

arts/entertainment

Concept film challenges concentration of viewers

By Chuck Lieurance

The audience at the screening seemed extremely confused by Karel Reisz's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, for one special reason: the film proposes a concept, and audiences have very rarely been forced to deal with that, especially in the American cinema. The concept comes into play the minute we realize that Harold Pinter's screenplay has done more than recreate John Fowles' novel of the same name.

movie review

Pinter has also built an analogous story inside a story. He has written the tale of Sarah Woodruff and Charles Smithson, two Victorian lovers tainted by Sarah's scarlet past. He has derived from this a parallel universe containing Anna (the actress playing Sarah in the film being made) and Mike (the actor who is playing Smithson).

At first it seems as though this other plot is just there to save us from the beautiful, sentimental period piece that would become too gushy if let undefined, but towards the middle of the film the two plots begin to add to one another in odd ways.

One, Fowles' novel is the story of a modern woman

Houserockers fill gap in working-class rock

By Pat Higgins

"It's the working life" — Bruce Springsteen
"Work real hard, you might get ahead but I doubt it"
—Iron City Houserockers

It's not necessary to have a blue-collar job to be able to relate to working class rock and roll. Anybody who has ever been trapped in a boring, nowhere job of any kind knows that the concept of living for the weekend is a reality.

album review

In the late '60s, hippies and working class kids were totally incompatible culturally. However, in today's new traditionalism there has been a role reversal. Collegiate have become clean-cut and job-oriented while the chemical-ingesting longhairs are typically railroad workers crying into their beer to Springsteen ballads.

The ultimate personification of working-class rock was Lynyrd Skynyrd, a band who was loud, tough and good. They were best symbolized by whiskey, guns and pickup trucks, but now they're gone.

The Iron City Houserockers were worthy successors to Lynyrd Skynyrd, and they already make better records than almost any other mainstream band. Last year they released *Have a Good Time - But Get Out Alive*, which was one fine album. This year's model, *Blood on the Bricks* is even better. The Iron City Houserockers aren't millionaire lightweight who crank out dumb odes to hedonism or equally meaningless drivel. Instead, they are concerned with serious realities.

The Iron City Houserockers came from Pittsburgh and seem obsessed with working in steel mills. They may not have read *Das Kapital*, but they have an instinctive grasp of the concept of alienation from labor that most Marxists would envy.

The Iron City Houserockers are probably the ultimate bar band, as they are the derivative of a lot of other artists. Perhaps the best way to describe them is Elvis Costello backed by the J. Geils Band, or maybe a less melodramatic Springsteen.

The key weapon for the Houserockers is vocalist and songwriter Joe Grushecky. His main theme is that there is no easy way out, but don't give up no matter what happens.

Blood on the Bricks is more of an emotionally down record than the last one. Grushecky seems nervous about aging and blown opportunities. The only possible redemption is the power of love, but Grushecky's baby seems to walk out on him a lot in these songs.

The band is good, particularly Gil Snyder on keyboards, who throws in references to everything from "96 Tears," to "Armed Forces." Plus the songs are fast and loud.

The first tune, "Friday Night," sets the premise for the rest of the record. Pay your dues doing the eight-to-five routine in order to explode into the night and find something a bit more meaningful, such as fun or love.

The most positive cut is "No More Loneliness," which quotes a bunch of classic songs and is even cheerful.

Because it takes Springsteen forever to put out a new record and Elvis Costello's new album is all country, *Blood on the Bricks* is a more than adequate substitute.

trapped in a system of oppressive ethics that will not allow her the freedom to be anything but a whore. In the second plot we see Anna, played with rewarding care by Meryl Streep, as the outcome of Sarah's struggles, an unfathomably complex entity that confuses Mike even more than it confused Charles.

Mike and Charles seem to have retained virtually the same set of values and a romantic optimism, whereas Sarah/Anna shows the change the years have brought. Anna is the product of all of the confusions over roles and social attitudes.

The second relationship is even more conceptual, if it is not just playfulness on the part of Pinter. There is a scene in which Anna's husband and Mike are discussing Fowles' novel and the fact that it has two endings, a happy ending and a sad ending, and lets the audience choose whichever satisfies them most. Anna's husband asks Mike which ending was chosen for the film. Mike replies that both endings were chosen and then adds, "Haven't you heard?" mysteriously.

