

Detroit Art Theatres Dying?

Joe Fineman

1967

Profits are the law and life. If survival carries with it struggling with one's own values than a movie theater must frequently submit to fourth run showings and nudies. In fact, this vain grasp at subsistence usually takes a downward spiral as the drowning business first revives and then submits, meeting bankruptcy its final reward. Sympathetically the owner is on trial. Curiously his jury is likewise his lifeguard and his sentence often is the road of least respect.

Witness the demise of three Detroit theaters, the Varsity, the Variety and the Midtown. As rookies each compiled the enviable records.

Five years ago the Studio Theatre chain recognized an uplifting of the status of art movies and ventured into the Bergman, Fellini, Beatles revival fad. Timing was inopportune and on weekdays an embarrassingly empty theater was common. With some persistence the Studio Midtown could have gained prominence but the programming was dull and the whole deal seemed a half-hearted fling at a virgin market. The final result, after several renters had collapsed, was "Olga's Girls," a burly show, and worse.

Similarly, The Variety and its sister The Coronet broke precedent, when at their nascent emerging they struck forward to blaze a trail for film culture buffs. One on the South side trudged uptown, fought dread congestion to pay \$1 for "Hallelujah The Hills" as northwesterners clamored southward to The Coronet to an equivalent treat. They both festered, involuted and crept beneath their hats.

But for me, perhaps saddest of all was an ominous but somehow welcome redecorating scheme at the old Varsity located at McNichols at Livernois. Nearly a five month lapse preceded the odious guillotine, shutting of a complacent public from an indifferent fate. It was the womb of my earliest childhood fantasies. It has been forgotten by most as it slipped into an innocent crepidation. For four months the marquee has alarmingly protested a Mitch Rider Mixer for alienated U of D youth.

So the outcome of all of this is an oblivious shrug. Nothing seems to resister but unwholesome mid-art fare. Occasionally heard are the trenchant utterance of the dedicated who crave not only Bergman and Fellini but also Dreyer, Hitchcock, Leo Carey and the artistry of Perk Westmore.

I've heard of an eager cluster of dopes who persistently claim their determination to reopen the Midtown Theater for the angelic purpose of investing Detroit with a true revival theater. The genesis for this came from Terry Kelly, Mike Kerman and myself besides a handful of adventurous investors. We see a minimum of \$10,000 as a jumping off point. We are in search of several able and wealthy parties.

Contact me in care of The Fifth Estate or at 18490 Birchcrest, Detroit 48221.



Joe Fineman
Detroit Art Theatres Dying?
1967

<https://www.fiftheastate.org/archive/26-march-15-31-1967/detroit-art-theatres-dying>
Fifth Estate #26, March 15-31, 1967

fiftheastate.anarchistlibraries.net