

# MOVING PICTURES

## Fox, DFT face off with special films

By John Monaghan  
special writer

There's a friendly battle raging this weekend and Detroit-area film fans will come out the winners.

The Detroit Film Theatre begins its 19th year with the acclaimed *Angel at My Table*, while the Fox Theatre concludes its summer film series by inviting the Detroit Symphony Orchestra and organist Dennis James to perform along with the 1922 silent *Robin Hood*.

Dennis James, a nationally renowned musician and distributor of silent film classics, will arrive early this week to rehearse with two separate orchestras. Seven screenings will occur from Thursday through Sunday, with James present at every one.

"This is the longest run of a film in such a condensed time that I've ever done," said James, who lives in Berkeley, Calif. "This is actually the way organists had to work in the old days. It will be intriguing to work this hard and see how I hold up."

"Robin Hood," which stars Douglas Fairbanks Sr., was previously screened at The Fox in 1932, with James accompanied by the 36-member Ann Arbor Chamber Orchestra.

"The performance before was basically for people enthused about the pipe organ," he said. "Now, riding on the success of the Kevin Costner film, it will be marketed with all the mechanizations of The Fox Theatre organization to bring it to a wider audience."

JAMES MADE his theater organ debut in 1967 at the old Senate Theatre on Woodward. He now makes regular tours to cities, such as Austin and San Francisco, where silent films with live musical accompaniment are part of the regular symphony series.

His company, "Silent Film Concerts," was formed to preserve the art form with archival prints and original scores. The music for "Robin Hood," written by Victor Schertzinger, was commissioned by Fairbanks.

James admits that music has to carry the film through a painfully slow first half.

"There's a lot of pageantry and establishing of characters," he said.

"Robin Hood doesn't even appear until the second half, but once he does, the film really takes off."

In 1922, "Robin Hood" was the most expensive film ever made, with the castle reported as the largest set ever constructed in Hollywood.

"People were much more into experiencing film on a spectacle level," James said. "The castle itself was enough to sustain people's interest."

Farther north down Woodward, at the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Detroit Film Theatre has been given the go-ahead for its new season. State budget cuts to institutions like the DIA made the picture look pretty grim for the city's premier alternative film venue.

THE SEASON opens this weekend with "An Angel at My Table," the brilliantly conceived new film about New Zealand writer Janet Frame. Director Jane Campion ("Sweetie") paints a memorable portrait of a woman whose introversion and creativity was mistaken for mental illness.

While DFT curator Elliot Wilhelm hesitates to describe his rationale behind choosing individual films, he does admit, "we have these titles here because we think they're good. And if each one isn't a masterpiece, then they at least deserve the light of day."

Among the more intriguing titles, "The Vanishing" (1986) is a devilish little thriller from the Netherlands about a woman's disappearance and her lover's obsession with discovering what happened to her. It plays Aug. 23-25.

"The Killer" (1990), by Hong Kong cult director John Woo, stages elaborately campy shootouts and action scenes with the breakneck pace that has put the country's films on the map. It screens Nov. 22-23.

In the controversial "Poison" (1990), director Todd Haynes adapts a trio of Jean Genet plays with relevance to the AIDS virus. Look for it Oct. 25-26.

A tribute to the late John Cassavetes unfolds for five weeks in October and November, highlighting the best of the independent writer/director's work.

"CASSAVETTES HAS not only been unavailable theatrically, but these films aren't on video either," said Wilhelm. "There's no way for the new generation to discover Cassavetes' work."



Douglas Fairbanks Sr. not only played the lead role in the silent version of "Robin Hood," he also commissioned Victor Schertzinger to write the musical score.

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Godard's 1960 "Breathless" (Sept. 20-22) remains the season highlight for vintage movie buffs. The free-wheeling French New Wave classic,

which stars Jean-Paul Belmondo and Jean Seberg, has long been seen in washed-out public domain prints.

The DFT has softened its budget blows through a fund-raiser earlier this month at The Fox. The opening night of "Spartacus" netted the DFT between \$8,000-9,000. Wilhelm hopes that collaborations with The Fox will become a regular part of DFT fund-raising efforts.

And if The Fox and DFT have big screenings on the same weekend, no matter, according to Wilhelm. "An Angel at My Table" is playing for two weekends.

Besides, according to the curator, "when you're on a good moviegoing binge, there's no reason why you can't go to one movie one night, another the next."

## SCREEN SCENE

CITY WIDE CINEMA, Wayne State University, Community Arts Auditorium, Cass between Kirby and Ferry Mall. Call 746-3303 for information. (\$5; \$3.50 students and senior citizens)

AIDS documentaries — "Positive" and "Silence = Death" share a double bill at 7:30 p.m. Aug. 2.

Directed by Rosa von Praunheim, both films document the struggle between homosexuals and the dreaded disease while reflecting on an uncaring, apathetic society and government. "Silence = Death" focuses on the artistic community, including interviews with Keith Haring, Allen Ginsberg, David Wojnarowicz and others.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE, 5300 Woodward, Detroit. Call 833-2333 for information. (\$5)

"An Angel at My Table" (New Zealand — 1990), 7 p.m., Aug. 2, 3 and 9-10 and 1, 4 and 7 p.m., Aug. 4 and 11.

