

A film column without a clever name

Emil Bacilla

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Everybody should make films.

Film-making is a beautiful thing and it's something that anyone can do. Really.

Sure there's a lot of strange professional things to get hung up on, but it's like the cat hustling Wurlitzer organs on television: "you can be playing your favorite songs in minutes." You're not going to be ready to take over for Boot if he doesn't make it to a gig with Billy C., and it's the same thing with film.

All you've got to do is start, and you're a film-maker.

And, yes, it's easy and cheap to get started. There are a million ways to start. For one thing, you can get a camera, run a few rolls of film through it to see what happens, and when you've got it "mastered," start working on your film.

If you're the type that would like to study a bit first, the Detroit Public Library has a pretty good selection of amateur filmmaking books that hip you to all sorts of technical information and shortcuts. Some of the more basic books even have ideas for films, if you're unable to come up with any at first. So you pick up a few books, skim through them, and you know enough, more than enough, to get started.

Equipment is no hassle. Sure, there are millions of things designed for motion picture making, but most of them are special things meant for special uses, and for the most part nonessential. All that's actually necessary are: camera, projector and editor. A light meter helps, and you probably should have one, but if you don't, use the chart that comes with the film and fake it. You actually don't even have to buy any equipment at all. Just borrow it.

Now that you've got it all together: you've skimmed through a book, have an idea for a film and have gotten your hands on a camera, what do you do? Well, you do two things: 1) find people to help you, if you need any, and 2) buy film. You can cop 8 mm Dynachrome at most discount stores for under three dollars a roll, and that's with the processing included in the purchase price.

Then you run around filming, send the film out to be processed and spend an agonized week checking the mailbox, waiting for the film to come back (it's very much like when you were a kid and sent in box tops.)

And when the film comes back you project it and find out that every foot of it stinks, it's not at all what you thought it was and maybe you should quit before anyone else gets to see it. But, instead, you look at it a few more times and start picking out the pieces you want to use and think about the very best way to cut them together.

Then you borrow somebody's editor, pick up some splicing cement or tape splices and start cutting it up and putting it back together. Then you project it again, cut some pieces out, put some others in, shorten some parts, rearrange some parts, and, finally, just plain give up and call it done.

Then, if you want to, you pick some music, or something to go along with it, and make up a tape to be played while it's projected. You don't have to have sound, but it tends to make it not look SO bad.

And, by golly, there it is.

Your film.

And, lo and behold, you're a film-maker. That's all there is to it. Sure the film stinks, but then I'll bet your organ playing is pretty bad when you first sit down at the Wurlitzer, too.

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