

NOW PLAYING

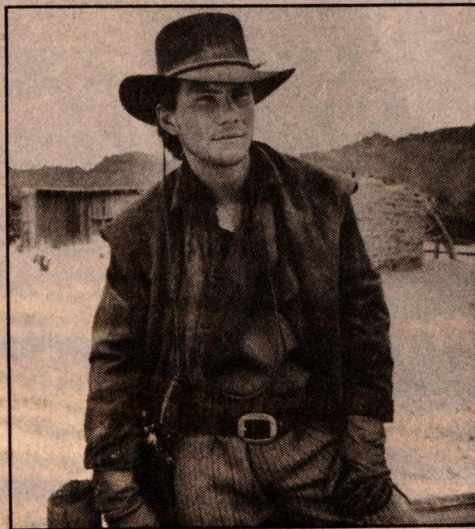
★ ★Pump up the Volume Oaks 6 East

There's something seductive about radio, about the way a speaker's voice can move through the air and slip into someone's mind. There's also something ironic about it: The deejay is addressing a huge crowd of listeners, but he's essentially alone in a sound booth talking to himself.

Mark Hunter (Christian Slater) likes that anonymity. He's a lonely high school student whose once-hip parents have given up their radical ways and joined the Establishment. Pop is a school commissioner, for heaven's sake. What could be more embarrassing than that?

All that remains of their ideals are a few old albums. Mark plays some of them on a make-shift pirate radio station he sets up in the basement. Every night at 10 p.m. (the dead of night for teenagers), he comes on the air playing his signature tune "Everybody Knows" by Leonard Cohen.

That song's despondency ("Everybody knows the fight was fixed/ The poor stay poor; the rich get rich/ That's how it goes/Everybody knows.") mirrors the



BEN GLASS

Christian Slater trades his Old West garb for a microphone in Pump up the Volume.

despair that Mark feels. Calling himself Hard Harry, he rants and raves about the ills of the world and how kids need to break out of their lethargy and fight back.

To Mark's great surprise, the people in his high school actually pay atten-

tion. Students start rebelling in small but significant ways. Teachers are shocked by Hard Harry's foul language and aggressive posturing, and *everyone* wants to know the identity of this mysterious deejay.

Events quickly spin out of control. The harmless pranks of the teenagers escalate into all-out vandalism and an evil principal starts cracking down indiscriminately on any "troublemakers" she can find. When the media picks up the story, the police and the Federal Communications Commission are called in to track down the illegal transmissions. Mark is suddenly the leader of something much more serious than he ever intended. He then has to choose between the allure of rebellion and playing it safe.

The script by director Allan Moyle is a fine one. Mark's speeches on the radio are filled with genuine emotion. But they also sound like Mark is putting his own little spin on someone else's ideas — which is exactly what teenagers talk like. He also throws in a lot of sophomoric humor, such as pretending to masturbate on the air.

Later, when the radio show turns into

an impromptu counseling service, Moyle wisely avoids turning Mark into a natural at providing advice. One student calls in threatening suicide and Mark fumbles around for the right tactic until the kid hangs up in frustration. Another teenager — who is gay — calls in upset because a classmate led him on, only to join in with some friends making fun of the guy. Mark is sympathetic, but he's also clearly in over his head when dealing with these problems.

It's too bad the script wasn't as realistic with the rest of the movie. *Pump up the Volume* stumbles badly by turning almost every adult into a buffoon or baddie.

The normal life of a teenager is difficult enough. But Moyle undercuts that message by creating paper tigers like the principal who ruthlessly expels any student that doesn't measure up. The result is entertaining enough, especially the Slater's performance. But if Moyle had treated the real concerns of kids more believably, he would have created a much better movie.

BY MICHAEL GILTZ