

## Tapeheads ★★

---

**Year of Release:** 1988

Review by Randy Parker

**Country:** USA

**Verdict:** Skip It

---

This definitely is not *Spinal Tap*! I am referring to the movie *Tapeheads*, which tries to do for music videos what *This Is Spinal Tap* did for heavy metal: that is, provide a biting satire of the industry. The movie stars John Cusack and Tim Robbins as two good-for-nothing security guards, who after losing their jobs, head for L.A. to try their hand at making rock videos. They call themselves the "Video Aces" and turn a run-down loft in a seedy area of town into a production studio. *Tapeheads* traces Robbins and Cusack's improbable rise to fame.

Despite its promising premise, *Tapeheads* falls far short of reaching the brilliant level of parody that Rob Reiner achieved in *Spinal Tap*. Bill Fishman, who directed *Tapeheads*, is a respected rock video director best known for his work with the Ramones, Suicidal Tendencies, and George Clinton. However, *Tapeheads* is Fishman's first feature film, and the movie reflects his lack of experience. Under Fishman's direction, *Tapeheads* often loses focus and coherence just when the satire is building momentum. Several other faults mar the movie as well, including a weak script and poor acting.

Cusack, who was exceptional as Buck Weaver in *Eight Men Out*, is atypically mediocre and extremely disappointing in *Tapeheads*. His performance as an aggressive scam artist feels forced; Cusack's likable demeanor is not well suited to his unsympathetic role. As Cusack's meek video-whiz sidekick, Robbins (*Bull Durham*) is adequate. His character is more interesting and likable than Cusack's, but Cusack overshadows him in the film.

The movie is also plagued by a stupid and unnecessary subplot about a presidential candidate, a videocassette of him engaging in kinky sex, and blackmail. *Tapeheads* is desperately in need of more focus, stronger protagonists, and above all a director, like Reiner, behind the camera who can maintain a subtle yet pointed satirical tone.

Despite its numerous shortcomings, *Tapeheads* is not without its merits. The movie has an off-beat, quirky sense of humor and contains several inventive scenes that succeed in humorously satirizing the music video industry. For example, the Video Aces film a hysterically funny commercial in which the owner of a chicken and waffle fast food restaurant struts around in gold chains and does a Run DMC-style rap. He pays the Aces for their services in buckets ... of chicken that is.

*Tapeheads* does a good job of mocking everything from rock videos to TV newscasts to commercials for presidential candidates; unfortunately, these biting parodies of television are few and far between. The movie is full of great cameos including Weird Al Yankovic, Ted Nugent, Bobcat Goldthwait, Mike Nesmith, Martha Quinn, and Lyle Alzado. The eccentric soundtrack is also a lot of fun; it features actual bands like Devo and Fishbone and fictitious ones like the Blender Children and a '60s soul duo called the Swanky Modes. However, in the balance—despite these few bright spots—*Tapeheads* has just too many shortcomings for me to recommend it; save your money and see *Spinal Tap* again instead.