

# Arts & Entertainment

## Bizarre punk fantasy shows creative vision

Review by Steve Abariotes

A wild and decadent surprise awaits those who come to the Sheldon Film Theatre this week to see *Liquid Sky*. The film was directed by Slava Tsukerman, a Russian emigre who came to the United States in 1973. As I watched the film, I couldn't decide exactly how to let it entertain me. It was an intriguing dilemma, to be sure.

*Liquid Sky* is an androgynous, punk rock, science fiction, drug fantasy. Uniquely weird but highly artistic, it is the quintessential film on the punk culture.

The drunken and chaotic day-to-day life for Margaret (Anne Carlisle), a beautiful punk fashion model, is altered even more drastically when a spaceship the size of a dinner plate lands on the roof of her penthouse apartment. The alien is in an inter-galactic search for people who are having sex. When it finds them, it kills the people in the midst of orgasm, using the opiates released in their brains for its own energy.

The alien finds Margaret's active crash pad quite lucrative and decides to stick around for awhile, long enough to zap several of her male and female lovers who invariably climax before she does. Adrian (Paula E. Sheppard) Margaret's roommate, sells heroin to the local junkies from her opium den which overlooks the New York City skyline. Garish decor and neon lights are indiscriminately hung all over the place.

The quality of the acting is a secondary consideration — the actors resemble the characters they portray so much. This is with the possible exception of Carlisle, who plays both the tall, blonde, slender Margaret and her slick male model counterpart "Jimmy." If good actors should truly be androgynous, then Anne Carlisle is an actor's actress, as it were. As Margaret, Carlisle capably conveys a nihilist consumed with anger, rage and erotic passion, all at the same time. She discovers a way to do away with the creeps from the club who raped her, with the help of the alien. When she says, "Let's go back to my place," she means it.



Anne Carlisle and Paula Sheppard in a scene from *Liquid Sky*.

### Contrast adds to effect

The absurdity of the plot together with Margaret's day-glo make-up and her fantastic feathery costumes contrast with her simple vocabulary, which is continually punctuated by four-letter words and the normal dialogue of the film in general. The setting of the film is depicted in such a strange fashion that an ordinary line like "Oh, I forgot, I'm not ready," or "Let's order Chinese!" becomes funny in a twisted way. Whether this comic reaction is intentional or accidental, it works brilliantly and is consistent throughout.

The photography in *Liquid Sky*, which is another term for heroin, is exquisite and breathtaking, and certainly has a mind-altering feel to it. The magnificent telephoto street shots of New York City present a portrait of a total lack of order. Many of the city

shots are composed with an odd symmetry that enhances the strangeness. Director Tsukerman knows how to evoke the humor that can be derived from the manner in which actors and objects are manipulated within the frame, a la Alfred Hitchcock or Roman Polanski.

When we see things from the alien's point of view, we discover that its vision is similar to looking through an ultraviolet, telescopic sight on a rifle. Tsukerman uses some sort of thermographic video photography that changes the normal photographic picture to blazing, high-contrast color images. When we see this effect, we know the space creature is going in for the kill. The thermographic video effect is somewhat reminiscent of a '60s acid trip.

That's where any similarity of punks to hippies ends. According to

### Punks in Outer Space

*Liquid Sky*, directed by Slava Tsukerman; screenplay by Slava Tsukerman; Anne Carlisle and Nina V. Kerova; produced by Slava Tsukerman for Z-Films. At the Sheldon Film Theatre, 12th and R streets through Jan. 26, except tonight and Friday.

Margaret/Jimmy ..... Anne Carlisle  
Adrian ..... Paula E. Sheppard  
Johann ..... Otto von Vernher  
Owen ..... Bob Brady

Adrian, Margaret's small but imposing roommate, they are spurning the false romanticism of the '60s and facing up to the hardness and coldness of reality. As punks, they are taking part in the "theater of life." Unlike the hippies, they don't take themselves so seriously, as long as they know where their next stash is coming from.

### Alien under pursuit

After awhile, a West German astrophysicist comes snooping around on the trail of the space creature. Johann (Otto Von Vernher) is from Berlin, and has been chasing the alien around the world for some time. It just so happens that Margaret and Adrian want to move to Berlin. In order to get a better look at the alien, Johann steals a room at the apartment across the street where Jimmy's mother lives.

All of the characters are related by these minor circumstances. These circumstantial qualities are believable elements that move the plot forward while giving the impression that all of the characters are inter-related in some cosmic and mystical way.

