

arts/entertainment

Confusing, surprising film looks at inner thoughts

By Jennifer Bauman

8½, directed by Federico Fellini (1963), is centered on the activities of a filmmaker named Guido (played by Marcello Mastroianni).

Guido wants to create a pure artistic statement through film, and it is this that occupies much of his thought. He is seen engaged in typical director's tasks—visiting the sets and production office and viewing screen tests.

movie review

Interwoven with these duties are glimpses of Guido's mental activities. His anxious memories of his childhood and his fantasy life inspire many of his themes. As Guido's consciousness focuses upon these inner visions, the visions are translated to the screen. Movement between different levels of consciousness is so fluid that it is often ambiguous exactly where the shifts come.

Fantasies become obsessions

In addition to thoughts about his film, Guido is tormented by many aspects of his personal life. The very memories and fantasies that are fuel for artistic inspiration are also specters that bedevil him. Guido is obsessed with his dead parents; he imagines visiting their tombs, sees them watching the world from their positions of confinement.

His adolescent years and his first sexual experience also occupy Guido's mind, creating scenes that are reminiscent of Fellini's *Amarcord*. He is uncertain and guilty about his feelings toward the Catholic Church and its role in Italian society

as well as in his own life.

Guido is also having problems juggling the time and affections of his wife and mistress. He thinks much about his relationships with the two women, as well as harboring a running fascination with a mysterious woman in white.

Finally, Guido is having health problems and is under a physician's care. Like so many people undergoing a sickness, he thinks much about medical examinations and medicine.

Attitude formation examined

8½ examines how these various parts of Guido's life come together to form his collective attitudes and his creative process. As Guido struggles to make his artistic

statement from many loose strands, he also is influenced by criticism he receives (or imagines he will receive) from the Church and his colleagues.

Fellini is an important director who uses surrealism and subjectivity as central qualities of his films, and *8½* is a widely-known and influential piece of cinema. As he has in many of his other films (*Juliet of the Spirits*, *Satyricon*), Fellini uses exaggeration and unorthodox juxtapositions of objects and themes to create a sense of fantasy and surrealism.

Aspects of people in his memory—the severity of the ecclesiastics who sat in judgment of him, the earthy sensuality of a woman to whom he was attracted during his adolescent years—are heightened to

grotesque degrees.

Fellini shows a conversation with a Cardinal in a mud bath, and a cabaret show on a set constructed to look like a missile launching site. Such incongruous combinations are presented matter-of-factly as if Fellini does not regard them as any more absurd than anything else he has experienced.

Mental process important

What is most important to Fellini is Guido's mental process. In the final analysis, it is not even important to know if Guido is actually making a film at all or not. As the audience contemplates Guido's activities, certain parallels with Fellini's role as a director and screenwriter become apparent.

Guido is not intended to be a surrogate Fellini, but methods of learning and seeing and creating are at issue. What Guido experiences shares some common ground with what Fellini goes through in his filmmaking.

If *8½* is sometimes confusing, it is always surprising. From time to time, it is difficult to decide whether or not Fellini is serious. His attitude toward women, for instance, seems exploitive unless it is understood as a satire on a specific set of values as represented by Guido's mindset.

Fellini is ambiguous about such specific attitudes in *8½*. Likewise he leaves it up to the viewer to decide if the film is just a melee of episodes without any philosophical statement, or whether there is something of depth to be taken from it. Regardless of which light *8½* is taken in, it is full of fine details and surprising images that are fun to watch.

8½ is showing at the Sheldon Film Theater Friday through Monday. Screenings will be at 7 and 9:30 p.m. with weekend matinees at 3 p.m.



Photo courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive

Pictured is Guido, the central character in Federico Fellini's movie, *8½*, showing at the Sheldon Film Theater starting Friday.

Wainwright music appeals to the 'sick at heart'

By Michael Zangari

There is an element of benign cynicism that is fashionable in recording right now. Any darkness that makes its way into wax with any punch is usually quickly buried.

The glaring exception to the rule has been the work of Pink Floyd, and the album *The Wall* must sound like fingernails scraped across the blackboard to proponents of "happy feet" music.

backtracks

Pink Floyd does not have the corner on the market, however. For several years now, guerrilla folkie Loudon Wainwright III has been jumping from the brush with the darkest humor and most vitriolic bile available. His stuff represents the closest any rock artist has been to living publicly on the edge.

