

Tarnished

Films on films paint grim picture

By ANDREA MEYER

Being a Hollywood big shot is not all it's cracked up to be.

That's the message from a spate of new movies in which filmmakers turn their cameras on filmmaking itself, showing directors and actors being blindsided by some of the same problems we all face: insecurity, stress and a remarkable amount of infidelity.

They've invited audiences behind the silver screen to glimpse an industry where the beautiful people often have ugly personal lives.

In his new documentary about legendary producer Robert Evans, director Brett Morgen spotlights the romantic woes and career troubles of familiar Hollywood players from such classics as "The Godfather," "Love Story" and "Chinatown."

"The Kid Stays in the Picture," narrated by Evans, suggests that the pressures on industry power brokers can wreak havoc in their lives.

"Bob takes us behind the curtain," said Morgen. "You get to see great characters, like Mia Farrow and Francis Coppola and Roman Polanski and Jack Nicholson, in a very personal and intimate manner."

The film doesn't spare Evans, who lost his starlet wife, Ali McGraw, to legendary screen hunk Steve McQueen — because, it claims, Evans was too involved with work.

"Bob became obsessed with 'The Godfather,' instead of being



Vincent Kessler/Reuters

Obsessing over work cost Robert Evans, the subject of "The Kid Stays in the Picture," his marriage to Ali McGraw.

there with Ali," said Morgen. "He was off doing his own thing, and was blind to the fact that he was reneging on his one promise, which was to never leave her."

"And she warned him. She said, 'Don't leave me, not for a week, not for two weeks.' And Bob's like, 'I promise you, baby. I won't.'"

Morgen says that outsiders have no idea how tough it is to work in the biz.

"This is not a 9-to-5, five-day-a-week job. It is a seven-day-a-week, 18-hour-a-day job," Morgen said. "To succeed in this business, you have to be 100 percent committed, so it's difficult to sustain a marriage."

More evidence? Evans con-

vinced a young Mia Farrow to finish shooting "Rosemary's Baby" instead of starring in a Frank Sinatra movie — a decision that jump-started her career, but ended her marriage to the blue-eyed crooner.

It also sparked a bitter box-office competition between the two.

"Obviously, we have the 'E! True Hollywood Stories' and all those sort of biography shows," said Morgen, "but I think this [explores] a side you don't get in those other shows."

French writer/director Yvan Attal's romantic comedy, "My Wife Is an Actress" (opening Wednesday), also depicts the threats that the film business can pose to relationships.

Attal plays a sportswriter — named Yvan — married to an actress named Charlotte, played by his real-life wife, Charlotte Gainsbourg. Yvan becomes so paranoid about the time his wife spends with her leading man that he ends up pushing her away, ultimately making his twisted, jealous fantasies a reality.

Attal said his script was fueled by his own experience, both as an actor and as the husband of an actress.

"You spend your day naked in bed with another actress, and then you come home to your wife and children and pretend you had a banal day," he said.

He said the vulnerability provoked by a film set can run even deeper.

"I don't care that Charlotte kisses actors in films. It's that you're

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Phaedra Cinema

not with your wife during the period of a shoot. A movie is very intense. You work day and night. Something can happen that hurts you, and who's the closest person to you at that moment? The director, the other actors. You put your real life away."

Job demands aren't the only pressures affecting the lives of movie people. Nicole Holofcener's "Lovely and Amazing," in theaters now, is about a family of four L.A. women, each warped by societal pressure to look and act according to impossible ideals.

Jane (Brenda Blethyn) undergoes liposuction, while her skinny actress daughter, Elizabeth (Emily Mortimer), obsesses about her nonexistent arm flab.

In one surreal scene, Elizabeth asks a handsome actor she's sleeping with to point out all her bodily imperfections.

Holofcener, who wrote and directed the film, thinks these characters are representative of a certain kind of woman on the periphery of the film industry —



Bob Marshall

"my friends, my family, my sick little group of friends who share common problems and obsessions."

"Everybody's so skinny here, or striving to be, and the film industry is so pervasive, and struggling actresses [are all] trying not to eat," she said. "Even Marilyn Monroe. Can you imagine if she

for Emily's character came from my own experience being photographed as a director, and my own issues with that. [I was] trying not to be bullied by stylists, and to figure out what I looked like and how I wanted to be represented."

Steven Soderbergh's new film, "Full Frontal" (in theaters Aug. 2)



Alexia Pflaum/Gale Films

Looking behind the scenes (clockwise from far left): Charles Berling, Charlotte Gainsbourg and Yvan Attal in "My Wife Is an Actress"; Jake Gyllenhaal and Catherine Keener in "Lovely and Amazing"; and Blair Underwood and Julia Roberts in "Full Frontal."

had that body now? She'd be the maid on some sitcom."

Holofcener said Hollywood's body obsession doesn't just apply to actors.

"A lot of the stuff I made up

also looks at the dysfunctional lives of filmmakers, billing itself as "a movie about movies for people who love movies."

Actress Catherine Keener — who also stars in "Lovely and Amazing" — plays Lee, an L.A. executive who is married to a screenwriter and having an affair with an actor in his film.

"It's about losing control," said Keener. "Everyone's screwing everyone. Everyone's getting massages. But even though it seems abysmal, there is hope. I think my character realizes that when it seems like it's just gone, there still is a little glimmer where things could turn around."

Keener may be the poster girl for this genre — she will also be appearing in a third movie-indus-

try film, "Simone," due out in August. That movie stars Al Pacino as a disillusioned director who creates a virtual actress to star in his film after his lead actress walks off the set.

His fictional starlet then becomes an overnight sensation.

Keener, who is happily married to fellow actor Dermot Mulroney, said show business can wreck your life if you're not careful.

"I think it can make you feel more threatened and insecure if you're prone to it. You're in a business of rampant insecurity. It's kind of ripe for a lot of disasters, personally."

"I guess that's why people are so fascinated," mused Holofcener. "People who have so much are just as unhappy as the rest of us."