

FILM SERIES

Detroit Film Theatre: A winter festival of new and restored films

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Forget the Sundance and the Toronto Film festivals.

In the metro area, there's only one place to see the best of both cinematic worlds year-round — the Detroit Film Theatre. With the onset of the DFT's winter and spring season comes a collection of new films and newly restored classics emanating with heart, simplicity and raw truth.

This season, the theater hosts a complete retrospective of the works of documentary filmmaker Errol Morris, an unconventional filmmaker whose documentaries have influenced change within the genre and among viewers' perceptions of it.

"People tend to think of the documentary as boring, good for you, as someone preaching to you," said Elliot Wilhelm, curator of the Detroit Film Theatre. But Errol Morris crushes those preconceptions.

In the "Gates of Heaven," the filmmaker found inspiration from a newspaper headline he read about a pet cemetery. In researching the issue, Wilhelm explained, Morris discovered a story that goes beyond the limits to explore family dynamics and the quest for the American

Detroit Film Theatre

Where: The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Ave., Detroit. Theater entrance at John R. and Farnsworth St.
Tickets: \$5.50, full-time students with ID, and DIA members with membership card, \$4.50. Discount coupons available in books of five for \$20. To reserve seats, obtain a complete schedule, or for more information on the Winter and Spring 2000 Detroit Film Theatre Series, call (313) 833-3237.

Event: Oscar Night America, Sunday, March 26 at the Roostertail Club in Detroit to benefit the Cinematic Arts Council, which is dedicated to providing support to the DIA's Department of Film and Video and the Detroit Film Theatre. Call (313) 833-7967 for ticket information.

Dream.

With "The Thin Blue Line," Morris made an even bigger impact — on the life of an innocent man sitting on death row. Sticking to what could be a rather morbid theme in his work, Morris uncovers hope. What began as a look at the life of a psychologist and the inmates he examined on death row became a crusade that ultimately freed an innocent man. Wilhelm pointed out that Morris is known for beginning a documentary without regard to where it might end.

By incorporating re-enactments to illustrate eyewitness accounts of the "truth" in this film, Errol Morris "changed the shape of the American documentary," said Wilhelm. "It became accepted that there are different

ways to present the truth... Documentary is something on the edges of real movie-making, and it shouldn't be."

From ground-breaking documentaries to a new voice for silent films, the DFT brings back Cambridge, Massachusetts's own Alloy Orchestra this April — who will premiere original scores for five films.

"The performance will be alive," said Wilhelm, who first discovered the orchestra at the Telluride Film Festival. More than five years ago, he incorporated the Alloy Orchestra into the DFT schedule for an annual appearance. The Detroit appearance has since become the orchestra's single largest draw.

This year, the orchestra will set music to comedies like Charles Chaplin's "Easy Street" and Roland West's 1930 release "The Bat Whispers," the main influence for Batman. The first film with Alloy accompaniment, "South," will be a partially unprovisional score. In some ways, these engagements are a throwback to the early days of film.

"Silent films were never really showed silent," said Wilhelm. "They were always accompanied by some sort of score."

Films like D.W. Griffith's "Birth of a Nation" and "Intolerance" were accompanied by scores to be played with the films, but over the years, some scores, or portions of them have been lost. By including the performance of the Alloy Orchestra, Wilhelm said, the music takes the film "out of the realm of being an antique and brings it to life."

The DFT also gives life to films which may not see the light of day elsewhere with its eclectic Monday Night Series that spotlights the best of feisty independent films and beautifully restored classics.

The 38th Annual Ann Arbor Film Festival Tour — a four-hour showing of the festival's best works — will make a stop on Monday, May 1, to flaunt independent works from across the country in a setting Wilhelm refers to as "The Real Sundance." In the Metro Area, the DFT may be the most diverse, educational, engaging and continuous festival of film as visual artwork.



NORMAN ALEXANDER

Documentary: Fred A. Leuchter Jr. in Errol Morris' "Mr. Death."

A night of theater: Something to see at the DFT

■ **American Movie** (1999: 104 minutes) 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, Feb. 4-5; 4 and 7 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 6.

Meet filmmaker Mark Borchardt. This is the true story of a man who will not give up the fight to make his own horror film, "Coven," despite the lack of a budget and against the odds. Director: Chris Smith.

■ **The Acid House** (1998: 112 minutes) 7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 7.

Set to be a cult classic, the DFT sought to bring it to screen one time — in all its mean-spirited glory. This adaptation of three short stories by "Trainspotting" author Irvine Welsh is strictly for viewers 18 and older. Director: Paul McGuigan.

■ **Rear Window** (1954: 113 minutes) 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday, Feb. 11; 1 p.m., 4 p.m., 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, Feb. 12-13.

Shown for the first time in totally-restored form, this Alfred Hitchcock thriller about voyeurism inspired other legendary directors like Francois Truffaut. What would you do if you witnessed a murder?

■ **The War Zone** (1999: 99 minutes) 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday-Saturday, March 17-18; 4 and 7 p.m. Sunday, March 19.

Actor Tim Roth takes to the director's chair for the first time in this painfully honest look at a family's disintegration in the face of incest. Not appropriate for people under 18.

■ **The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg** (1999: 90 minutes) 7 and 9:30 p.m. Friday, March 31; 1 p.m., 4 p.m., 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, April 1-2.

Metro Detroiters will cherish this documentary of the legendary Detroit Tiger who almost broke Babe Ruth's home run record in the 1930s. Director: Aviva Kempner.

■ **The Edge of the World** (1937: 81 minutes) 7:30 p.m. Monday, April 3.

DFT Curator Elliot Wilhelm calls it a "simple story told with elegance." Michael Powell directed this story of a group of islanders in the North Sea who are forced to move to the mainland.

■ **The Trial** (1963: 119 minutes) 7:30 p.m. Monday, April 10.

The film Orson Welles considered his finest work, "The Trial" is based on Franz Kafka's novel. After 30 years, Welles' missing negative has been found, rescuing this cinematic work.

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