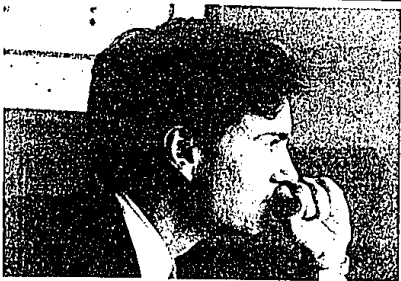


These films are worth seeing



Philip Handelman, who produced and directed "Brothers in Congress," listens during an interview with Sander Levin.

Filmmaker's documentary 'touches heart'

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

His video documentary on Carl and Sander Levin entitled "Brothers in Congress" is a perfect example of the kind of project that appeals to filmmaker Philip Handelman of Birmingham.

"They have to be projects that in some way or another touch my heart," said Handelman, in a recent phone interview about the documentary. The 27-minute film will be shown at 1:30 p.m. Sunday on television station CBET, Channel 9, Windsor.

Handelman said that most people today don't have confidence in their public officials — and with good reason. He said that he has been active in the political process. He believes the Levins are a good choice as a film subject because they are "a pretty notable exception to the run-of-the-mill politician."

In the documentary, the two brothers share not only their political side but their personal side, Handelman said.

"I thought it would be refreshing to ask different kinds of questions," he said, like what kind of impact has the political lifestyle had on their children?

"ANOTHER inspiration for the documentary was to show a day in the life of a prominent public official," Handelman said. "I followed them around their hometown of Detroit for several days, telling the camera roll. I interspersed natural footage with the interviews."

The film producer said the fun part was going on location, but that the project required months of preparation and months of editing.

ing — six months in all. "We got some great footage," he said.

As an example, he cited scenes of Sander Levin participating in the Focus Hope parade last fall and talking to marchers and Handelman.

Other settings shown in the film include a bar association function at the Omni Hotel in Detroit and the offices of both brothers. U.S. Rep. Sander Levin's office is at 1717 W. Mile Mile in Southfield and U.S. Sen. Carl Levin's office is at the MacNaughton Building in Detroit.

Asked if he knew the Levins before the filming, he said, "I've known both Carl and Sander for the better part of my life. They've been family friends."

"Filmmakers are like journalists. . . . We are better off admitting from the outset what kind of connection we have with our subject matter."

"I tried in this documentary to question both of the subjects in a rather intense manner. I didn't want them to get off easy."

HANDELMAN SAID filming the Levins' activities was done with the latest, state-of-the-art Sony Betacam equipment.

"Our main task during the shooting was just staying up with them. They have these planned schedules. . . . We are better off admitting from the outset what kind of connection we have with our subject matter."

The filmmaker would have liked to have his documentary premiere on a Detroit TV station but couldn't get an airing.

"I think they have an obligation to this community to be open and to be willing. Commercial stations are very reluctant to let an independent get involved."

In spite of all the trash around, there are worthwhile films that attempt to teach us what it means to be human even while they entertain. Rob Reiner's latest, "Stand By Me," and a British import, "Letter to Brezhnev," both Reiner, and two films at the Detroit Institute of Arts next weekend, "Smooth Talk" and "Dreamchild," offer more than the mindless horrors of extra-terrestrial monsters or dumb ducks from outer space.

Once again Reiner demonstrates his talent and versatility in "Stand By Me," based on the Stephen King novella, "The Body." In a lot of ways it is a "little movie" but a very nice one.

Four young boys hike off into the woods to search for the body of a young fellow who had been killed while walking along the railroad track. Along the way they encounter themselves as well some nasty older fellows, leeches and the horrors of the night, which may be the same as growing up. Both difficult.

THE FILM'S charm lies in the four young boys maturing, the unaffected acting of Wil Wheaton, River Phoenix, Corey Feldman and Jerry O'Connell, and Reiner's deft directorial touch, which keeps their travails moving through what might easily have been a trite forest hike to self-discovery.

"A Letter to Brezhnev" is a dank, dismal and realistic portrait of a couple of working girls in Liverpool. Teresa (Margi Clark) packs chickens and her friend, Elaine (Alexandra Pigg), is on welfare when she's not fighting with her sister, Tracy (Tracy Leach), her mother (Mandy Walsh) and her father (Joey Kaye).

All things considered, it is a pretty unpleasant lot and their lives are grim. That's the whole purpose of the film which, up to a point, is well-executed. A couple of Hollywood touches and considerable difficulty comprehending Liverpoolian English detract from what might have been a terrific film.

One night the girls are out on the town and pinch a fat wallet from a fat guy who was trying to deal Teresa. The girls take off for fancier bars and meet two sailors, Sergei (Alfred Molina) and Peter (Peter Firth), from a Russian freighter in the harbor on a public relations exercise.

Well, I could have forgiven that bit of unlikely romanticism if I could have understood everything they were saying and there weren't a couple of other items to strain credulity.

TERESA HOOKS UP with Sergei and they both just want a good time but Peter and Elaine want more from life and spend the night talking. They fall in love. Peter points to a star, which is inordinately bright, something painted on a Hollywood sky, and that becomes "their" star.

The ship leaves in the morning and Elaine decides she will follow Peter to Russia. That, as you can well imagine, is not so easily accomplished. One of the problems with the film is that the struggle to join her lover seems rather easy. When she finally writes to Brezhnev, he sends her her plane ticket.

Structurally, the film suffers from lack of proper technique to make her long struggle to join Peter seem as realistic as her miserable life in Liverpool. That aspect of the film is, indeed, well represented and her escape from a dreary life is the film's point, but the process of escape is

the movies
Dan Greenberg



Peter Firth and Alexandra Pigg star in "Letter to Brezhnev," about a working girl from Liverpool who falls in love with a Russian sailor.

TWO NEW FILMS highlight the Detroit Film Theatre this coming weekend. "Smooth Talk" is a 1986 Joyce Chopra film based on Joyce Carol Oates' story, "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?" starring Laura Dern. The story deals with an adolescent girl on the brink of sexual awareness.

"Smooth Talk" will be screened at 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday at the Detroit Institute of Arts Theatre on Friday, while "Dreamchild" will be shown there Saturday, also at 7 and 9:30 p.m.

"Dreamchild" is a 1985 British movie about the memories of 80-year-old Alice Hargreaves (Coral Browne). In her childhood Hargreaves was the object of Charles Dodgson's obsession. Dodgson is better known as Lewis Carroll. Here's an opportunity to see the story of the real "Alice in Wonderland" in a film not otherwise available.

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WSU seeks 'lost' alumni for a 'first-ever' reunion

A "first-ever" reunion of radio, TV, film and theater alumni of Wayne State University has been scheduled for Saturday-Sunday, Sept. 20-21.

A WSU staff committee has been working since the first of the year plan the event and to identify as many people as possible who have studied and/or participated in these areas.

"Lost" alumni and anyone knowing the addresses of any graduates or former students in these fields are being asked to call Mona Torp at Alumni Relations, 577-2163.

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