

Cinema

Detroit Filmmaker Mourns Death of Local Flicks

Emil Bacilla

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Film, the liveliest art, is, for all intents and purposes dead. At least in Detroit. Those wanting to attend services, needn't bother, since there usually aren't any for a stillborn that was just dumped in a garbage can for expediency.

Since the end of WWII there has been an increasing interest in film in this country. Foreign films developed an audience and in almost every city with a population over 200 underground movements sprung up, with independents making films from high art to low trash. In Detroit, however, nothing has happened. At different times different people have attempted to give life to some kind of movement, and each time all that ever developed was a few kicks that gave signs of life but ended in miscarriage.

The most recent attempt at giving life to such a movement is also in what appears to be its last throes. The Midwest Film Society gave all the signs of a healthy birth at first, but it appears now that, in the Detroit tradition of miscarriages and false labors, it is a blue baby, lying in an oxygen tent, heading for an inevitable death; unless someone finds a way of helping it to survive.

The MFS was conceived just over a year ago by Gary Crowdus and a few other people. Through its gestation period it reached a high of about 35 semi-active members and two screenings a month. It picked up a few potential film makers, produced a short film in 8mm with a magnetic sound track. A few other films were produced by members of the group, and for a short time it appeared that the city was finally being blessed with a happy, healthy, film movement. But as often happens in these instances, something went amiss. The film makers, wanting to do things and find other people to work with started to leave. It was becoming apparent that the situation would not develop much more in Detroit, unless there was some kind of miracle. One guy went to USC, and Crowdus has gone to NYU, passing the organization on to Dennis Kawicki, the former secretary. The organization, which used to meet in Crowdus' basement is now looking for a new location, hopefully something closer to the inner city because Warren, where they had been located, was so hard to get to. The membership is down to twenty people and they're finding themselves unable to pay for film rentals.

The theaters in Detroit also show the state of film here. The Varsity folded. The Variety, Esquire, and Coronet have gone over to skin flicks. The Studios are still going strong, and are the last refuge for art films in Detroit. But their programs are composed primarily of new films with an assured box office. No matter how badly someone may want to see a film that came out before last year or a classic, there's no place to go. And after going to the four Studios, and seeing the films there, one is left with nothing new to see for six months, until the programs change, unless there's something good on television.

In short it appears that film is truly dead in Detroit. All that remains is the few reminders of what might have been: the polished Studio chain and the dying Midwest Film Society. And yet I can't believe it. I imagine that I should face it and pack up and leave to somewhere where films are alive. But I can't face it. I, as strange as it may seem to many people, myself included at times, love Detroit. And I see things happening and struggling to make it a better place. This newspaper for example, and the ideals behind the Artists Workshop. I keep thinking that maybe something will happen. There must be other people who are interested in film somewhere around here. People who

realize that film is an art form that requires a group of people working together, acting, writing, filming, editing, animating, recording, editing sound, et al. There must be people interested in supporting a group like the Midwest Film Society could be if it ever manages to survive and leave the oxygen tent it is in. If there are they can contact Dennis Kawicki at 24217 Rosemarie, Warren, Michigan: SL7-0813. If there aren't, don't bother sending cards of sympathy, they only compound the sorrow. Besides, we're getting used to it.

fifth Estate

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