

DFT celebrates 20 years of quality films

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

For the 20th anniversary season of the Detroit Film Theatre, curator Elliott Wilhelm originally considered a sort of greatest-hits package along with first-run features. The availability of so many quality new films has made him change his plans.

"We figured the best way to celebrate the anniversary is to do business as usual," Wilhelm said.

Among the more anticipated titles are "The Snapper," the second in a trilogy of Dublin-based movies that began with "The Commitments"; the latest from Wim Wenders, "Ararat, So Close"; and "Naked," a controversial new work from British director Mike Leigh.

The current series does begin on a nostalgic note this weekend with the revival of "Lo Strade" (1953) from late director Federico

Fellini. Wilhelm considers it "one of the films that put Fellini on the map stylistically... It's also one of the early movies for people who started going to foreign films in the 1950s."

Wilhelm's own interest in movies was launched in 1960, when he was 10. That's the year he saw revivals of "Pinocchio" and "Citizen Kane," and the original release of "Psycho." For the Hitchcock shocker he had snuck into a theater full of adults and was shocked to find them screaming at the top of their lungs.

"It was probably that experience more than anything," he said, "that made me want to show films for the public."

The Detroit Institute of Arts has been showing foreign and specialized films "in fits and starts" since 1927, according to Wilhelm. But it was the 23-year-old movie fan, armed with a \$10,000 grant

MOVIES

from the National Endowment for the Arts, that made the DFT a regular weekend program in 1973.

"I put together the kind of theater I'd love to go to but wasn't here yet," Wilhelm said.

Wilhelm discovers films by attending up to four film festivals annually, including Telluride in Colorado. He sends assistant curator Larry Baranski and production assistant Serena Donatoni to check out the latest at the Sundance and Toronto Film Festivals, but the final choice remains his.

Up until the mid-1980s, the DFT limited its premieres mostly to Fridays, with Saturdays devoted to older films and Sundays to a thematic series. Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, George Stevens, Luis Buñuel and Werner Broth-

ers classics were all honored with Sunday retrospectives.

Perhaps the most ambitious Sunday program was the series of 3-D movies (from "Dial M for Murder" to "Gorilla at Large") shown on two simultaneously running projectors. Though a technical headache (that came off flawlessly — I saw all 13 films), the DFT sold out for practically every performance.

Wilhelm believes that availability on video and cable has made it harder to attract an audience for vintage titles. He has, however, booked a pair of rare Hitchcock short films made in support of French resistance fighters during World War II.

"They were made as propaganda, but they're also rather wicked exercises in Hitchcockian perverseness," Wilhelm notes. "That combination I find very interesting."

The Afternoon Film Theatre, a weekday series organized by assistant curator Baranski, was stalled due to the DIA's much-publicized budget cuts. Wilhelm hopes it will start again soon.

New releases now play full weekends (sometimes two) and often fill the 1,160-seat auditorium. In recent seasons, the DFT has premiered art-house hits "The Crying Game," "sex, lies, and videotape" and "The Piano."

Though it would appear at first glance that the DFT's success alone could help the struggling DIA, Wilhelm is less certain. "I don't get the bill every month for heating and air-conditioning," he pointed out, also noting the staff, security and advertising needed to keep the DFT running.

Wilhelm does admit that the film program is "not a financial drain on the DIA."

What has kept people coming

back to the DFT over the past 20 years? Wilhelm thinks "it's a combination of discovery and celebration. Most people understand that films are shown here for a reason — not because we have to fill 13 screens. Because films are hand-selected, this turns the DFT into a year-round film festival."

It was once a common sight for a bearded Wilhelm to address audience members from the auditorium stage, alerting them to upcoming films that might need an extra push. According to Wilhelm, who now concentrates his energy behind the scenes, "the series more or less sells itself."

If you have a comment for John Monaghan, call him at 953-2047, mailbox number 1866, on a Touch-Tone phone, or write him care of Street Scene, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

SCREEN SCENE

A sampling of what's playing at alternative movie theaters across metro Detroit as reviewed by John Monaghan.

