home with groceries held the boom.

Although most of it's set in Manhattan, what might be termed a Long Island perspective is crucial to the film. The city serves as battleground and backdrop, but the sense of wonder and danger and possibility wrapped up in it comes straight out of the narrative distance held by someone who grew up in the suburbs. One of the most startling shots cuts from a series of blue-black city scenes straight to the grotesque surreality of a white chandelier in a giant house at dinnertime on the Island. The characters hammer out identities between these contrasts.

Threat's triumph is that it avoids scenerist naiveté. Every subculture is interrogated equally by the poetic script -- black, white, straight-edge, drinker, gangster, city kid, suburban kid -- which turns the film into a whirling meditation on youth, city and future. The incendiary techno beats and electronic scrawls provided by Atari Teenage Riot's Alec Empire riddle the film with the same kind of uneasiness you get watching a horror movie.

To keep the communal spirit of the nearly completed project going, Pizzolo and Nisa have formed a multi-art, multiracial collective called Kings Mob. One pair that met on the set, Hempstead rapper Kamouflage and London-born jungle DJ Queque, have started working together. The newest good news: Digital Hardcore, Empire's London-based hardcore techno label, has just agreed to help fund the rest of the project and release the soundtrack. Kings Mob will also put out a book of Nisa's poetry and a futuristic comic book by Pizzolo sometime in the future.

"We did Threat to show what we were taught to believe as true," Pizzolo says. "By making it, we proved it didn't have to be true."

### **STYLE MAGAZINE**

CALL IT A THREAT  
by Chris Campion

Shot on over 50 locations around New York with a cast and crew of over 200 mostly non-professionals in their early 20's, 'Threat' is a US independent movie with ambition and attitude. Rooted in the hip hop and hardcore punk scenes, Threat traces the lives of six lead characters whose interaction ends in a full-scale riot on the streets of Manhattan. It aspires to the visual impact of a Hollywood event movie but was totally self-financed by its makers.

Formed in the late 90s as a production company by Matt Pizzolo and Katie Nisa, Kings Mob Productions has since grown into 'an army of young people.' "Some kids work around the clock," says Pizzolo, Threat's 23 year-old writer-director, "others work when they can or when they can't help it. The Kings Mob is run somewhere between a collective and a corporation." Their media pack boldly claims that they have set out to "change the face of art and politics in America."

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

Inspired by an arcane political group that operated in England in the late 1960s - The King Mob were ex-Situationist pranksters who aspired to be 'a street gang with analysis' - the 90's Kings Mob realised that they had to adopt a chameleon-like corporate structure in order to effectively subvert from within.

The Mob evolved from Pizzolo and Nisa's original intention to start an NYC-based artists collective. "But what we found," says Nisa, Threat's writer-producer, "is that most collectives are forced to scrape for funding and get caught up in red tape. They become paralyzed."

"So," Pizzolo continues, "we felt that in order to survive in this economy as subversive artists, we had to teach ourselves how the economy works and use that information to turn it on itself. We did some research and started a legitimate business."

"Our first project was Threat, a script that we had written together and, while shopping it around, were told by countless industry insiders that we would never be able to make it ourselves. So we got a bunch of kids behind us and just went out and did it. People really connected with it and devoted a year of their lives to it."

Although the Threat script was written by two people, the Threat movie was made by 200 people, who were all encouraged to contribute ideas. As originally written by Pizzolo and Nisa, the lead characters were based on friends and acquaintances who, for the most part, ended up playing themselves on film.

Threat's two main protagonists are Jim, a white, straight-edge hardcore kid who is homeless, and Fred, a black hip hop kid. As friends they begin to gain an appreciation of the common values that underpin their respective cultures, and the nature of the struggle needed to survive in NYC. But their friendship inadvertently becomes the catalyst for conflict between their crews. An argument at a hardcore gig spills out onto the streets and escalates into a full-scale race riot. Caught up in a spiraling maelstrom of violence, Jim and Fred try to maintain a friendship that threatens to be torn apart by allegiances to race and clique.

