

Arts & Entertainment



Photo courtesy of Sheldon Theatre

Sally Cruikshank

"Quasi's Cabaret"

Old cartoons influence Cruikshank's fantasies

By David Thompson

"I'm trying to create an upbeat vision of things," Sally Cruikshank has said, "trying to create images that would delight me."

Cruikshank finds this delight by creating cartoons, technicolor dreamworlds where one can bring any number of oddities to life through the combination of motion, character and time.

Cruikshank's dreamworld is an interesting one, and it will come alive tonight and Friday night at the Sheldon Film Theatre in a retrospective of her films. Moviegoers will have the opportunity not only to examine her animated wonderland but also to ask her about its creation, as Cruikshank will attend both screenings.

Her cartoons are born of a fascination with those 1930s "Merrie Melodies" that everyone used to enjoy in the old days before "Tarzan" and "The Super Seven." Cruikshank loves all those dancing animals. She loves to watch Popeye beating up Brutus and Betty Boop wiggling her cartoon hips. These little snippets have psychological significance, different from Wile E. Coyote's antics with gadgets like rocket-powered roller skates, and it is from these cartoons of the past that

Cruikshank draws her inspiration.

A few oldies are included in the retrospective to serve as a reference point. Cruikshank claims she was not addicted to these cartoons as a child, but when she saw them again as an adult they "really struck some memory chord from long

ago."

The influence is clear, especially in Cruikshank's later films. Her first film, "Ducky," was made in 1971 while she was studying art at Smith College in Massachusetts. With its primitive watercolor drawings and its choppy motion, "Ducky" is more an adventure for the eye than any sort of story. An odd parade of images bursts forth from Cruikshank's imagination, mostly centered on a baby whose face is constantly changing from one bizarre form to another.

Another of her early films, "Fun on Mars," also made in 1971, was the result of Cruikshank's move to San Francisco.

"At first, I was bowled over by the differences between New England and California," she has said in previous interviews.

The film is full of highways, roller coasters, tourists and condos, all dancing about in the Disneyland atmosphere to a song that extolls the California philosophy: "If you want happiness, just help yourself to some."

From these earlier films, Cruikshank moved into a more advanced technique known as "cel" animation in which pictures are painted on layers of celluloid with bright vinyl colors.

"Quasi at the Quackadero," made in 1975, and "Make Me Psychic," made in 1978, concern an odd little duck-like creature named Quasi and his sidekick Anita.

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Flash, Gonzo, Jimin-i, Animal strip for Lincoln

By Terry Field and Kris Saalfeld

"Everyone should go once. It's just like trying marijuana. You gotta get loose. This may be taboo, but it's harmless."

These were the words of UNL business student Janice York as she watched Thursday night's show of male strippers at the Downstairs Lounge in the Clayton House, 10th and O streets.

According to John MacDonald, lounge manager, the

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male strip shows have been performed at the Downstairs every Tuesday and Thursday since June.

"We planned these shows for the college market," he said. Business has increased, too, in the past couple of weeks. Our largest crowd was 95 people."

How did MacDonald find his dancers?

"I was looking for guys to do my show and through word of mouth, Flash, Gonzo, Jimin-i and Animal (the dancers' stage names) showed up, willing to work."

Jimin-i described the stripper routine as a show with four stages and four songs. Each dancer returns to the floor four to five times during the evening.

In the first stage, the dancer starts his act by tantalizing the audience with body movements. During the second stage, he removes his shirt and unzips his pants. Each article of clothing is removed as his dance continues until finally, in the fourth stage, he removes his A-string (a Speedo-type suit) to entertain the audience with his G-string.

"I love it," said Jimin-i, a former disk jockey. "I consider it an art, a real sport. Not everyone can do it."

"It's fun," Gonzo agreed. "I feel good that the audience likes what I'm doing and appreciates me for it."

Another dancer, Flash, who described himself as "thirty-ish," sees the show differently.

"Our dancing is therapeutic for society. Women have been deprived for a long time. This lets them be themselves. And it's good for men, too. They see that there's

not much to it. Sometimes they get jealous, but in the end they appreciate what we're doing."

Flash continued, "It's good for me too. It's an outlet after a hard day of work."

Animal, 22, said he enjoys the dancing but cited instances when women, especially older ones, have been too aggressive.

"We have a clean show. We haven't been busted or closed down. One of the stringent rules we are bound to is that the women must not have any physical contact with the dancers. And the dancers cannot go anywhere past the lower part of the stage when dancing."

The stage is a small, raised wooden platform in the center of the dimly lit basement room. Tables with chairs jut out from the edge of the stage like the legs of a spider.

Onlookers can reach out to the rhythmic dancers from the closest chairs. But often, as they reach holding a dollar to "tip" the dancer, he will taunt them by backing up just out of the tipper's grasp.

What does the audience think of the dancers? Asking to remain anonymous, one woman from California explained that Californian shows have more male applicants, which causes more competition for the jobs and produces better dancers.

"Compared to Nebraskan dancers, Californian strippers usually do not hold a second job. This is their only source of income." "But," she said, "the male dancers here pamper the audience and circulate to focus on all the tables. They make an effort to know their audience on a friendly basis."

Another viewer in her early 60s said she enjoyed the dancers.

"I'm not offended by their gestures," she said. "But, I'm waiting for the gray-haired strippers myself."

The UNL students in attendance seemed to thoroughly enjoy the show.

"There's nothing wrong with a good male body," York said. "They must display talent though, not just sexual gestures. As for some of the dancers' movements, they can really offend our tastes."

Gonzo defended the dancers, saying, "Suggestive movements are the main reason people come to see us. But we won't take it all off. If we did, nothing would be left to the imagination."



Staff photo by Dave Bentz

Male strippers entertain at the Downstairs.