

Film Festival - Take Two

"Around here, the kids won't let me do nothin' with 'em."
- Sam, an epileptic

Sam is a short film about unusual people, those who, because of Physical defects or unique diseases, are unable to participate in the games Americans play. Nice symbolism. Sam runs out of the sunset into the morning, while we listen to his reverie. We follow his training period and see his final victory as a distance runner in a track meet. He's part of a special education program called Adaptive Physical Education. It's anti-standardization. No uniform calisthenics or other exercises designed to make all the people alike.

"In here, there's always something someone can't do, but there's always something else for them to do."

I enjoyed this film. As a boy, I went to a fascist high school where anyone who had a physical defect was ridiculed and called names.

"Whatsamatter you, chicken shit, scart a da wata?"

An epileptic in one of my classes was called "Fits" and there were a lot of people who wouldn't sit near him in English. He was a nice guy. I used to talk to him after class once in awhile. He was reading Dostoyevsky, and he told me the Russian novelist had been an epileptic like him. He had his pride. "You know, Clay," he said, "A lot of people won't even look at me when they pass me in the hall and I've been in the same schools with them since I was a kid. They think I'm weird, but I'm no different than anybody else. I just have mild seizures once in awhile."

I walked around in the lobby. Delancy Street caiered the affair. Dollar glasses of champagne. Thirty cent cups of coffee. Get those bucks! Sock it to those film freaks. Doug Wendt came in. He runs the midnight scene at Presidio on Saturday nights. One of the judges at the last Ann Arbor Film Festival. He told me the students booted a lot of experimental and abstract films. They wanted ham and nostalgia. Warm-ed over TV. A distinctly anti-psychedelic attitude. It's no different locally. I think that whole sixties audience has dispersed.

That evening we watched France, Inc. Gore and comedy in the future. A man reads a serious philosophical work which he has hidden inside the covers of a copy of the Fantastic Four. A cop reads Robert Crumb's Your Hytone Comics. A businessman studies the collected Buck Rogers. A woman is out to legalize all chemicals and a gang of ex Murder, Inc gangsters compete with her for the action. She's the dehumanized ad personality par excellence. Not a trace of feeling in anything she does. France, Inc. drove a lot of people out. I counted thirty walkouts. Beautiful. That something can still gross them out means there may be a glimmer of hope. What scenes did it? In one, a young tough handcuffs a businessman dope dealer to the wheel of his car in a garage.

He slices the dealer's left wrist with a switchblade or straight razor.

That bit of gore drove some people out.

But I thought I heard a few orgasms in the darkness as well. I know the pornography of violence has a cultivated group of devotees, because the films of Lady Divine (Pink Flamingos) always sell out and her audience never fails to cheer the onscreen murders.

France, Inc. is a step beyond 2001. The emotions are 1984, and a lot of the anti-ads are right out of the National Lampoon. In one scene, Walt Disney is defined as "the only American Prophet." In another, the ad people watch four TV monitors in order to determine which is most effective. On each one is a sex scene in a single color. Three people walked out on the rose-tinted blow job, one a young girl who looked a bit less than the ten-year-old limit for entry into the theater.

"Why do we have to leave, Mommy?"
"Shut up!"

I have to tell you about one more scene. In this one, a high level dope dealer (millionaire corporate executive) sits in his wheelchair at the bottom of a long staircase. He takes out a diamond ring and shows it to a woman who stands at the top of the stairs. "This is worth a lot of money," he says placing the ring on a sterling silver plate of shit located in front of the bottom step. The woman drops her one piece white gown and crawls down the stairs (slithers? A very snaky and erotic movement). At bottom, she seizes the ring with her teeth and looks up at her benefactor with gratitude.

At that precise moment, the

a table-top abortion goes unnoticed, lost in the shuffle.

There was a Movietone News retrospective one afternoon and a lot of it was booted, indicating a new sophistication in an audience which would once have accepted those loud, booming pronouncements about World events as gospel. Today, those newsreels are seen for what they were, propaganda. Do those viewers apply the same degree of skepticism to the news on television? One wonders.

The newsreels were used as shorts to open each program.

One was dated 1945. A plane crashed into the Empire State Building. Footage showed a gigantic hole in what was once the world's tallest building. Someone in the audience applauded. I'm not even going to speculate about

trough which is slanted so that the eggs roll down to a second trough for pick-up.

The second half of the film speculates about genetic engineering. If you think you'd enjoy watching elephants and rhinos and chimpanzees fucking, this is your cup of tea. At the press conference a woman asked script writer, Nick Noxon, if he became sexually excited at any time during the making of the film. "No," he said. We all turned around to look her over, but she was nonplussed.

From Rome, The Profiteer (or as it was on the film credit, The Saprophyte) showed strong influences of Fellini, Antonioni, De Sica, and Bergman. A tightly edited and intense study of the sexual awakening of a crippled boy. This

were shown, and some of them are joyful to watch. You can tell by the audience reaction which fantasies are doing it for them and when Steve McQueen is blasting those squad cars with his shotgun in The Getaway everybody is with him all the way.

Is there a more oppressive symbol than the squad car? Not for the Midwestern kids who watch McQueen and love him. They remember watching for squad cars in their rearview windows all their lives. Everytime they find a good parking place on a country road and start to get it on with a girl friend, there is the worry about the pig in the dark with his flashlight, and the money the kids have had to pay for speeding on empty midwestern highways replete with speed traps would finance one of Peck's movies.

He's loved by the drive-in audience because he never lets them down. Those who are harassed and oppressed all their lives and never get revenge are Peck's biggest fans because in his movies they always win. Oates may get it in the end of Bring Me The Head of Alfredo Garcia, but by that time he's been the avenging force that wiped out dozens of money-grubbing middle-men for whom the fulfillment of the contract was merely a bureaucratic matter.