Jim, who is also drawn to Mekky, an HIV+ 16-year old girl, comes to the conclusion that it is dangerous to be close to other people. This materialises in Threat's street-fighting scenes which reach sickening extremes of violence. Of this Pizzolo and Nisa are unapologetic: "Threat is made by kids about kids. We're not trying to shock, this is simply a statement of our experience."

Unlike Larry Clark's 'Kids' and 'Hurricane Streets', two acclaimed portraits of perpetually dazed and confused delinquent kids, Threat's key characters are kids who, activated and agitated by their respective cultures, are engaged in challenging the prevailing street politic.

"As a society, we're not equipped with the language to connect to someone who is different," explains Nisa. "So the conflict in 'Threat' is caused by two people from different scenes attempting to connect, which erupts into mass violence - the next level from the violence that we all experience on a personal level."

"The violence is real because we've experienced that type of violence - we understand it. We've all experienced intolerance and ignorance. And we're all raised to be intolerant and ignorant. We wanted to open that up."

Shot over the period of a year, in grueling 22 hour sessions for weeks at a time, making the movie was an ordeal in itself. Despite going to great lengths to avoid agitating local residents when shooting outside, the cast and crew still experienced

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

intolerance of their activities. Nisa, who in 'Threat' plays Kat, a young poet terrorised by a stalker, relates one particularly gut-churning incident.

"We were shooting out front of St. Marks Church when this business man walks past and kicks over one of our lights. Our borrowed lights! I was so pissed, I screamed after him 'asshole'. And he says, 'If you wanna make a movie go to fucking Hollywood!' The lack of sleep and stress all hit me then and I went off. And this guy comes back, gets up in my face and says, 'You got a pretty face. Won't be so pretty when I pour battery acid on it'. The guys all pulled me back like, 'Let it go, he's just crazy'."

But more often than not though they would find that local residents would pitch in and help them set-up shots. The local cops got so used to seeing them shooting around the East Village that they stopped hassling them, despite the fact that the Kings Mob crew obviously did not have the permits to do so. The Mob coined the term renegade filmmaking to describe their efforts to achieve the most visually dynamic shots using anything around them.

"One time," recalls Pizzolo, "I found myself driving a rented truck backwards the wrong way down a one way street with our Director Of Photography strapped to the side of the truck and a CB radio taped to my face so I could give directions and we could get a really cool dolley shot. And then this cop gave a ticket to one of the double-parked cars we passed but not to us! That was fucking weird."

Intent on producing every aspect of the film themselves, the expanded Kings Mob was fortunate to be able to draw on a formidable array of writers, musicians, and designers who are developing other Kings Mob-affiliated projects such as books, music and clothing lines. "Am I A Threat?," the movie's musical calling card, is a defiantly hardcore hip hop track by rapper Kamouflage (who plays Desmond in the movie) and producer Queque. Reflecting the film's dualistic nature, the track is due to be re-interpreted by a NYC hardcore group. Queque - who is composing Threat's electronic and hip hop-influenced score (which also includes original music by Alec Empire, The Destroyer) - and his partner Killili are also designing the Threat titles, while Killili is overseeing the animation sequences that run through the movie.

Rather than being co-opted into the system, the Mob are looking to effect change and share the knowledge they have gained from making 'Threat' with others. Pizzolo and Nisa have been touring indie music festivals in the US, running workshops on D-I-Y media in the hope that the kids attending them will go out and start something themselves.

"When we were thinking of forming a D-I-Y production company," says Pizzolo, "there were no models on how to do it in independent film. So we looked to musical role-models like the Wu-Tang Clan and the hardcore Dischord label. Now we want Kings Mob to be the role model that we couldn't find."

## **URB MAGAZINE (Review)**

THREAT

by Daniel Chamberlin

Larry Clark's Kids paints urban youth as sexual psychopaths lost in a skewed world of drugs and violence--a wake-up call to paranoid middle class parents to save their children from the perils of the urban jungle. Gregg Araki counters with the erotic nihilism of The Doom Generation, gratuitously endorsing sex-and-drugs-and-

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

alternative-rock without saying much about anything else in the process. In the spirit of Suburbia, Penelope Spheeris' 1984 dramatization of LA's squatter punks, Threat ignores sensationalistic commentary on youth culture with its aggressively DiY approach focusing on issues of race, gender and class articulated by the people it's written about.

