

# arts/entertainment

## Student filmmakers portray varied backgrounds

By Cydney Wilson

Tonight 10 university students will show their films at Woods Hall from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. The films, made in connection with Art 265, are from a beginning filmmaking class taught by Dr. Edward Azlant.

Azlant, who splits teaching duties between the art and English departments here at UNL, said the class is "as close to the first course taught in most major film schools."

"It's a different approach to films. We're looking at it with the widest eye, looking at it as an art medium." It is not a class in cinematography, Azlant said, or strictly documentary films which are more television oriented and leaning toward journalism, it's more of an art form.

Of the 10 films which are being presented, most are narrative films. In the class, each student must make three films—a documentary, a formal film which can be abstract, and a narrative film.

Mark Coniglio, a freshman music major from Omaha, feels that the three different types of films are important because "each form takes you through a different route."

There were no restrictions on possible topics for any of the films assigned.

"The heart of the matter is that each film must tell a story. Because of some financial restrictions, each film must state the topic as clearly and economically as they can. Also, the fact that the films are done in Super 8 or

silent film is another restriction," Azlant said.

### Scary but good

The films of each class member are critiqued by the rest of the class from start to finish. Jackie Maurstad, a senior art major from Lincoln, said this was scary, but good.

"You're not allowed to say anything until they're done," Coniglio said, "and that's hard at first, and really frustrating, because you can see in your head what you are going to do, and they're just dealing with the facts."

Members of the class come from all different areas of study. Some are English majors who took classes from Azlant in the English department (film study classes, film history and film criticism), journalism students looking at a different approach to films other than news formats and art students.

Coniglio said he felt the varied background really helped.

"It lets you see more points of view and the criticism is much better," he said.

Each background of study was highlighted by the three different assignments, he said.

"For example the journalism majors did a super job on the documentary," he said, "and the art majors with their color sense were best featured on the formal film."

### Get out and do it

"I'm a music major," he said, "and the reason that

I'm taking this class is because editing film is very much like music. It involves rhythm, tempo and blending images. I'm interested in scoring music for films, and I think this will give me a better understanding."

Jackie Maurstad said she became interested in this class after taking a film history class.

"I became interested in the whole filmmaking experience and I wanted to learn in a practical, experiential way," she said. "I wanted to understand what they're doing in films. Since this class I've found that there's so much more to see. It's creative, it's not just a technical process."

"You start seeing things you never realized were there before" Coniglio said, "and you start noticing what it really takes to put a film together. In Azlant's class we don't just learn the principles but we get out there and do it."

Film is fast becoming a major part of the world of media, whether it's in art or journalism. Azlant said he wants students on this campus to have the opportunity to take a film class without having to go far away.

"Film is not just a fad or a frill," he said, "with the coming of film and the new kinds of media that are developing with it."

## Series debuts with blues

"33rd Street Sessions," a new, locally produced music series featuring "homegrown" music from Nebraska groups, premieres with the blues of "Little Jimmy Valentine and the Heart Murmurs," Thursday at 7:30 p.m. on NETV. The program will be repeated Saturday May 9 at 10:30 p.m.

The Heart Murmurs, who play traditional blues as well as rhythm and blues and rock'n' roll, perform a variety of songs, including "Standing at the Crossroads," "One Way Out," "In The Evening" and "Get Your Business Straight." The 30-minute program was taped before a live audience in the Nebraska ETV studios.

The four-piece blues group features Sean Benjamin, guitar and vocals; Jim "Cid" Cidlik, piano and vocals; Dave Kasik, bass guitar; and Marc Wilson, drums.

"Little Jimmy Valentine and the Heart Murmurs" was one of four groups chosen to be featured on the first four programs of the 33rd Street Sessions series. Other groups appearing on the musical series in May will include "The Neoclassic Jazz Orchestra," the rock group "Blackberry Winter" and the bluegrass band "The Sandy Creek Pickers."

33rd Street Sessions is a production of the cultural affairs unit of University of Nebraska Television. Producer for the series is Gene Bunge, with Michael Farrell, producer/director for the "Little Jimmy Valentine and the Heart Murmurs" program. Luise Fuzy is unit director for the series, with Art Kuhr, scenic design; Dan Wright, sound mixer and Foster Collins, lighting design. The series is financed in part by Nebraskans for Public Television, Inc.



