

# Movie Ratings: How The Public Is Reacting

By SUE SHAUGHNESSY

It was in the fall of 1969 that the motion picture industry started to issue the ratings of G, M, R and X for movies.

How's the system working? Managers of local movie theaters say that the system helps, but add that problems with enforcement come more often from parents than children.

There is also some confusion as to what the letters of the code mean.

The group which administers the code, the Motion Picture Association, admitted to this confusion this week when it announced that a new rating of GP would replace the old M rating.

Both ratings mean the same. That is, there is no age limit set for entrance to the films, but that parental guidance is suggested in making a choice for children.

WHEN THE CODE went into effect Nov. 1, 1968, the industry proclaimed it "was designed to keep in close harmony with the mores, culture, the moral sense and change in our society."

Objectives are two-fold: "(1) To encourage artistic expression by expanding creative freedom and (2) to assure that the freedom which encourages the artist remains responsible and sensitive to the standards of the larger society."

The most recent information on the code says that "the purpose is to rate films for children, to furnish guides to parents to decide on the movie-going of their children. The system does not rate for adults, nor does it pass on the quality or artistry of a film."

What does all this mean? It means that the film industry decided to issue some guidelines for the parent and general audience before the government or some other agency tried to regulate what films should be released for viewing by the general public.

And that's all the rating system is — a guideline for the public about the general content of a movie.

And the system in theaters where it is enforced is working, according to local theater managers.

The managers add that the system works when people understand it, but not all of the people buying tickets at the box-office care about or are aware of the ratings.

### WHAT DO THE ratings mean?

As a general rule, the G (general) rating is given to films that are suitable for both adults and children, while films with the old M or the new GP rating are designed for a more limited adult and young adult audience. Films carrying an R rating are "restricted" in that anyone under the age of 17 may not attend unless accompanied by a parent or legal guardian. The final category, X, prohibits attendance by anyone under the age of 18.

As a rule of thumb, it's safe to consider that any outright nudity will earn at least an R rating. The X rated films are even more explicit, while the M or GP rating is used to denote a more sophisticated approach than a Walt Disney feature.

G rated films range from the Walt Disney re-issues to productions which can be almost documentary in style such as "The Battle of Britain."

ARE THERE PROBLEMS with the ratings?

Every one of the seven local owners or managers contacted said that the biggest problem with the ratings came from parents.

Numerous managers said that parents frequently drop their youngsters off to see a movie without checking on the rating.

The managers also report resistance from parents, who object to the remainder of the R rating, when purchasing tickets for themselves and their children.

In fact, this problem caused one manager to tell the Observer Newspapers that "we have more trouble with parents than with children." Another said that "parents of 14 and 15-year-old children yell at us when we enforce the rating system."

Part of the confusion is due to the fact that the State of Michigan sets 18 as the age for adults, while the national industry has set the age of 17 for admittance to the X films. Previously the national age level was 16.

One revision announced by the movie industry this week was that 17 years of age would be used as the age limit for entrance to R films with a provision for local option for the age limit on X films.

In spite of the confusion, local managers still believe that the code is doing the job. They say many customers call the box office to check on the rating for a current film.

Leonard Hix, manager of the Quo Vadis Penthouse in Westland, points to the fact that the Green Sheet is ceasing publication after 50 years as proof that the ratings are effective.

The Green Sheet was a monthly publication of movie ratings published by Parents Magazine. It was primarily concerned whether or not films were suitable for children.

BOB HUDSON, manager of the Quo Vadis Theater, says that the ratings "are a step in the right direction, but they are not working as well as they could because many people still don't understand the rating system."

Dorothy Dernik, manager of Livonia's, Mai Kai Theater, says that "many people don't care about the ratings, but for those who do, the system is working."

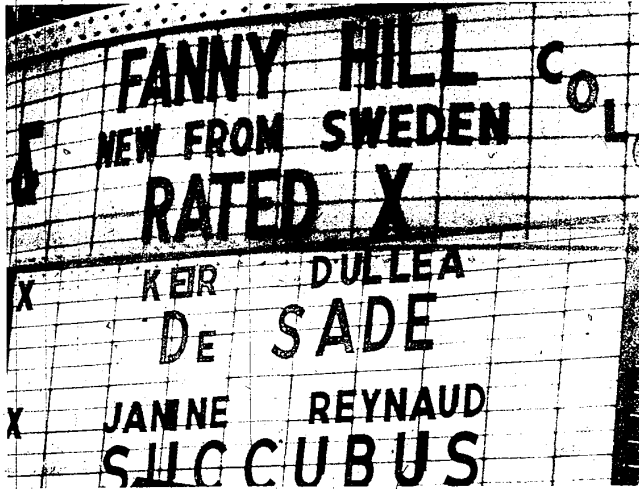
At the Terrace Theater, Manager Grace LuBarr says that the ratings do "the job if it is enforced."