A narrative about New York City youth struggling with the "suit"-imposed confines of the adult world, Threat focuses on the friendship of pacifist straight-edge punk Jim and his black revolutionary co-worker Fred, and the people who populate their lives. Jim spends his evenings with a posse of white straight-edgers out to beat down drunk drivers, Katie is a waitress dealing with a voyeuristic neighbor and Mekky is 16-years-old and HIV positive. Fred has a young child and wife to be responsible to while spreading consciousness to hip-hop heads preoccupied with pistols and 40s.

The film flows between these different stories (shot in black & white during the day and color at night), until they come together at a hardcore punk show where violence erupts over a hip-hop kid dousing a straight-edger with his brew. Twenty minutes of rioting and killing, dramatized with crude but effective animated inserts and the sounds of Digital Hardcore, bring the surviving characters to the conclusion that they've wasted their aggression on "the wrong people," a sobering statement which could've used a more subtle exploration.

Threat is a refreshing movie, unafraid to be awkward and honest about the multicultural urban experience of intelligent young adults who are pissed about being placed at the end of the food chain. Filmmakers Nisa and Pizzolo wear their DiY credentials with pride--self-production and distribution gives their Kings Mob collective almost complete creative control of their output. However, at times Threat becomes unwieldy and unfocused--the Mob would do well to check their French sister-film La Haine (released in the US as Hate) for tighter editing and a more consistent aesthetic which could refine their message without compromising their script or ideology.

### **SUICIDE GIRLS .com (Interview)**

MATT PIZZOLO, director of THREAT  
by VeganJihad

*Matt Pizzolo shook up Hollywood with his indie movie "Threat" and the guerrilla tactics he used to produce and distribute it. A defiant and confrontational movie about class war and unbridled youth violence, "Threat" is not exactly the type of film you might expect to earn its writer-director a multi-picture deal with Sony, but that's exactly what Pizzolo managed to accomplish along with his filmmaking partner Katie Nisa and their Kings Mob multimedia militia. With "Threat" tearing it up in theaters and three new Kings Mob movies in the pipeline, I decided to catch up with Pizzolo and figure out what he's so angry about.*

**Vegan Jihad:** Where did Threat come from?

**Matt Pizzolo:** I wanted to make a really hardcore punk movie... mostly because I'm tone deaf so I can't be in a band. My initial idea was to pirate the whole thing: shoot actors talking and reacting, but then lift all the action from other movies, literally going to the video store, renting movies, and cutting shots from like hundreds of different movies and editing it against my own actors. So that was the original idea, to just be totally underground with it. But it didn't work out that way. Somewhere along the line, Katie and I decided to actually make a real movie. Katie goes "independent film exists, I mean, it can't be that hard." Famous last words...

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

**VJ:** I mean, where did the source of the movie come from, not how you did it, we'll get to that.

**MP:** I originally wrote a short script called "I Am A Threat To Everything You Stand For" which was totally experimental. It was sort of inspired by a comic book by J.M. DeMatteis called "Brooklyn Dreams." I was writing these weird scripts at the time... they were meant to be read, you couldn't really shoot them because part of the story is written in the stage direction. I wrote this play called "If There's A Gun Onstage, Shoot Yourself" that was performed in a few cities, but needed a narrator to read the stage direction because it had stuff about how the character died in future and past lives because of circular time theory. All the stuff I was writing was very weird and angry and experimental partly because I was getting kicked out of screenwriting school, so I was just generally annoyed with the way things are "supposed" to be done. "I Am A Threat To Everything You Stand For" was weird like that, but it set up the characters and the world that I expanded in "Threat."

**VJ:** Can you expand a bit on the world in which "Threat" exists? Are there years? Streets? Locations? Some people look at the streets of New York in a very different way either post 9/11 or post Rudy Giuliani?