When Peckinpah walked onstage, he was cheered and hissed. Who are those hissers? Who knows? Sam comes on like the ultimate male chauvinist and there are women who don't like that, but there are others that get off on it. "Why do you treat women as whores who like to be raped and pushed around?"

"I don't. I've experienced a few numbers along that way. I just try to tell the truth as I see it. If you don't like it, that's your problem."

Hiss. Violence in films? "There is no violence in films. There is violence in life. I'm concerned with violence because we're the most violent people in the world. I think we've got to look at it, to understand it before we can do anything about it."

Background. "I was born and raised in the United States Marine Corps. I got out and worked with Don Diegel. I didn't like the way Hollywood depicted death. I just try to do my own thing that's all. So I'm called the bad boy of Hollywood."

Politics. "I live in Mexico. I went there when Nixon was re-elected."

With the exception of the few women who hissed Peckinpah, the majority of that Saturday afternoon audience loved him. His film clips were applauded, he got a standing ovation when he walked onstage, and there were ten times as many photographers there to photograph him as had been present for Truman Capote.

A midnight showing of Steppenwolf was added. It's an unusual film, poetic like the 1927 novel by Hermann Hesse from which it was adapted by Peter Sprague. The main character is Harry Haller, the man who sees himself as a schizophrenic, the man who needs the comfort and security of the bourgeoisie, while seeking the kinds of intellectual satisfaction beyond their ken. He is the intellectual and he symbolizes the primitive aspect of himself as a wolf of the steppes. The film uses an animated sequence to demonstrate the relationship between Harry and the wolf. Paintings in the Magic Theatre sequence are by Mati Klarwein. Maximum image. Beautiful use of color. Minimum dialogue. One of those films designed for a stoned audience. Said Harry in the novel: "I like the contrast between my lonely, loveless, hunted, and thoroughly disordered existence and this middle-class family life."

"Ah, but it is hard to find this track of the divine in the midst of this life we lead, in this besotted humdrum age of spiritual blindness, with its architecture, its business, its politics, its men!" -- C.G.



police enter at the top of the stairs. It's a bust. They walk downstairs, arrest the dealer, and take him away, ignoring the woman who lies with her face in the plate of shit.

Welcome to the new wave of 1974 gang.

Once Upon A Time In The East is really two films intercut, but the technique works in a strange way. One plot concerns a woman who wins a million trading stamps. She hustles all of her friends and neighbors to come over to her small apartment to stick all of the stamps in the books so they can be traded in for radios and washing machines and other junk. In the process human greed is exposed. The women steal stamps and when the woman confronts them they push her out of the way and ransack her apartment.

The other major plot concerns a small night club which promotes business by encouraging competition among the local drag queens. We watch one queen prepare her best drag, Cleopatra, only to discover that all of the other contestants have deliberately done the same Cleopatra drag in order to put her down. While this is progressing, a woman is rehearsing a Country-Western act and when she finally comes onstage, her pink Dale Evans Cowgirl drag is seen to be a more outrageous parody of woman than those achieved by any of the boys in the chorus.

East is a Canadian film. It was written and directed by Andre Brassard. I found it an excellent portrayal of the present time where the emphasis on flash, image, trivial attitudes and public postures have tended to obscure all serious and meaningful experiences and relationships. As the women compete with their drags, the death of a young girl of

where his head was.

Birds Do It, Bees Do It is another of those biological films which extend the original range of Disney's Tru-Life Adventures. He always sentimentalized and excluded sexual behavior; well, The Hellstrom Chronicle pretty well did away with sentimentalism last year by showing nature to be pragmatic and indifferent to death; Birds is in the same vein with the focus on animal and insect sexuality. The macrophotography is excellent and the ten-day sequence in which the corpse of a dead rat is consumed by maggots is a classic. It passes on the screen in seconds, leaving nothing but the bones of the rat. "Nothing," says the narrator, "is wasted in nature."

The film is episodic, focusing upon what was colorful and unusual and photographable, and it is divided into two parts, the second of which concerns ways in which man has changed the course of nature. The chicken factory episode is likely to change your thoughts about smiling old Colonel Sanders. The chicks are bred in incubators. Factory hands are shown separating the males from the females. The males are then thrown out in the trash, while the females are processed to become egg-layers. spend their entire lives in a tiny wire cage, dropping eggs into a



one is having problems in Italy, not because of the sex scenes as much as the satirical religious humor. The plot is simple. A young priest leaves the monastery and becomes secretary to a young crippled boy, confined to his wheelchair. The boy's mother seduces the priest. Her husband suicides. The boy picks up impressions which distort his own sexuality. He associates sex and violence, sex and death, because these seem inter-connected. Seeing his sister enter her room after a bath, he takes pictures of her with a polaroid. Hearing the clicks, she begins to perform for him. Voyeur and exhibitionist find one another.

Out for a walk one afternoon, the secretary loses control of the boy's wheelchair and it speeds down the hill toward an intersection with him racing after it. The chair and boy escape injury, but the young man is hit by a car. The boy has an orgasm as he watches.

The boy's mother bathes him and the secretary enters the room. He joins the woman in rubbing the boy down with soap and both become aroused through the warm medium of the third body. They leave the room and the maid finishes bathing him.

The Saprophyte is a beautiful film. It reminds me of Bergman's The Silence and Franz Wedekind's Spring Awakening. On a social level, it reveals many of the basic hypocrisies of the church and shows an incredible sequence of the heavily-commercialized tourist scene which has grown up around Lourdes. The relationship between sexuality and religion is intricately explored, usually in the humorous manner pioneered by Fellini.

Saturday afternoon, the 26th, was all Peckinpah, and cantankerous and drunk he was, giving the audience as good as they gave him. Clips from many of his films