Photo Courtesy of NETV

## Movie critic's authority comes with experience

By Pete Schmitz

I often am asked, "What makes your opinion about movies so valuable?" My only response to this is that my opinion about movies is, for the most part, no more valuable, or right, than the observations of any other person who truly is interested in film. The only thing that distinguishes me from the rest, is that I choose to express my feelings on paper. Period.

### Movies have message

The topic of "objectivity" versus "subjectivity" is another big concern among readers and writers. Let me say that a good critic recognizes and embraces a "slip-page" between the two. On the one hand, most films are made with a specific intent and message in mind. Even

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the ones that are made only for commercial appeal must have some gimmick to catch an audience. But on the other hand, each of us gets something a little bit different out of a movie because our unique experiences shape our perception. If you don't believe this, try seeing a movie that you saw 10 years ago.

I can guarantee that it will be a totally different experience for you. In junior high I saw *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* with some friends and hated it; two years ago I watched it on television and became convinced that it was a masterpiece.

### Exposure brings objectivity

But while I'll never deny the importance of subjectivity (even choosing what film to review is a subjective decision), I can say that exposure will render more objectivity, as well as a greater knowledge of film, to the viewer.

My biggest criticism from others is that I focus on the

political and sociological aspects of film without giving equal consideration to its aesthetic qualities. To this, I plead guilty as charged, but without shame.

Although I view film as an art, I recognize it as a political act, as well as an attempt to represent reality in some way (even the expressionistic film-makers, whose art lies in the distortion of reality, must rely on a reality to distort). When most audiences view a certain director's or writer's reality as given, then it is the duty of the critic to judge how the film-maker imposes his or her vision on the audience.

### Subjective decision

And as for film-maker's objectivity, I would say that those who claim to be are lying. Choosing what to film, how to film it, and how to put it together, are all subjective decisions that are balanced, usually for the worse, by what the public wants to see.

When asked, "What's wrong with film today?", I am hard put for a simple answer, but there is one plausible explanation. Film, unlike many other art forms, is a very expensive pursuit. Even the little 12-minute piece, done by a student, may run up to \$200 or more.

While it is possible to write a story, paint a picture, or compose a poem without an extensive monetary investment on the part of the artist and his/her sponsors, making a movie requires a lot of money and collective energy. In fact, the expense of making a movie practically requires that one make a movie to make money. To do this, one often must appeal to the lowest common denominator.

And television is where films are headed. To recover costs and guarantee a profit, movies must now rely on television and cable sales. And in order to guarantee a television sale, a movie must look more like a television show. Today films are increasingly casting television stars (e.g., John Travolta, Robin Williams, Chevy Chase and Mary Tyler Moore). They are shot to fit the small screen (this is true in the case of the more acclaimed movies such as *Kramer Versus Kramer* and *Ordinary People*), and they are edited with commercial breaks in mind.

Studios even go so far as to demand a separate "movie

ending" and "television ending." My prediction is that the television factor in movie-making will destroy the careers or integrity of such directors as Woody Allen, Hal Ashby, John Huston, Robert Altman, John Cassavettes, and Martin Scorsese.

Finally, people often will tell me, "But analyzing a movie takes all the fun out of it." This is true for bad movies. And if I have ruined any enjoyment that you might have derived from something like *Caddyshack* or *Ordinary People*, all I can say is that I am glad.

If movies are to get any better, we all will have to analyze them and play the part of the critic, whether we do it in print or just among friends.

## Grace Slick back in Starship album

Review by Pat Higgins

The Jefferson Starship, of all people, have released a new album called *Modern Times* and it is a surprisingly listenable record.

The big news is that Grace Slick has rejoined the band after an extended leave of absence.

She sings lead on "Familiar Stranger" (intended for Paul Kantner?) and backing vocals on the other songs which brings back those soaring harmonies of times past. However, the basic sound of Jefferson Starship 1981 is mainstream FM rock. Gone are the psychedelic excesses of the always overrated *Airplane*, or the sappy middle-of-the-road love songs that Marty Balin was cranking out for the easy listening set. Incidentally, Balin's replacement is Mickey Thomas, who did the vocals on Elvin Bishop's "Fooled Around and Fell in Love." He has a decent set of pipes. *Modern Times* is the closest the Jefferson Starship have been to conventional rock as we know it.

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