**MP:** "Threat" is definitely of the era when New York City still had balls, before the Lower East Side was consumed by all these neo-yuppies. We started working on it before 9/11, but we finished it after 9/11, so there's this weird time lapse in the movie. There's a shot of the towers that we filmed from a rooftop during a shoot one night, but there's also a voiceover that references the towers being destroyed. We were all there on 9/11, our neighborhood was closed off... I don't want to get too much into 9/11 stories, but the point is that we couldn't ignore 9/11 and be like "oh, but 'Threat' takes place before 9/11." I mean, we were obviously profoundly affected by those events, so they crept into the movie. Technically, the movie takes place before 9/11 in the early days of Giuliani, when we all really hated him, before he gutted the city and made it "safe." But I think the rage and confusion we tried to depict in "Threat" is more relevant to a lot of people after 9/11. I mean, we're in an unpopular and bloody war, and we've got a government that's the most intrusive since the fucking Alien & Sedition Acts, and that's not going to change with the next administration whether they're donkeys or elephants. But it's still business-as-usual with the popcorn entertainment.

**VJ:** "Threat" has a twinge of an autobiographical narrative. When I have mentioned the plot to people, some ask if it's a documentary. But this is an action film, a drama, and at moments pokes fun at the characters who inhabit it.

**MP:** I really sensed that there was conflict all around me. Everyone was so angry because they really felt that they had no control over their own lives... all of them for very different reasons, but they shared the same hostility. My idea was to take these real people and see what would happen if they were pushed to the edge. So it's autobiographical to a point. Obviously, I was living out of a backpack when I wrote it and Jim is living out of a backpack, but I never got pulled into a bloody race riot where my friends were killed. So it was basically introducing these people and then showing the disaster I felt we were on the brink of. There's a real clear shift in the movie, it goes from a sort of documentary vibe to all of a sudden this action and mayhem. It freaks out a lot of people when the movie changes gears like that. And yeah it definitely pokes fun at the characters, and I think that's really important. I didn't want to deify anyone or pedestalize any particular group. I was very nervous about bringing together characters from all these different places and groups. I really wanted to make sure I called them all on their shit equally.

**VJ:** In the film there is a range of different characters with their own motivations. We get a glimmer of each. Where are these people coming from? What does a middle class white kid and a struggling black man have in common?

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

**MP:** I think that question summarizes a lot of the movie... what DO a middle class white kid and a struggling black man have in common? They're both living in this world together and hoping that their lives will have some sort of value in making it a better place. Fred, the struggling black man, has enough faith that he's working to make a better life for his son. Jim, the middle class white kid, is totally existential and barely sees his life having any value at all. The tragedy is that Fred tries to show Jim that life can have value, but Jim doesn't understand that until it's too late.

**VJ:** There is an issue of classism that goes beyond race in the movie.

**MP:** Yeah, I came at it from an angle that class is really the ultimate divider in our culture, beyond even race or gender. And the thing these kids in the movie all share is that they're at the bottom rung of the class system and they're pissed about it. But it's not just about being poor, it's really just about being average in a world where decisions are made by a super wealthy minority. You may be white or black, male or female, but if you're not super wealthy or from the right family then you don't have any say... you go to war when they tell you to go to war. And the violence in "Threat" is about how we in the trenches are so angry, but we take it out on each other instead of taking drastic measures to make change.

**VJ:** This is probably one of the few (if not the only) feature length films to put the spotlight on straight-edge. It's a huge theme in the movie. Jim, the protagonist, is straight-edge, and so is one of the agitators, Marco. Their views on straight-edge seem to be polar opposites.

**MP:** Apparently people think I was particularly harsh on straight-edge kids. I never set out to make a definitive movie about straight-edge. I was straight-edge and many of my friends were, so it just made sense to include straight-edge characters. I don't wear Xs on my hands to shows anymore, but I've never had a drink, never used any drugs... I didn't intend to make straight-edge look bad. But one of "Threat's" main themes is intolerance, and I'd be lying if I didn't say that a lot of straight-edge kids can be overzealous to the point of intolerance. I'd just gone on tour with Earth Crisis and I met a drug-dealing, gun-toting straight-edge kid. Hardline was a big movement at the time. There were gangs of straight-edge kids storming bars and beating people up. So I integrated that vibe into one of the straight-edge characters, but instead of just being dogmatic he starts off as being very noble, he's trying to stop drunk drivers after a friend is killed by a DWI. Another theme of the movie is that people are so angry that it won't take much to light the fuse of a riot. What could be a smaller incident than something as stupid and juvenile as pouring a beer on someone's head? The point is that everyone is waiting for the chance to attack, and they won't need much of an excuse. So using straight-edge to set off the riot wasn't really about straight-edge, it was about the fact that just about \*anything\* could have caused that riot.