The fascinating soundtrack, featuring atonal synthesized music, adds an ominous feeling to the film. None of the "music" resembles any sort of melody except maybe toward the end where I detected a guitar riff. All of the music was "realized" at the Pass Studios in New York.

*Liquid Sky* is an impressive and creative vision. It is an independently produced film which reportedly cost between \$400,000 and \$500,000 to make, but it looks much more expensive. It is quite pleasant to watch, whether or not you decide to empathize with the characters. It is an artistic film that is entertaining on any level whether you chose to take it seriously or not.

## Cartoonist offers absurd view

Mark Alan Stamaty  
Washington  
Congdon and Weed (\$7.95)

Mark Alan Stamaty is the world's greatest living cartoonist.

I discovered this early my freshman year when I stumbled across copies of the *Village Voice*, an unusual newspaper. I found Stamaty's "Cartoon" was even more unusual.

### Book Review

Instead of the standard satire or cheap laugh or serial, Stamaty dealt with philosophy, psychology and social commentary purely from a detached, absurdist point of view. Many of his comic strips related to his own personal artistic conflicts. Some were just plain weird. But a genius shone through and Stamaty had the artistic ability to fully express ideas which could not be adequately expressed in other media. He raised cartoon drawing to its fullest potential.

After President Reagan took power, though, Stamaty's cartoons took a decisively more political tone. In one strip he has the "idocracy" taking over. One character says to the other: "Since when did you become so political?", to which the other responds "Since they started driving

their Mercedes-Benzes over my life." Or, as he says elsewhere, "The only way to escape is to get rich."

Unfortunately, as good as Stamaty's grasp of political affairs is, his "Washington" is not the apex of his cartooning ability. When I heard about Stamaty coming out with a new collection of cartoons, I was hoping they'd be his older, weirder ones. Nevertheless, *Washington* is a book well worth buying, especially if you have never before seen his work. In the words of the book, it "tells the tale of Congressman Bob Forehead from his creation by charismatics and perceptual engineers to his troubled marriage and his gallant efforts to defend the tycoon sector from oppression by the underprivileged."

Stamaty is a liberal, but his approach is far more novel than that of Garry Trudeau or Jules Feiffer. Stamaty has the ability to reach down and grasp the *real* absurdities in the current state of affairs, not just fire off cheap shots. Reagan is portrayed as he really is — a silly old man, not an evil tyrant. In Stamaty's world politics is dominated by the media, a confused public and generally odd arrangements.

If you can laugh about Reagan getting elected and the nuclear arms race, then Stamaty is a must. If you can't, you'll probably develop an ulcer.

Tom Mockler

## HOTSPOTS

### Television

• The television adaptation of Philip Roth's best-selling novel *The Ghost Writer*, opens the third season of *American Playhouse* (9 p.m., Channel 12). The story tells of a young writer who is forced to come to terms with himself and his creative talents. The production stars Claire Bloom, Mark Linn-Baker, Paulette Smith and Sam Wanamaker. Other productions this season include Sam Shepard's *True West* and Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.

### At the Sheldon

• The Suzuki Method of musical instruction has gained world-wide notoriety for teaching small children to perform intricate classical pieces. A demonstration featuring Lincoln children featuring Lincoln children ages three through 15, will take place tonight at 7:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the Sheldon Art Gallery. Presented in conjunction with the School of Music and the dance department, the program features not only music, but a dance demonstration by Teresa Field and Bob Kamp, two UNL dance students. The two will don costumes made by the theater department. There is no admission charge.

• While you were away, three exhibits opened at the Art Gallery: Chinese Tapestries by Ruth Kao, recent paintings by Gary Day and Chicago: *Some Other Traditions*.

Kao is the Chairperson of the Fibre Department (!) at the University of



Nebraska ETV Network

Claire Bloom, Paulette Smith and Mark Linn-Baker in *The Ghost Writer*. See Television.

Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She has long produced works which reflect the traditions of her native China.

The *Chicago* exhibit, which focuses in the art of the Windy City, is described by Sheldon's Assistant Director Donald Doe as "the third in our City series . . . which focuses on the contemporary art produced . . . in cities around the country which have a vital and sometimes not very well-known community of artists." Other cities featured are Kansas City and Santa Fe.

### Around Town

• Local artist John Walker will bring his unique brand of traditional music to the Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14th St. There is no cover charge.