

Arts & Entertainment

Film at Sheldon predictable, good

By David Thompson

The original title of "Cutter's Way" was "Cutter and Bone." The film has wandered from the shelving room of United Artists, through redistribution and will emerge as "Cutter's Way" at Sheldon, where it will run Thursday through Saturday this weekend.

Why the change of title? Because the studio biggies were afraid that people would be scared away by a title that cuts a little too close to the bone with its connotations of surgical severity. The change was well made, because no one should be scared away from a film of such honest emotion and intelligent technique.

The original title did serve one purpose. It clued the viewer into the method by which this film works.

Alex Cutter, played by John Heard, is a Vietnam veteran who is drifting in a post-war melancholia, sadly accentuated by his loss of an eye, leg and arm. His friend is Richard Bone, played by Jeff Bridges, who spent the war in college and now goes sailing and sleeps with women when he's not hanging around with Cutter.

Tense friendship

Their relationship is tense. Cutter is the angry, active force, while Bone is more laid back and leaves the cutting to his feisty counterpart. It is a tidy allegory with built-in signs to lead us to the meaning that is intertwined with the plot. One has to accept such an allegory as an art object, an entity containing the assumptions that we make in order to absorb what's going on.

The film opens with Bone tying up a tryst on a stormy night. Driving home, his car breaks down in an alley. A big car drives up, stops nearby and a man jumps out. Instead of coming to help Bone, the man lurks in the darkness a while and then drives off.

The next day, Bone is questioned as a murder suspect after a body is found in the alley near his car. Later, while watching a parade, he sees the man he thinks was in the car the night before. Cutter sets off to find this would-be murderer, and the plot is tripped into action.

That is assumption No. 1. We have to accept the coincidence of Bone and Cutter both being at the parade and just happening to see the man from the alley. If we spend all our time thinking, "Ah, c'mon, man, you expect me to believe that?" we miss out on the film's more valuable aspects. Just as one doesn't look to Ellery Queen for meaningful insights, neither do we look to literary allegory for seamless plots.

Within this somewhat ragged plot we have Cutter and Bone, the active and the passive, trying to find justice. The search is especially difficult in light of the fact that the man at the parade, the supposed murderer, is none other than the infamous Mr. Cord, millionaire president of Cord Consolidated Oil.

Cutter and Bone become freedom fighters against the establishment, Robin Hood and the Lone Ranger out to make waves in apathetic post-Vietnam America.

The odds of their search are made painfully apparent when they go to Cord's office building in Los Angeles.

They pull their beat up convertible in front of this monolith to the system. They are like two Mongols running up against the Great Wall of China. This is great stuff, folks, so leave your cynicism at the door of Sheldon with your backpack.

If you decide to go through the film with a fine-toothed comb in spite of my warnings, there are other delights.

Cutter and Bone have an old friend, who eventually became Cutter's wife but who actually is balanced somewhere between the two. Mo, played by Lisa Eichhorn, is in love with her valiant, fiery husband and drawn to his more sensitive, relaxed sidekick.

Emotional center

Neither one of them gives her the devotion she deserves, so she softens her lonely, painful place in life with alcohol. She gives the film its emotional center, suspended somewhere between thought, action and her devotion to her troubled friends.

What makes the triangle fascinating is the delicate modes of communication that go on between three people who don't quite satisfy each other, but are nonetheless connected. When Cutter becomes overly enthusiastic about catching the murderous millionaire and Bone bows out of his friend's struggle with honor, Mo asks him if he was seized by "a moment of weakness or sanity." It is a mixture of these two elements that binds the three people, one fighting his own Arthurean legend, one groping at freedom, one at love, and all in the midst of a world that threatens and succeeds at tearing them apart.

If that doesn't grip you either, I can proceed further into esotericism and away from feeling by praising Jordan Cronenweth's cinematography and Ivan Passer's direction. Events are caught in extraordinary lighting. It is tawny in the sad, steamy sex scene and crisp and clear at a polo match. Scenes are constructed that catch, with unabashed bluntness, everything from the delicacy of facial expressions to the tragic fury that leads Cutter to pulverize a carnival teddy bear with a gun.

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Movies



John Heard and Lisa Eichhorn in "Cutter's Way"

"Stevie" weaves poetry

By Chuck Jagoda

"Stevie," the first in this year's Sheldon Foreign Film Series, was a series of poems, then a radio play and then a stage play before becoming a movie. Directed by Robert Enders, starring Glenda Jackson and based on the play by Hugh Whitmore and the works of Stevie Smith, a well-known British poetess, the movie is made up of poems stitched together to make a composite portrait of the main character.

There are a number of outdoor sequences and some scene changes from one room to another, but most of the scenes take place on the single set of Stevie's living room, as befits a stage play. The poems come across as poems, most of them spoken by Stevie directly to the camera.