**VJ:** So this is not a call to arms?

**MP:** A call to arms? We're already at arms. It's a call to focus your anger at the real enemy.

**VJ:** Generally if you ask anyone to name independent films or filmmakers, you might hear Clerks or Quentin Tarantino. Who were you looking at when "Threat" started to come off the page?

**MP:** I was looking at more politically volatile films. See, I never wanted to be a filmmaker. I didn't want "Threat" to get me work in Hollywood as a director, so I didn't look for guidance from those indie movies that launched Hollywood careers. I wanted to tell the truth, shake people up, shock them into thinking slightly different. So I was looking at movies like "Sweet Sweetback's Badass Song" by Melvin Van Peebles, "The Battle Of Algiers" by Gillo Pontecorvo, "Spook Who Sat By The Door" by Ivan Dixon,

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

Richard Kern's movies, "Romper Stomper" by Geoffrey Wright... stuff like that. But I hafta admit that I was also obsessed with "Natural Born Killers."

**VJ:** So it might have been more or less of an art piece.

**MP:** Yeah it started as an art piece and by some bizarre coincidence it turned into a movie.

**VJ:** "Threat" is a feature length film, though. Most people would have settled for video?

**MP:** I think video is great for certain projects, but it's not a replacement for film... at least not yet. It's more ephemeral than film. When you look at something shot on video, you know instantly what video format it was shot on and when that format was in general use. Film is always film. We knew we would have to suffer and struggle for a long time to make "Threat" on film, but no matter how long it took to make it, that film would stand the test of time, for better or for worse. Also, we had a very specific aesthetic in mind for Threat: dreamlike black & white daytime and color-drenched nights with the kinds of saturated reds and blues you'd see in a comic book. It works great with film, but if you do it with video it would get psychedelic and then the story and performances would suffer.

**VJ:** So when you and your partner Katie Nisa started out, how did the two of you think you would actually shoot, edit, or even afford the project?

**MP:** We had no clue. Once we made the decision to actually make the movie ourselves, we knew we wouldn't stop until we figured everything out the hard way. Katie knew a crazy film student named Benjamin Brancato who had shot over 20 short films in 3 years. We brought him on as Cinematographer, but he was just a junior in undergrad film! I got an internship at a film co-op called Film/Video Arts. I would clean up after classes and help in the equipment vault and in exchange we got to use the equipment when it wasn't in use. We hung up flyers for casting sessions that we held at venues after hardcore shows. I used to write for this zine "Under The Volcano" and I ended one of my articles by asking people to come out and PA on my movie and that's how we started building the crew. Kids came to the set to volunteer and we all figured it out together.

**VJ:** The score and soundtrack of "Threat" is possibly as vivid as the movie itself. At times it seems to provide a narrative of its own. How did a German industrial band like Atari Teenage Riot make its way into a movie about hardcore kids in New York?

**MP:** By playing at CBGBs! I always loved Atari Teenage Riot and while working on the movie I thought that would be the perfect music. It was a total fantasy at the time, I never thought it would happen. When we were cutting the first trailers for the movie, we used Atari tracks without permission. When they played at CBs, I went backstage after the show and gave Alec Empire a copy of the trailer. He loved it and not only did he agree to let us use Atari tracks, but he gave us carte blanche to the entire Digital Hardcore catalog. Over the years he contributed more and more, eventually doing new music for the soundtrack and composing an entire alternate-score for the DVD. We were really blessed by his involvement.

**VJ:** Also what is up with the two soundtracks? What is this "Judgment Night?"

**MP:** Yes exactly. Look, "Threat" is a mash-up of a movie. When people came to the set, they didn't know what to make of us. There were hardcore kids and hip hop kids, crusty punks and goths, hippies and straight-edge kids, film geeks and industrial kids. Mashing up our subcultures is what it became about. So when it came time to make a soundtrack, we didn't know what kind of music to focus on. At its root, "Threat" is most strongly influenced by hardcore, but we wanted to change it up a bit so we had industrial and breakcore artists mash-up the hardcore tracks. The "Judgment Night" soundtrack was definitely the model, it was one of the best soundtracks ever and it

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

totally opened kids up to a style of music they were probably ignoring at the time. The fact that we could get Killswitch Engage and Eighteen Visions on an album with Gorilla Biscuits and Minor Threat and then add Alec Empire and Enduser and EDGEY and Otto Von Schirach and Schizoid into the mix, it's the greatest kind of clusterfuck you can imagine.