This statement immediately crosses the boundaries of the concept. It was complicated enough to put the filming of the story into the story itself and show the actors' similarities to the characters. But when the ending comes and the tale of Anna and Mike acquires the sad ending and the Woodruff/Smithson tale ends in an embrace, the statement by Mike takes on a number of rather ambiguous meanings.

It could almost be a way of showing Anna and Mike somehow as hopeless victims of reincarnation, knowing that their happiness was very real in the past but also knowing it could never be repeated under modern circumstances. In the end of the film Mike yells "Sarah!" to the fleeing Anna, seeming to be quite unsure with whom he has fallen in love.

These two plot lines cross over many times in the film. At times, the new fashions Anna is wearing resemble Sarah's and many of the scenes in the modern world are played in Victorian settings. This enhances the confusion that Mike and Anna are feeling. In the happy ending that is occurring in Charles and Sarah's world, there are still hints of the sadness about to descend in Anna and Mike's world. Thus one story is never completely unaffected by the other.

Pinter and Reisz have created one of the best films of the year and certainly the most fascinating. It speaks on every subject from Victorian love and ethics to modernization and the lines between what is film and what is reality.

The French Lieutenant's Woman is also a fulfilling and complete achievement for the cast. Streep, who was seriously overrated in her past performances (see *Kramer vs. Kramer*) is finally showing her talent. It is certainly to par with any actress working today and above most.

Perhaps the idea of the film challenging its audience is returning, and *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is certainly a challenge.



The Iron City Houserockers

Photo courtesy of MCA Records

Bump Fuzz plays hot but acts cool

By Bob Crisler

In the never-ending quest for supremacy in the regional rock'n'roll coolness sweepstakes, Omaha group Bump Fuzz suffered a major setback Saturday night at the Drumstick.

Not that the band is actually bad. On the contrary, their dissonant rhythms and prominent use of violin are welcome departures from the usual bass, drums, rhythm and lead setup.

nightlife

But these guys lost all of their cool when they showed up in a chauffeur-driven Caddy limo. A pitiful attempt to appear chic, when real savvy might dictate a beat-up '57 Chevy Nomad with rotting upholstery and rusted fenders.

Bump Fuzz travels with an entourage, when a single mental defect might do. I'm sure it's all in the name of professionalism, but this is a jaundiced view of how things should be run. It follows in the Neil Bogart/Don Kirshner school of stardom: the pursuing of media exposure with all the tact and style of advertising salesmen.

With Bump Fuzz, the problem is not the product but rather the packaging.

The band itself is one of the most interesting to appear on the local modern music scene in quite some time. They put out a healthy dose of original material notable for its quirky eclecticism. They also produce a true-to-the-original version of Talking Heads' "Psycho Killer" and an interesting aberration on David Bowie's "Diamond Dogs" foundation.

Guitarist Stinky Wees said he sees those artists, and others, merely as part of a collective experience, rather

than influences to follow.

"We're not patterning our band after anything. People bill us as new wave or rock'n' roll, but they call us whatever they want," Wees said.

Violinist Achmed-74 does admit to one inspiration, however — the Adams Family theme.

Conventional venues to fame and fortune don't have too much allure in Wees' estimation, specifically FM radio.

"I don't think too highly of FM radio. You know, a lot of people won't like something unless it's pounded into their head. It doesn't bother me that our kind of music doesn't get played on the radio. It'd be nice to do it, but you'd want to do it with your own integrity."

Instead, Wees looks at success as the end result of proficient creative artistry, rather than advertising or other media exposure.

"If you record some songs, or an album, you become known by what you do, not how much you can hype it," Wees said. Success is determined by the intrinsic value of something artistic, rather than how many copies it sells, he said.

Lyrical meaning should be nebulous in Wees' mind. "You can't tell people what songs are about," he said. "That's what's great about so many artistic things. You leave it up to their imagination. It's all images — what they form in their mind. You give them a vague image, and they interpret. And that's what makes great music. There's albums I can go home and listen to, and find something new every time."

This amalgamation of Catholic, vegetarian non-smokers has only been in existence for six months, and already they are an encouraging element in the cultural void we call Nebraska. But this fake Hollywood pretentiousness has got to stop. People will become alienated if the Bump Fuzz is seen cruising by in the lap of luxury, while their fans' heating bills have yet to be paid.