

Commentator goes on road in 'Scholar'

BY JOHN MONAGHAN
SPECIAL WRITER

Some might say that Andrei Codrescu already discovered a large chunk of the American dream before even pulling out of the driveway.

After all, the National Public Radio humorist and social commentator couldn't even drive when he was asked to make a movie about a cross-country road trip. And yet here he is, looking quite comfortable behind the wheel of an obscenely long, screaming red 1968 Cadillac convertible.

"Road Scholar" chronicles Codrescu's trip from New York's Ellis Island to San Francisco, with a lengthy stop in Detroit, and it's an engaging 82 minutes. Directed by Roger Weisberg, it plays this weekend at the Detroit Film Theatre.

"All my life I had two claims to fame," Codrescu says. "I was born in Transylvania and I didn't drive a car. The first fact made people naturally assume that I didn't need to drive because I could always use a bat — like a vampire."

Codrescu emigrated to Detroit in 1966, where he resided in the artistic community around Cass Corridor. His return to the Mo-

MOVIES

tor City involves taking his steel and chrome tail-finned motor to its birthplace at a GM factory, where he wisely notes that they don't make Caddies like they used to.

Aside from touring the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Motown Museum, he also visits former neighbor and artist Tracy Guyton shortly after demolition of his controversial Heidelberg Project. He also stops at the Kowalski sausage factory in Hamtramck, which he calls "hell for vegetarians."

The trip takes him farther west, where "Road Scholar" begins its fascination with groups on the edge of the social fringe. He visits Chicago's Holy Rollers, for instance, which performs a louche gospel music while circling a local roller rink.

He sarcastically calls Santa Fe "the land of enchantment," where he is literally bombarded by crystals from a New Age healer and later tours the proprietor calls "a spiritual supermarket."

'All my life I had two claims to fame. I was born in Transylvania and I didn't drive a car. The first fact made people naturally assume that I didn't need to drive because I could always use a bat — like a vampire.'

Andrei Codrescu

Just as Michael Moore let Flint boosters show their inanity in "Roger and Me," the stone-faced Codrescu simply lets the camera roll as people ramble on about their bizarre interests. He doesn't flinch, for instance, when the crystal healer explains that a 10-foot blonde spirit named Ariel has joined them in the room.

Codrescu also makes this a thoughtful and sentimental journey. He visits Haitians squatting in New York City and talks about the ability to speak freely in America and not in his native land. He concludes that the country's diversity only adds to its unique spirit, leaving us with a more or less hopeful message.

For his part, director Weisberg keeps things simple behind the camera, though he does in-

clude in arty neon reflections off the Cadillac's glossy red finish. Don't expect the typical scenic montages, since much of the journey was filmed in the grayness of late winter.

In a nutshell, "Road Scholar" accomplishes exactly what the New Orleans-based Codrescu has done on radio for the past decade. It mixes the sentimental and sarcastic observations of an outsider both befuddled and fascinated by the ever-changing American landscape.

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 48160.



Music mon: Members of the Junk Monkeys are lead guitarist Dave Boutette (from left), bassist Kevin Perri, vocalist/guitarist David Bierman, and drummer Glynn Scanlan.

Junk Monkeys aim for record success

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER

In the late 1980s, the Junk Monkeys were part of a lineup at St. Andrew's Hall which included a few little-known bands — Soul Asylum and Soundgarden. Reflecting on the show, vocalist/guitarist David Bierman has one prediction about it.

"We're going to be the next band off that bill to make it big," he said with a smirk.

Seriously, however, the band is working on that. Since then, the Junk Monkeys were signed to Warner Bros. Metal Blade Records. They've also toured with Tommy Stinson's Bash & Pop, the Goo Goo Dolls and Lunachicks. Touring, he said, is nice because fans take the Dearborn-based band more seriously out of town.

"We've got a different reputation in Detroit than we do elsewhere. When people come, it's a different attitude. People have seen us here quite a few times. We get a little more attention out of town," said Bierman whose band's current album is "Bliss."