The key to each album has been the question of his survival to the second side without chucking it and climbing a bell tower with a rifle and taking pot shots at the passers-by. He makes Warren Zevon look like a Girl Scout loaded down with cookies.

If the name sounds vaguely familiar, it is because of his fluke hit "Dead Skunk In The Middle Of the Road," an ecological love song about the only creature that has the power to fight back (even in death) against human invasion into the wilds.

"Hold your nose that ain't no rose. . ." Wainwright sings, and you know it's true.

According to *Rolling Stone*, his Atlantic recordings contain his least comic, most morbid material, and his Artists albums have his most freakish and bitter material. I find all those qualities running rampant through his entire library.

Wainwright has seven albums out that I know about, but, for this peek, we'll concentrate on two of them.

Album III, (The "Dead Skunk" album) is probably his finest work. In addition to his golden bisquit, we come across the "Muse Blues," a yearning lament for the lack of inspiration that leads our hero to drink, cocaine, and finally to slugging electrodes into his brain to get him to produce artistically. Wainwright virtually cries the haunting refrain out like a banshee. "Oh muse, where are you?"

He evidently decides that it's not worth the effort—in "Red Guitar," he stomps his instrument to pieces and burns it in his living room as the culmination of an argu-

ment with his wife. A photograph of a mangled and burnt red Gibson adorns the back of the album, leading us gullible romantics to believe that Wainwright wasn't kidding; he *does* live this way.

Maybe that's why we get the divorce songs and the love laments on *Unrequited to the Nth Degree*.

I must say I prefer this album simply because side two is live, featuring him as a solo artist, unadorned and entirely upfront.

Included are a good sampling of his live style, funny but disturbing. Aside from the pointlessly obscene "Hardy Boys at the Y" the songs are pointed. He lampoons a guru in California, tourists and society, but his best material remains personal.

"Mr. Guilty" is a song that starts off as an apology for his being such a creep, but twists slowly around to be an

indictment of his beloved for allowing herself to be abused. A "funny" song that hits like a knife in the back.

"Refus is a Tit Man" is actually fairly pleasant. Despite the title's immediate connotations, it's a nice ramble written for his new-born son, who spends long hours at his mother's breast. The song ends with Wainwright nostalgic for simpler times. He wants to be on the other breast.

"Unrequited to the Nth Degree, with the famous laugh-a-long chorus (he sang it on an episode of *MASH*) is a last-ditch effort to get attention, by dying.

Finally, the album ends with a truly unfunny song called "Old Friend." It's a song about people who have nothing left to share, even though they "kiss the past's ass all night long."

Wainwright is Dylanesque broken glass for the truly sick at heart.

Enthusiasm and technical emphasis make Pennsylvania Ballet a winner

By Penelope Smith

Ballet companies can be ephemeral things. They can, for all their value, good intentions and the enthusiasm of their dancers, fade in a year or two, never to be seen again.

dance review

The Pennsylvania Ballet is not such a company. From its beginning in 1962 it has held out through thick and thin in the world of dance-funding paucity to become one of America's leading professional ballet companies.

In its opening night performance last night at Kimball, what the Pennsylvania has going for it was apparent. Enthusiastic young dancers displayed a fine attention to craftsmanship and the visual technical quality of each movement. Such quality leads to fine performances that the audience will return again and again to see. This is very important in a company like the Pennsylvania because it is not a company of stars. In fact, most of the members of their company seem evenly matched in terms

of technique and development. They must present a unified presence rather than rely upon the dash of an individual "super dancer."

The first work on Monday night's program was George Balanchine's "Allegro Brillante" choreographed to Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No. 3. This abstract piece gave a good chance to see the style of the company because the San Francisco performed the same work when it was in Lincoln last March.

The Pennsylvania Ballet has a more fluid lyrical quality than the San Francisco. Technically the two companies are equal but, while the San Francisco stressed a sharp attack and a certain athleticism, the Pennsylvania Ballet was more subtle with a light, smooth quality in the movement and intricate, precise footwork.

"Concerto Grosso," choreographed by Charles Czarny to the deliciously ornate "Concerto Grosso in D Opus 6 No. 5" by George Frederick Handel, is one of the Pennsylvania Ballet's standards. The work is a comic piece consisting of variations on different types of sports. Monday the variations included a "warm up," "shadow boxing," "skating," "the tightrope," "soccer" and "the karate minuet." The audience loved this work, especially "the tightrope walker."

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