From Jane Campion, the director of "Sweetie," comes this moving biography of New Zealand writer Janet Frame, whose terminal shyness was diagnosed as schizophrenia. Despite eight years of hospitalization and shock treatment, she emerged as one of the country's premier authors. Brilliantly done.

FOX THEATRE, 3311 Woodward, Detroit. Call 567-600 for information. (\$10)

"Robin Hood" (USA — 1922), 8 p.m. Aug. 1-2, 1, 4:30 and 8 p.m. Aug. 3 and 4:30 and 8 p.m. Aug. 4.

The Detroit Symphony Orchestra and organist Dennis James perform the original score in tandem with a screening of "Robin Hood," the 1922 silent epic starring Douglas Fairbanks Sr. A rare treat concluding the Fox's summer film series.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY, 13471 Michigan Avenue, Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (free)

"Nothing Sacred" (USA — 1937), 7 p.m. July 29. The classic screwball comedy stars Carole Lombard as a small-town girl who is given the time of her life in New York by a large newspaper that hopes to gain publicity by following the "last weeks" of her life. Scripted by Ben Hecht. As part of a summer series of movie comedies.

LIVONIA MALL, Seven Mile and Middlebelt, Livonia. Call 476-1166 for information. (free)

"Logan's Run" (USA — 1976), 10 a.m. July 30. In the not-so-distant future, society believes that you must "renew" your life at age 30. Michael York plays a police officer who tracks down "runners" who attempt to live outside the protective dome. With Peter Ustinov as a curmudgeon and Farrah Fawcett-Majors, at the height of her popularity, The final film in a monthlong tribute to science fiction.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE, 22918 Woodward Avenue, Ferndale. Call 540-0640 for more information. (\$4)

"The Buddy Holly Story" (USA — 1978), 8 p.m. July 30. Gary Busey takes on the unlikely role of Buddy Holly with amazing conviction and depth.

MICHIGAN THEATRE, 16301 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 963-8690 for information. (\$5; \$3.50 students and senior citizens)

"Ji Dou" (China — 1990), through Aug. 4 (call for show times). The first Chinese film nominated for an Oscar, is this steamy tale of a married woman's tragic affair with her husband's adopted nephew.

— John Monaghan

## 'Next of Kin' is blah like a rice cake

I've always thought that movies are kind of like food. Movies have different flavors and textures.

Good movies are rich and satisfying. Some are old favorites like comfort food, while others are exotic or taste expanding. Some movies are mental junk food you might not admit to liking.

Bad films leaving you feeling sort of empty, especially if you just kissed five bucks goodbye to see it. Really lame or off-putting movies leave a bad taste in your mouth.

THEN THERE are movies like "Next of Kin." It falls into that rice cake category. It doesn't taste like much and you don't remember it afterward.

Patrick Swayze plays a Kentucky native, working in Chicago as a police detective. His younger brother is working in the big city but is torn between Swayze, who has moved into an urban lifestyle, and another brother, interestingly played by Irish actor Liam Neeson, who has returned to their boyhood home.

The plot of the film is triggered by the murder of the youngest brother during a truck hijacking and the efforts of the surviving brothers to find the killers.



pass the popcorn

LeAnne Rogers

Actually, it doesn't take much of an effort. Somehow Swayze just sort of knows through police osmosis who was responsible although he can't prove anything. Neeson figures it out by watching the trucking business and then breaking in to threaten the mobster employees.

SWAYZE STARS out giving Neeson the expected speeches about letting the police do their jobs rather than kinfolk trying to exact good old-fashioned justice. We know which one the brothers will choose, even if one of them knows better.

This film about family obligations and avenging relatives seems to be sending mixed messages. The bad-guy mob boss follows the same credo as the good guys. And no one seems to notice that the vendetta cycle will never end as long as there are relatives to promulgate it. The inevitable showdown with

the bad guys takes place in a cemetery. For some mind boggling reason, Swayze takes on the mobsters when he is armed with bows and arrows and big knife.

Let's think this through. Guys armed with automatic weapons that have lighted scopes — don't ask me what kind of gun but they looked extremely lethal — and I'm going to show up alone to play Robin Hood. I don't think so. Honey don't play that.

I was kind of warned in advance that "Next of Kin" did stretch your ability to suspend disbelief. A local

police officer, himself a transplant Kentucky, scoffed over a busload of snakes being brought up for the big finale. He said those old boys would have AK-47s and heavy firepower. I'll take his word for that.

THE BEST scenes take place when Swayze's character and his wife return to Kentucky with his brother's body. He realizes his choices to leave the family's traditional life have made him more of a stranger to his family than his wife, whom they've never met.

Walking around his old stomping grounds, Swayze looks like the city cousin comes for a visit. Neeson tells Swayze he's no longer part of the family. "In your heart you're just a cop from the hills."

One thing I found simultaneously offensive and puzzling was the steady onslaught of invective and derogatory remarks aimed at "hillbillies" throughout much of the film.

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