The Junk Monkeys have gotten attention in town for their notorious onstage antics. Bierman said band members just get antsy on stage.

"When we're playing the same songs (at every show) there's gotta be an unlit bomb somewhere on stage," Bierman knows too that some

illness may be more memorable. "I know that these people will be talking about this show on Monday if I take off my clothes . . . I've never had any club give me a hard time about it," he said. For their upcoming show this Saturday at Lili's in Hamtramck, the band is bringing the local band Breech and a friend of Bierman's — Magic Bob — to open the show.

"He's a big hit with the 4-8-year-old set. He switched his act around for the sophisticated crowd who comes to see us," he said.

The group's Lili's show is their last until early winter. The band hopes to go into the studio and record their next album. The follow-up to "Bliss" will be a departure for the band. It will include more outside musicians like pianists, organists, and horn section.

But, he said, he's adding the musicians so he'll sell more albums. After all, that's not why the Junk Monkeys are in the business.

"It's not the money that's important to us. A lot of people think it is . . . We like to play, put out music. That makes us happy." Junk Monkeys, with special guests Breech and Magic Bob, perform at Lili's, 2320 Jacob Hamtramck. Cover is \$6. Only those aged 21 and older will be admitted. For more information, call 875-6555.

SCREEN SCENE

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

DETROIT FILM THEATRE
Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 833-2323 for information. (\$5; \$4 students)

"Road Scholar" (USA — 1993), 7 and 9:30 p.m. Aug. 27-28; 4 and 7 p.m. Aug. 29. Transylvania-born and now New Orleans-based Andrei Codrescu takes off in an obscenely long Cadillac on a 4,500-mile journey across the country. The insights of Codrescu, whose regular radio commentaries can be heard on National Public Radio, translate well to the screen.

HENRY FORD CENTENNIAL LIBRARY
13671 Michigan Ave., Dearborn. Call 943-2330 for information. (Free)
"The Gorilla" (USA — 1939), 7

p.m. Aug. 23. Bela Lugosi teams with the 31st Brothers in this likably low-budget mix of comedy and horror.

MAGIC BAG THEATRE CAFE
22918 Woodward Ave., Ferndale. Call 544-3030 for information. (\$3)

"Tribute to Rocky and Bullwinkle," 8 p.m. Aug. 26. The most irreverent episodes from the popular '60s TV cartoon show will be featured, along with vintage toy and cereal commercials.

MICHIGAN THEATRE
603 E. Liberty, Ann Arbor. Call 668-8397 for information and show times. (\$5; \$4 students and senior citizens)

"American Friends" (Britain — 1992), 9:30 p.m. Aug. 23-24; 7 p.m. Aug. 25-26. Monty Python's Michael Palin makes his dramatic film debut as a 19th-century Oxford professor who forsakes his career and social standing to wed

an Irish-American commoner.

"Heavy Metal" (Canada — 1981), 11:45 p.m. Aug. 27-28. Animators from around the world contributed to this series of sexy sci-fi vignettes, most set to rock music.

"Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory" (USA — 1971), 2 p.m. Aug. 29. Gene Wilder plays the title character, who takes children on a tour that proves both fantastical and dangerous. Roald Dahl wrote the screenplay, based on his story. (Admission \$1 for adults, 50 cents kids as part of a special summer Sunday matinee series.)

RABBLES COFFEEHOUSE
22010 Harper Ave., St. Clair Shores. Call 779-0707 for information. (Free)

"Bare science fiction trailers and shorts," 10 p.m. Aug. 23. The title says it all in this collection of oddities curated by Bill Green-shields.

