

walton's mountain

Rough Cut's managing editor and film critic Rob Walton

By Connie Mulqueen

IN THE GROOVE

It's the Thursday morning before Freaknik, and Rob Walton, clad in a v-neck ribbed sweater and sporting a perfectly-trimmed goatee, is rushing to get through his weekly 10-minute "Mark it on your Calendar" segment for the 99X morning show. "Instead of me, like, going camping or going to Miami, I'm gonna stay in town this weekend and make a killing," Walton fires rapidly into the microphone, his upper body arched forward as he concentrates. He's got to squeeze a lot in between the clever interruptions and unbridled guffaws of his paid-to-be obnoxious co-hosts, Leslie Fram, Jimmy Baron, and Barnes. "Here's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna set up a booth selling Michael Bolton CDs and cassettes in Piedmont Park and just rake it in."

Walton, *Creative Loafing's* former film editor and now managing editor for Turner Network Television's daily online film magazine *Rough Cut*, compiles a list of the most obscure cultural events in Atlanta and presents them "with an attitude" on the radio segment and in a column for the alternative weekly *Poets, Artists and Madmen*.

A graduate of Penn State University's School of Film and Video, Walton started out wanting to produce films but discovered in college that a career as a film critic would be more affordable. An Atlanta native and graduate of Marist Academy, he chose to move back to Atlanta because he wanted to live where he could make an impact.

And he has. During his nine years at *Creative Loafing*, not only did he review major film releases and write feature profiles of key Hollywood players, but he also worked hard during the independent film revolution of the mid-1990s to shift the publication's focus from mainstream to independent films. "Rob Walton is certainly one of the most important people for getting the word out for any unusual or alternative films in Atlanta," claims Michelle Forren, executive director of the Peachtree International Film Society, which organizes year-round screenings of alternative feature length and international films. And *Playboy* magazine's online editor Roger Brown, who for eight years filled many editorial positions alongside Walton, calls him Atlanta's "movie maven." "His personality really galvanizes events when he appears, so he's the kind of guy you always want to be at your party," Brown says.

Walton joined *Rough Cut*, where he manages business and editorial development, last fall. He also serves as a marketing liaison between the site and the weekly television show of the same name, which broadcasts in Los Angeles. On the side, the critic has enjoyed working as a production assistant in a handful of films shot in the Atlanta area, including the upcoming Patrick Swayze action thriller *Black*

"Our film society
wouldn't be here
if it were not for Rob.
He lets people know
there's stuff out there
besides movies like
Titanic." —Michelle Forren,
executive director of the Peachtree
International Film Society



Dog and the 1997 Walt Disney film *Flash*. But it is clearly his ubiquitous radio rhetoric that provides the most grist for the local media mill.

Wrapping up his segment at the morning show, the sultan of cinema mentions this year's spring Renaissance Festival south of the airport, which he calls "the largest yearly gathering of people in the woods of Fairburn without a cross burning." He then advises listeners to read *Rough Cut's* exclusive interview with actress Jennifer Aniston whose most recent film, *The Object of My Affection*, was given a favorable review by Walton.

"Are you being easier on the movie because you're having it on your page?" asks Barnes.

"No!" Walton exclaims dramatically.

"I'm just asking," Barnes says.

"No!" Walton says again.

"Just asking," Barnes says again.

"Hey, we don't pimp," Walton says, a smug tone in his voice.

"No pimping?" Barnes sounds disappointed. "That's where we differ."

Such ribald back-and-forth antics are typical of Walton and his band of devil's-advocates-without-a-cause. "Rob does a great job," says sarcastic co-host Baron. "Part of our audience is completely without culture, and Barnes and I like to think we represent that part. Rob's always got this culturally elite stuff, and it gives us, Barnes and me, a chance to put our cultural ignorance on display." Indeed, the seemingly insolent commentary is integral to the team's on-air brand of comradery. "It upsets my mother terribly because she thinks they're being mean," laments Walton. "For me, it just gives me a chance to be snappish back. The day I would get upset is when they listen to everything I have to say. When they don't interrupt, it makes me feel like I'm out there by myself." ☼