

# On-the-spot critics get poor review

By Peg Sheldrick

The time has come at last to pay tribute to a vocal but much maligned minority, a group whose activities are often misunderstood, even scorned by the rest of the world.

For too long they've been trying to share the fruits of their knowledge with a public unwilling to listen to their astute, even profound observations.

Hostility and icy stares greet them at every turn. But, motivated only by love for their fellow humans, they raise their voices despite it all with offerings of wit and wisdom.

## humor

I am speaking, of course, of that very special breed, the On-the-Spot Movie Critics (or, as the jealous masses choose to call them, Those Jerks in the Back of the Theater Who Won't Shut Up).

The On-the-Spot Movie Critics have been with us for quite some time, but until recently their services were only available at midnight movies, on football Saturdays, or in the privacy of their own homes.

But now, at almost any evening showing, wherever two or three are gathered in the name of cinema, the On-the-Spotter can be counted on to contribute to the evening's fun in their own special way.

PERHAPS YOU HAVE been lucky enough to attend a show with one or two of them in the audience. If you haven't, you can easily recognize them by the generous help they are always offering the rest of the crowd.

For example, they are always there to read the opening credits out loud for the hard-of-hearing, careful to drown out that boring, dopey mood music with their own melodious voices.

Speaking loudly enough so that no one in the theater misses a word, they offer amazing insights regarding the scenes before them ("Oh wow, man! That's really gross!"). They also favor patrons with refined, articulate commentary on the quality of the actors and actresses on screen ("Oooo ee! She sure has a nice butt!").

And they point out, in full voice, many small technical flaws that no one else would detect, such as the sound going completely off, the picture being totally out of focus, or the film itself breaking in two. The unschooled viewer seldom notices such subtleties.

You would think with all the vocal assistance these budding Rex Reeds offer, the audience would be glad to have them around. After all, it's terribly inconvenient to wait 'til after a movie to hear a critique—so much better to observe the fine points as they come along.

STRANGELY ENOUGH, however, people are actually ungrateful for these services. They often urge silence from the critics with harsh words or hostile glares. In fact, some patrons go so far as to say rude things to the would-be mentors.

But our heroes are ready for them, hollering back such withering flashes of wit as, "Make me!" and "Aw, kiss off!"

It isn't easy to reach this pinnacle of brilliance. It takes years of throwing popcorn, staging fights in the aisles, and barfing from the balcony at countless kiddie matinees to grow up into a really first rate On-the-Spot Movie Critic.

(Of course, it is possible to start late—anyone with a

fifth of scotch, an irritating voice, and a will to succeed can make up for years of lost training. Just remember that you are the most important person in the theater, that everyone is waiting anxiously to hear what you think, and then use that inborn talent and sing out!)

Yes, it takes a special kind of person to be On-the-Spot Movie Critic, someone gutsy, determined, and above all honest. It's a dirty job, but somebody's got to do it.

AND I SAY it's high time we, the rest of the public, take time out to thank these crazy, wonderful folks. I think we should let them know exactly what we think of them.

The next time we're at a showing blessed by such a divine presence, I think we should all gather 'round and give our friend a pat on the back. Five or six hundred thankful thuds should do it.

I think we should offer our roving reviewer popcorn, and even help him ingest it—perhaps through his nose so that his mouth is free to keep talking.

Or, best of all, maybe we can all join together to give our chum the kind of attention he literally is crying out for—we can hoist him on our shoulders and parade him right out of the theater, thus relieving him of the necessity of wasting his time entertaining everyone else, and allowing us all to see if absence really does make the heart grow fonder.

It's worth a try.

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