**VJ:** So you had the film in the can, a trailer, and a score... how did it make it onto the screen? I read that you took the nearly finished film to Park City, Utah for the Sundance Film Festival. And what was DiY-Fest?

**MP:** The story of us going to Sundance is just the perfect example of how we had no idea what the fuck we were doing, and how our own ridiculous ignorance of the film world turned out to be our greatest asset. Apparently your film has to be accepted by Sundance in order for it to play there. Who knew? We thought it was more of an indie film party, just roll up and show your movie and if people like it then they get the word out. So as soon as we finished a rough cut, we hit the road with it and planned a tour to the Sundance Film Festival in Utah. We piled fifteen kids into a van and played "Threat" in bars and clubs and skateparks along the way. Keep in mind, the movie wasn't even really done. It sounded like shit, the colors were all fucked up, and we had title cards inserted for scenes we hadn't shot yet. It was ridiculous. So we finally got to Sundance and it turned out that it's more of a Hollywood junket type thing full of movie stars and coke parties. But we noticed a Doc Martens shoe store across the street from the big, flagship Sundance movie theater, and we talked the owners into letting us turn it into a movie theater of our own for two nights. We went to Wal-Mart and used their 30-day no-questions-asked return policy to get a truckload of TVs, and we built this big multi-screen installation in the shoe store. Instead of promoting it to the Hollywood suits at Sundance, we drove out to Salt Lake and promoted it to the kids and we wound up selling out all four shows. We saw right there that we didn't need to jump through Hollywood hoops to reach our audience, so we took the movie on tour across the US and then we got invited to the Raindance Film Festival in London and we got to tour through Europe. After each screening, Katie and I would run a Do-It-Yourself filmmaking workshop, basically explaining how we made "Threat." That developed into its own festival called DiY-Fest, where indie artists would explain how they do what they do. We managed to get together tons of people from all different scenes, Jim Jarmusch, Ani DiFranco, Jello Biafra, Lloyd Kaufman from Troma, it was a blast.

**VJ:** So how did "Threat" finally get finished?

**MP:** While on tour we met a commercial editor who loved the movie, and he helped us finally finish all the really expensive and technical post-production on "Threat." By then we'd created enough of a stir around Hollywood that there were a bunch of offers to buy the movie, but we figured we never got anywhere by doing it the easy way. So we held out for a deal that would enable us to keep making movies, as crazy and angry and hardcore as we want, and never have to sell it to Hollywood suits just to get it out to the kids. So we built our own little micro-studio, signed an output deal that gives us total control, and now we're hard at work making more movies.

## **ENTERTAINMENT TODAY (Feature)**

JUST A MINOR *THREAT*: New York Punks Attack Hollywood  
by Ryan Orvis

Executed on a shoestring budget by a cast and crew of teenagers and twenty-somethings, *Threat* is a brutal yet fascinating glimpse at life on the streets of New York. The plot describes several young characters from different social, racial, and economic backgrounds whose lives become intertwined until tragedy strikes (think

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

Kids meets Do the Right Thing, with a touch of The Warriors thrown in for good measure). The action mainly takes place in the insular world of straight-edge counterculture, an offshoot of hardcore punk where the participants adopt a dogmatic anti-alcohol and drug lifestyle. The film attempts to illustrate what happens when a group of straight-edge fanatics clash with a decidedly more party-friendly group of hip-hop kids (hint: it ain't pretty).

Although some of the characters' motives may be hard to follow for anyone who isn't familiar with these subcultures, Threat remains a personal and surprisingly well-crafted debut. Its complex layers invite multiple viewings; and through a combination of its uniqueness and the cultural elements it exposes, it has the potential to achieve cult movie status in years to come.