DETROIT FILM THEATRE
Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward, Detroit, Call (313) 833-2323 for information. (\$5)

"La Strada" (Italy-1953), 7:30 p.m. Jan. 7-8; 4, 7 p.m. Jan. 9. Federico Fellini's deeply mysterious story about a carnival strongman (Anthony Quinn), his woman assistant (Giulietta Masina) and a taunting acrobat (Richard Basehart). A fitting tribute to

the late director kicking off the DFT's 20th anniversary season.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE
22918 Woodward, Ferndale, Call 544-3309 for information. (\$4)
"A Clockwork Orange" (Britain-1971), 8 p.m. Jan. 6. Stanley Kubrick's harrowing look at the future, where a charismatic hooligan (Malcolm McDowell) undergoes treatment for his anti-social behavior. Based on a novel by the late Anthony Burgess.

MAIN THEATRE

118 N. Main (at 11 Mile), Royal Oak. Films play through at least Thursday. Call 542-0180 for information and show times. (\$6.50; \$4 students; \$3 twilight/matinee)

"The Piano" (New Zealand-1993), Through Dec. 6 (call for show times). Jane Campion directed this stunning tale of a mute woman who arrives in the New Zealand bush as part of an arranged marriage. While her husband (Sam Neill) leaves her cold, she carries on a bizarre relationship with a neighboring settler (Harvey Keitel).

"The Summer House" (Britain-1993). Joan Plowright, Julie Walters and Jeanne Moreau star in this very-gentle-looking story about a young woman trying to escape marriage to a most unappealing suitor.

"Schindler's List" (USA-1993). Steven Spielberg directed this uncompromising tale of Oskar Schindler (Liam Neeson), a war profiteer and Nazi enemy who protected and saved the lives of more than 1,000 Jews during the Holocaust. Expect big things from this one around Oscar time.

MAPLE THEATRE
4135 W. Maple, Bloomfield Township. Call 855-9090 for information. (\$5.75; \$3.95 matinee; \$2.95 twilight)

"Heaven and Earth" (USA-1993). Oliver Stone directed this account of a Vietnamese woman's experiences in both her native land and in America. Tommy Lee Jones and Joan Chen star in this adaptation of Le Ly Hayslip's autobiographical books.

"Schindler's List." See Main listing above.

"The Piano." See Main listing above.

REDFORD THEATRE
17360 Lahar, Detroit. Call 537-2560 for information. (\$2.50)

"The Man From Snowy River" (Australia-1992), 8 p.m. Jan. 7, 2, 8 p.m. Jan. 8 (organ overture begins a half hour before show time). Kirk Douglas has a dual role in this Australian-made Western about a cattle baron who tangles with the young ranchhand in love with his daughter. Great old-fashioned entertainment.

Kiara from page 4A

Black Entertainment Television (BET). "Condition of the Heart" will be the first album released on BCI.

"It's hard to find the right artist, so we figured the best thing to do was to kick off the label with Kiara," Winston said.

The collaboration, the duo hopes, will continue the success they've had since the late 1980s. The songwriters/musicians produced a string of hits from the albums "Kiara: To Change And/or Make A Difference" and "Civilized Rogue" including the singles "The Best of Me," "Every Little Time" and "This Time," a No. 1 charted duet with Motown artist Shanie Wilson.

From 1987 to 1991 Kiara toured with the likes of MC Hammer, New Edition, Keith Sweat, Roberta Flack and Midnight Star. With the rigors of touring taking a toll on them, the duo decided to pursue other projects for a while. Charley worked with a vocal coach, while Winston concentrated on increasing his knowledge of other instruments and studio production. The duo also left Arista due to "creative differences."

"We still have a lot of good friends at Arista," Charley said. "A lot of people supported us; a lot didn't."

Charley and Winston then signed on with Don and Keenan Barden, owners of BCI Records. The Barden's and their collective Barden Companies were named Black Enterprise Magazine's 1992 Company of the Year, featured as one of the nation's top black-owned businesses in the Wall Street Journal and was recognized as the fifth-largest black-owned business in the country.

Charley, Winston and Barden's 26-year-old son, Keenan, share the duties of running the record company. Keenan Barden works with rap artists such as the female rapper Kym C. Charley and Winston take care of the rhythm and blues acts.

"We all wear a bunch of different hats," Winston said.

Kiara's single "Tell Me" is available at area record stores or by contacting: BCI Records, 243 W. Congress, Suite 1000, Detroit 48226; (313) 963-5010. "Condition of the Heart" will be released Feb. 14.