## What Films We're Getting

What type of movies are shown in Observerland theaters? During the past two months, a total of 160 different movies have been advertised in this newspaper. The ratings are:

General family rated — 37, or 23%.  
Mature of GP for general audience with parental discretion recommended — 45, or 27%.  
Restricted to anyone under the age of 18 — 23, or 14%.  
X or banned to anyone under the age of 18 — 13, or 8%, less than one out of 10.

Films carrying no rating, which means, that they were probably released before the system was begun — 44, or 27%.



### MOVIE RATINGS FOR PARENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The objective of the ratings is to inform parents about the suitability of movie content for viewing by their children.

**G** ALL AGES ADMITTED  
General Audiences

**GP** ALL AGES ADMITTED  
Parental Guidance Suggested

**R** RESTRICTED  
Under 17 requires accompanying Parent or Adult Guardian

**X** NO ONE UNDER 17 ADMITTED  
Age limit may vary in certain areas

ALL **G**, **GP**, and **R** FILMS RECEIVE THIS SEAL OF THE MOTION PICTURE CODE OF SELF-REGULATION.

Margaret Wilson, owner of Plymouth's Penn Theater, agrees that the rating works only "in the hands of theater managers that enforce the regulations."

At the Livonia Mall, Cinema Manager Ben Sugameli says that the problem is that the public still "isn't used to the rating classifications."

In Garden City, James Sweeney, manager of LaParisien, says that the system is getting "through to the people who pay attention."

THAT DOESN'T mean that the managers put all the blame on the public. Some of them believe that the rating system could be more effective.

Hudson says that he finds the ratings "arbitrary" and thinks that the standards used by the industry to set the ratings are "hazy."

Miss Wilson said that she thought the 18-year-old age limit on the R films was too restrictive and says she is "delighted" with the new age of 17.

"There are films that the industry has rated R," she explained, "and the Catholic rating (the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures) has rated the same film as A-3 or morally unobjectionable for adults. I think that many of 16-year-olds of today can handle these films better than the 45-year-olds."

(EDITOR'S NOTE: To illustrate this point, we note that the film, "Alice's Restaurant," carried the ratings of R from the industry and A-3 from the Catholic agency.)

Mrs. LuBarr agrees that the rating system could be improved upon, but adds: "Just where is another question."

WHAT'S THE MARKET for films? Film industry pundits point to the tremendous box office success of "The Gradu-

ate" as an indication that today's movie audiences are young adults. That's one of the factors behind the rash of films directed toward the under-30 age group.

There is a great deal of public outcry, however, about the "dirty movies" and the lack of general film entertainment.

Are there any movies made for general audiences and how marketable are they?

When it comes down to the economics of the business, most of the G rated films are not profitable.

Hudson says that the Quo Vadis doesn't book many family films because "nobody comes, and nobody comes because there isn't family entertainment. Which came first the chicken or the egg?" he asks rhetorically.

Mrs. LuBarr says that the basic product is the final determination for the box office figures.

Of all the managers interviewed, only Miss Wilson said that her theater's market increased when showing G films.

She agrees that this is against the national trend in box office figures, but says that she believes that the Penn's location in the center of what is still a relatively small town is a factor.

Mrs. LuBarr reports that the theater often receives comments from parents about their Saturday matinees which are geared for children.

This proves that there is a market for family entertainment, but as Subameli at the Livonia Cinema says: "The product is what determines the box office. If a film doesn't have it, no rating will save the product."

## A Look Inside A Jumbo Jet

Here's a view of the interior of one of the economy sections of the new 747 jumbo jet that was given its first Detroit showing by Pan-American Airlines last week at Metro Airport.

Spacious as this seems, it is only the middle four-seat section. There is a wide aisle on either side with a series of three seats on one side and the windows are on the other. Combination on the other — making the seating arrangement nine abreast.

And big as it is with the tall six stories high and the pilot's cabin 29 feet above the ground, the airline officials claim that this is only the beginning of a whole new era of flying that will mark the next decade.

To get some idea of the size of the big jet, wing spread is much longer than the entire first flight of the Wright Brothers, inventors of the airplane.

(Observer photo)