While the action of Threat is compelling, an equally intriguing story lies in the creation of the film itself.

Director/writer/producers Matt Pizzolo and Katie Nisa completed the script while attending a dramatic writing program at NYU. They weren't film students, and initially began shopping it around to studios as they were taught to do. Surprisingly, they received offers right away. But it soon became evident that the film, based loosely on the lives of their friends and other young people living in the city, was too abrasive for mainstream consumption. Rewrites were insisted upon, but they felt too strongly about the material to change anything. "The basic message we got was that Hollywood wasn't ready for an HIV-positive 16 year-old girl," explains Pizzolo, in reference to one of Threat's more memorable characters. Without a second thought, the pair decided to make the film themselves. They formed a production company called King's Mob, which would later develop into an underground militia of angry (yet motivated) kids.

Initially they invited the ridicule of more experienced peers who felt that a feature film couldn't be made in New York without a budget, crew, or shooting permits. Yet the pair were determined to do the film--their way. "To be honest," laughs Pizzolo, "A lot of it was produced out of spite." The problem of equipment rentals was solved when Pizzolo secured an internship at a film co-op, who let him use the gear for free at night. Casting was another issue.

After placing an ad in a local paper, the pair was contacted by hundreds of actors desperate for any kind of work available, despite the fact that the script called for people with a background in youth-oriented counterculture. "We were getting headshots from 40 year-old women with post-it notes like, 'Could be a Goth?'" recalls Nisa. "We're just a bunch of douchebags, and we've got people offering to shave their heads into a Mohawk," adds Pizzolo. They began holding auditions after punk and hip-hop shows, in an effort to find people who looked and acted the part in real life. Some actors were chosen off the street. Several characters ended up being played by the people they were based upon, but unlike most low-budget films starring the director's girlfriend, the makers of Threat made sure all the casting choices were right. Everyone had to audition, including Nisa, who plays the role of a woman dealing with constant sexual harassment by a neighbor.

Much of the film's visual sophistication can be credited to Benjamin Brancato, a talented cinematographer who was still a student at the time. His skills were put to the test when he found himself transformed into a human dolly on more than one occasion. "We were using old cameras, so the only way we could make the film visually compelling was to put Ben's life in danger over and over again," explains Pizzolo. Thus Brancato was tied to the hood of a car, lashed to the side of a van, and lowered from a fire escape for many of Threat's action shots.

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

This sense of adventure led the crew to plan an illegal shoot atop the building where the film co-op was located. "It was gorgeous. Absolutely illegal to shoot there," recalls Pizzolo. "We could not possibly get permission from anywhere. The building was 15 stories up, a complete death trap." Still, the gang monitored the building to find out when it emptied out at night, scored a copy of the keys, and brought 100 people (95% unaware that they were breaking the law) and a generator up for a clandestine shoot. The only roof access was through a narrow chute, so the generator had to stay below with a hose connecting it. They managed to get all the equipment set up and working, when disaster struck.

"Someone was climbing down the ladder in between shots, and his foot hit the hose and knocked it off. I jumped down in time to see one tiny puff of smoke escape before I could close it." The fire alarm went off, and the crew frantically rushed to clear the area. Equipment was stashed in a closet while the cast & crew hid around the side of the building. Nisa managed to sweet-talk the fire department, posing as an employee who was working late and had stepped out for a cigarette. As soon as the fire trucks left they set the equipment back up and started shooting again.

A chance meeting with Alec Empire of Atari Teenage Riot led to a licensing deal with the Digital Hardcore label, who granted the filmmakers access to their entire catalog for use on the soundtrack. Empire also greatly helped to generate a buzz for the film, talking it up in interviews and spreading the word online.

Eventually the work print of Threat was completed, and its creators realized they needed to test it before an audience. Drawing from their experiences hanging out with punk bands, they decided to take it on tour. "It was an emotional, visceral thing," recalls Nisa. "We felt like a band with their first demo...we wanted a reaction." Sundance was two weeks away, and although the film had not been submitted, it seemed like the logical place to go. They booked screenings from New York to Utah and back. 15 kids piled into the van, and the tour was underway.

