

Film falls under cult's spell

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Toronto Sun

If you need more proof that Ellen Page is going to be a superstar, take in Alison Murray's debut feature film, *Mouth To Mouth*. Between TV's *ReGenesis* and next year's *X-Men 3*, this film could be your last chance to see the superb Canadian actress in the sort of smallish vehicle you'll want to bring up one day at cocktail parties. Won't you.

Mouth To Mouth is a well-made movie without quite enough story to it. In this tale of disaffected youth and the cult they join, Page stars as Sherry, a kid wandering around Europe on her own. In Berlin, a good-looking guy talks her into joining S.P.A.R.K. (Street People Armed with Radical Knowledge), a group of travellers who seem happy and capable of helping others, especially homeless or drug-addled kids.

Actually, most S.P.A.R.K. members are homeless and drug-addled kids themselves.

Sherry goes along with the group. Their travels take them eventually to Portugal, and she joins in for the grape harvest and slowly becomes a full-on member of S.P.A.R.K. The group leader (Eric Thal) is just the sort of psycho-babble spouting, hail-fellow, authority figure bound to be revealed as a bully, a coward and a sexual predator; he is, too.

Not too far into the narrative there's a tragedy. The group is directed to flee before any authorities show up, a sure hint of

worse events to come.

The S.P.A.R.K. road trip involves a drug-fueled music festival, where it turns out that Sherry's young mother (played by Natasha Wightman) is handing out 'Lost' posters and looking for her child. Their reunion is less than cheery, however, when mom also falls under the spell of S.P.A.R.K. and joins the group.

After several increasingly ugly episodes involving some form of brutality or another, Sherry at last appears capable of saving herself from her saviours at S.P.A.R.K.

Mouth To Mouth is said to have been inspired by writer/director/choreographer Alison Murray's own experiences in a cult in the late '80s.

Maybe that's why S.P.A.R.K. is the filmmaker's most enduring creation — from the group's little "Spark it up" cheer to their desperate need to be loved, accepted and returned to a happier go at childhood, the cult itself

becomes the most important character in the film. One doubts this is what Murray intended, but never mind.

Redemption notwithstanding, *Mouth To Mouth*

is often tough to look at and populated by characters it's difficult to care about. Mind you, it's just the sort of intense, cautionary outing you might want to show to a teenager; too bad you

have to be 19 or older (there's a bar on the premises) to get into the Camera Theatre.

BOTTOM LINE

The cult becomes the most

important character in this otherwise well-made Canadian film about a charismatic group leader and his followers. Catch star Ellen Page so you can say you knew her when.

★★★½

Mouth To Mouth

1 hour, 41 minutes

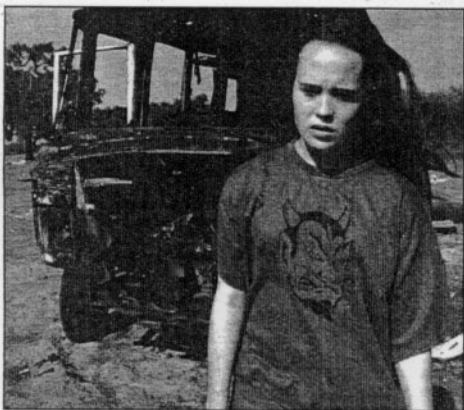
Starring: Ellen Page, Eric Thal,

Maxwell McCabe Lokos

Director: Alison Murray

Rated: 19+ (for Camera Theatre)

PLOT: A teenager on her own joins a cult-like group that ostensibly protects street kids. They travel across Europe until the young girl realizes she has traded one type of slavery for another.



Ellen Page stars as a woman caught by a cult in *Mouth To Mouth*.