REDFORD THEATRE
17350 Lathrop, Detroit. Call 637-2560 for information. (\$3.50)

"Charlie Chan double feature — 'Charlie Chan at the Opera' (USA — 1936) and 'Charlie Chan at Treasure Island' (USA — 1939), starting at 8 p.m. Aug. 27; 2 and 6 p.m. Aug. 28 (beginning of feature begins a half hour before show times). Two of the best entries in the popular mystery series. In the first, Warner Oland stars as the Oriental super sleuth, battling Boris Karloff. Sidney Toller takes over in 'Treasure Island' animated by magician Cesar Romero. Great fun.

STATE THEATRE
2115 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Call 961-6450 for information. (\$1)

"Wayne's World" (USA — 1991), 9 p.m. Aug. 23. Excellent entertainment for fans of "Saturday Night Live's" public access metal heads.

'Innocent Blood' works — sometimes

BY LEANNE ROGERS
STAFF WRITER

Looking out from the window of her Pittsburgh apartment, Marie sadly reflects on the state of her life. She is lonely and hungry. To the dark-haired pixish creature, people — by that she apparently means men — fall into two distinct categories that never overlap, food or lovers.

In the 1992 film "Innocent Blood," French actress Anne Parillaud ("La Femme Nikita") portrays Marie, a vampire who has moved to the urban jungle and learned to use her environment to cover her hunt for human blood.

Reading about warfare between local gangsters gives her an idea about where to find some likely victims.

The local mob families are waging a territorial war amongst themselves. It provides a perfect cover for a vampire not wishing to attract any attention. One of the hoods, actually an undercover police officer, played by Anthony LaPaglia, bumps into the vampire first. He's polite but it's his sad eyes that keep him from becoming Marie's next entree. One of the other hoods isn't so lucky. A horny, churlish lout, he ends up as the vampire's main course in his car to the strains of Sinatra,

VIDEO

naturally, singing "Witchcraft." Quite appropriate.

The film begins with an interesting premise about the mores of a vampire and how such a creature deals with its existence, living isolated among what would at one time be his friends and family.

Marie always takes the extra steps needed to make sure her victim is dead and not going to head out as a newly created vampire. Problems arise for Marie when the mob boss, played to the

thuggish hilt by Robert Loggia, doesn't stay dead. Instead he starts organizing a new mob family, one consisting of the undead.

"I swear on my mother's eyes he was dead and this ain't no improvement," one perplexed thug comments on his damaged but still moving boss.

It's about this point that the movie starts lapsing into the usual John Landis film, relying heavily on car chases and throw-away jokes when some suspense and plot development are required. The film becomes very reminiscent of Landis' earlier "An American Werewolf in London."

Some of the plot problems are inconsistencies which become annoying. Our vampire heroine rapidly recovers from being shot but the other vampires are killed pretty easily by the same method.

The actors can't be faulted for their efforts. Parillaud is interesting as the vampire who takes a shine to the understandably nervous LaPaglia, who does a nice job with a male version of the girlfriend role. There are some bits that strangely enough work, like Don Rickles as the mob lawyer and a cameo by director Sam Raimi as a meat packer whose late night lunch break is interrupted by a vampire looking for a dark place to take a nap.

"Innocent Blood" is available on tape at local video stores. If you have a question or comment, call LeAnne Rogers at 833-2193 or write her at The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48160.

So innocent:

Anthony LaPaglia is the undercover detective who falls for a vampire, played by Anne Parillaud, in "Innocent Blood."



Cheap Eats from page 8A

Patrons can drink an imported beer from Holland at the Walt's crowded bar, or sip a Spanish coffee out on the front porch. And while they're enjoying their relaxing drinks, locals supply the

entertainment by recounting endless stories about the inn, dating back to its early beginnings. Deserts are rotated on a weekly basis and feature such

goodies as "Chocolate Suicide" (definitely to "die for"), apple cobbler and "Snicker's" pie. The Walt's dinner entrees are quite filling, but make sure you save some room for dessert — even if

you have to share. It's worth it! So grab your partner, jump in the car, take a train, or go by horseback . . . or if all else fails, Walt's Inn. It's a jaunt — but it's worth every extra step.

On the Town

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