Upon arriving in Park City, the King's Mob found a shoe store conveniently located across the street from the nexus of the festival. The store's manager agreed to host a screening, and several TV's were hastily purchased from a nearby Wal-Mart in blatant misuse of their 30-days "no questions asked" return policy. Word of the screening had already filtered through the punk/snowboarder subculture of Utah by the time the Mob arrived back at the store to set up. A line was forming out front, comprised of savvy kids as well as curious festival-goers. Apparently none other than Roger Ebert was turned away at the door for refusing to pay. "When you've got kids driving up from Salt Lake City and paying, no one gets in for free," explains Pizzolo.

A wall of televisions was erected with military-style efficiency, crewmembers tossing cords over the heads of unsuspecting bystanders as they went. Although largely ignored by industry types, the film was screened to a packed house comprised mainly of its core audience: teenagers and twenty-somethings.

The filmmakers soon found themselves being flown out to London to show the film at the Raindance festival, followed by a tour of Europe. Upon returning to the States they were invited to go on the Warped Tour, which resulted in a fan of Threat offering the use of his post-production facility in L.A. to re-cut the film. "We were suddenly encountering these amazing, talented, generous people," recalls Nisa.

Having both lost their jobs in New York while they were filming, Pizzolo and Nisa decided to move out to L.A. "We followed our instincts, and what we learned was that we love making films," says Nisa. "We operated for so long outside of the industry, it was time to come here and expose ourselves to it."

## **THREAT: PRESS (cont.)**

The pair took a trailer for the film to the Coachella music festival, where they struck up a theatrical distribution deal with HIQI Media. For the DVD release, they set up their own label, Halo 8, which will be distributed by Sony-BMG. This arrangement allows them to maintain creative control while enjoying the distribution and advertising power afforded by a large corporation. The label will also handle the release of two different soundtracks: one featuring music from the film, and one with remixes of hardcore songs that inspired the film.

"We're out here to build King's Mob as a company that can produce dangerous and thought-provoking media," says Pizzolo. "We're not here to make commercials." Amen to that.

### **FILM THREAT (Review)**

THREAT

by T.W. Anderson

Threat is ostensibly the tale of 2 very different protagonists who have developed a mutual respect and friendship through their workplace interactions. Jim (Carlos Puga) is a homeless straightedge punk whose caustic worldview defines the very quintessence of the disaffected. In stark contrast to Jim is Fred (Keith Middleton) an intellectually turned on artist who sees society's ills and strives to affect what changes he can. Over the course of one fateful night this unlikely duo will find out that the myths are true, the stakes are high, and the end is unavoidable.

This film works on every conceivable level; it holds court not only as a historical document of time and place, but also as a window into the soul of American adolescence. The message in the film is clear and the final frames echo with a kind of haunting immediacy that forces the audience to reevaluate the last 20 minutes of film, if not the last 20 years of their lives. The same kind of tragic supposition that makes Threat so important is evident every night of the week, at 6 and 11.

The crew behind Threat is as bright and urgent as the film they made. Threat was a labor of love for a cast and crew of over 200, lead by Writer/Director Matt Pizzolo and Writer/Producer Katie Nisa. Three years in the making, shot on the fly for no money, on borrowed equipment, and stolen streetscapes. The film is a revelation partly because of the subject matter, partly because of the DiY ethic but most importantly because the performances ring so true. The cast of mostly non-professional actors extract remarkable performances that frighten and stir the audience throughout this epic battle of cinematic creativity.

To really define the significance of Threat, one must recognize and accept that filmmaking is an art form and that art, like life must reflect civilization. If that civilization is trapped in a philosophy of internal strife, art, music, film and literature should reflect that dissension. Great Art should ask the truly difficult questions and not provide stock answers. Great art should assail the status quo, and that is what Pizzolo and Nisa's film has skillfully accomplished. It refuses to provide answers, if dares to avoid the blame game. The residents of this film are besieged by their own lives, they have to eat, work, sleep and shit so they don't have the time to dissect the reasons they exist. In the final act, a simple argument of mistaken issue forces the narrative into a bloodbath of felled futures. This catastrophic dénouement is as inevitable as Greek tragedy. In effect the characters never had a chance. The world sent them out to do battle and the world bled with them. [ 4.5 out of 5 ]