Music notes from page 4A

After taking a holiday break, the rock band Bad Religion will return to the studio to record their follow-up to "Problem Factory" for Interference Records, according to lead singer and former Royal Oak resident Andre Comaeu. While in town for the holidays, Comaeu — decked out in shiny multi-colored howling lion costume — took in the Big Block Lemmonjule show at St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit on Dec. 29.

Dan Vitale (of Bim Skala Bim) recently returned to the area with his side project Steady Earnest for a show at the Falcon Club in Hamtramck.

"We're trying to focus more on a pop aka with a soul twist," he said describing Steady Earnest. "Bim Skala Bim never did that much of that."

Steady Earnest also includes members of Maelstrom, Sk'd For Life and The Prophets. They recently released their album, "Out of Line" on Vitale's BIB Records. Aside from that, his company is also busy with the release of the all-Boston ska compilation "Moah It Up '93." "The Shack" featuring performances by Special Beat, the Toasters and Madness; Bim Skala Bim's live album; and the album by the Concession Ensemble, a band with four drummers and no vocalists.

A year ago The Afghan Whigs

released "Uptown Avondale," an album of their versions of Motown songs. In early December, they came face-to-face with one of their influences. The band toured the Motown Museum with Martha Reeves and snapped a few photos with her while Rolling Stone magazine, MTV and Raygun magazine covered the event. The quartet walked around the historic studio awe-struck, giggling nervously over things such as a photo showing the Temptations' moves. At the end of the tour, a few lucky(?) tag-alongs were chosen by a tour guide to sing a few Motown tunes for Reeves and the Afghan Whigs. Later in the evening, Reeves joined the Afghan Whigs, touring in support of their latest album "Gentlemen," halfway through their set to sing "Heat Wave."

The synthesizer-influenced rock band Discipline is looking for a new keyboardist. David Kroschke is leaving the band at the end of January. The bands stresses that musicians applying for the job need not own keyboards. Discipline also requires that the person be "dependable, able to play in unusual time signatures, able to play by ear and able to groove." To set up an appointment with the band, call (810) 548-8665 and leave your telephone number on the answering machine.

Sixteen years after forming Bad

Brains, the band is finally enjoying the success of releasing an album on a major label, Epic Records.

"It's positive," lead singer Israel Joseph-I said. "We got an opportunity to spread the message to a wider range of people." The message? "Love and awareness, spiritually and mentally. Now is not the time for blinders."

Bad Brains recently visited St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit to promote their album "Rise." Their last tour swing through Detroit was an opening spot for Living Colour at the State Theatre earlier this year.

He hopes that that tour dispelled rumors that the bands were arch enemies.

"We got together and went out and did this thing. We hoped it would discredit any animosity that the two bands had. We love each other and respect each other as musicians."

My Little Funhouse vocalist Alan Lawlor thinks his band has it rough — or maybe just encountered a lucky streak. "It's hard to get tours. We take what we can," he said. Since the release of their debut album "Standunder," the Irish rock band has signed with label-mates Guns N' Roses, Izzy Stradlin and Jackyl, along with former Motley Crue singer Vince Neil. They also appeared as extras in the wedding sequence of Guns' "No-

vember Rain" video. Not too bad for a fledgling band. The twin guitar assault of the Morrissey brothers — Brendan and Anthony (a dead-ringer for Soundgarden's Chris Cornell with hair) — has caused a frenzy among fans in Europe. In his best imitation of Matt Dillon in "Singles," Lawlor said their song "L.S.D." hit No. 1 in Portugal. "We're big in little places." So far, the band has yet to duplicate that success in the United States. They hope the United States catches on to them when they release in January the video for "Raintown" directed by Richard Murray, who's responsible for many of MTV's No. 1 videos.

Disposable Heroes of Hip-hop have temporarily broken up. Rono Tsewill focus his efforts on his recently formed "V-tamin C" production company. He's producing Mystic Journey-men and has begun work on a solo album with engineer Matt Kelly (Del The Funky Homosapien, Spice one, Heiroglyphics). Meanwhile, Michael Franti is working on a solo album produced by Joe Nicolo (Urge Overkill, Cypress Hill and Kriss Kross). "Rono and I have been friends for a long time. We each wanted to broaden our musical horizons before doing another record together," Franti said.

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