

the austin CHRONICLE

I Don't Know Jack (2001)

D: Chris Leavens; with. (Not Rated, 91:02 min.) Chances are that going into I Don't Know Jack, you probably don't, in fact, know Jack. And it's likely that learning that cult-film icon Jack Nance was Henry Spencer in David Lynch's *Eraserhead*, or *Twin Peaks*, Pete Martell, still might not prime you for the leap aboard 25-year-old, first-time filmmaker Chris Leavens, vehicle for acquainting you with the character actor's life and brutal death at age 53: a seemingly endless series of *This Is Your (Posthumous) Life* testimonials by family, ex-wives, and adoring fans (including Lynch and Dennis Hopper). But stay with it. Sure, it can feel like being at the funeral of someone you didn't know. But at some point, the fascination, bemusement, and attachment that all these talking heads felt for the tragically alcoholic Nance reaches something akin to critical mass, at which point one begins to feel like maybe you did know Jack or, at least, would have liked to. And hey, didn't you always wonder about the back story of the guy who launched the *Twin Peaks* series with the discovery of Laura Palmer's body and the memorable "She's dead, wrapped in plastic" line? The film that Leavens made on something of a dare while at his first post-college film job at executive producer Richard Green's Next Step Studios in L.A took 1 1/2 years to put together. It bears the "David Lynch Presents" imprimatur and screened at Cannes Market last May. Not bad for someone new to the business.

Though Nance had lots of juicy bit parts in many films and Leavens, documentary is leavened with footage of these the filmmaker regrets that he couldn't have included more. "Unfortunately, many of these parts were so small that they don't show well as clips," he said, adding that Nance had a significant career on the stage as well. Beyond this limitation, the project went enviably smoothly, until the "Lynchian" complication. Just as the Leavens group had completed a rough cut of the film, it and a box containing more than 60 tapes of footage were stolen and ransom notes sent, apparently by someone unhappy with the content of one of the interviews. Luckily, despite the fact that the cops laughed when Leavens reported the theft the rough cut was recovered, though the other tapes are still missing. "This is something they don't teach you about in film school," laughs Leavens. "Up to that point, we'd had none of the problems they teach you to anticipate then we had the biggest problem you can have. I can laugh about it now but at the time, I didn't sleep for two months."

Anne S. Lewis, Filmmakers

Chris Leaven and Richard Green will be present following the screening for a Q.

Special thanks to the Austin Film Society
TEXAS DOCUMENTARY TOUR for they're
Screening of **I don't know JACK!**



Visit www.jacknance.com



The Texas Documentary Tour is co-sponsored by the Austin Film Society, the UT Department of RTF, The Austin Chronicle, KLRU-TV, Hotel San José, and SXSW Film. @Alamo Drafthouse Downtown (409 Colorado): Wednesday (2/13), 7-9:30pm, \$6 admission/\$4 AFS and KLRU members, and students (AFS members can purchase advance tickets online at... www.austinfilm.org/jack until noon, Tue (2/12).