She commutes to London to her job in a publishing company and gives readings for the British Broadcasting Corporation and to literary clubs. She lives with her aunt in the same suburban house she has lived in since her childhood.

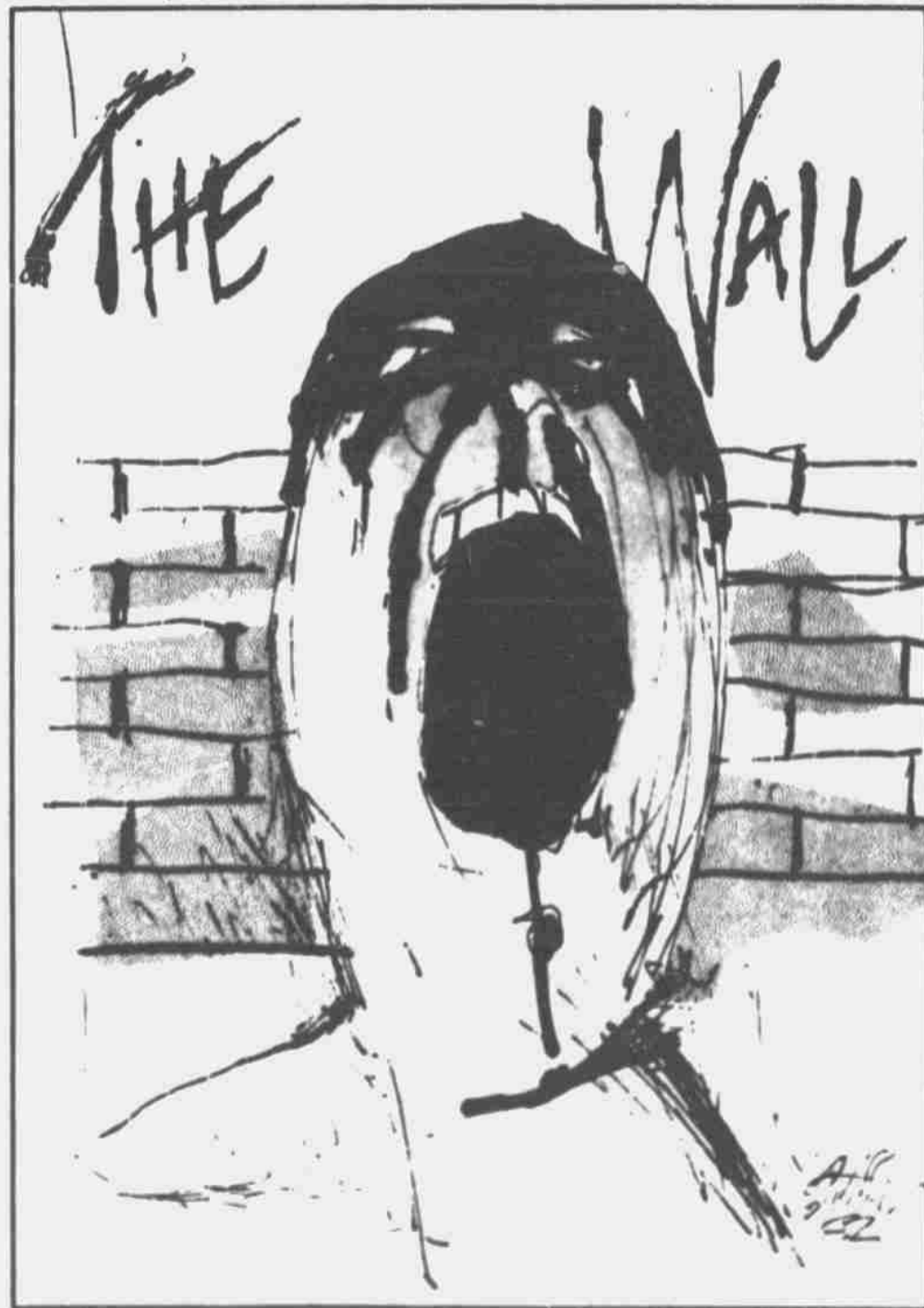
Most of Stevie's poetry is about herself, her surroundings and her relationships. She is very fond of odes. When she tells you about something, she doesn't just describe it. She writes an ode to it. She has odes to the importance of being tired, to suburban people, to suburban living, living without Freddie and living with her aunt. Most are celebrations of her unconventional attitudes, and they find a perfect match in the acting of Glenda Jackson. She is entirely convincing as the independent, self-reliant heroine who clearly hears her own drummer and cares for no other.

Mona Washbourne is fitting as "the Lion Aunt," all tawny and warm. Trevor Howard and Alec McCown are excellent in their supporting roles.

Although I found much to admire in the film, it seemed more like a play than a movie, and still more like poetry than a play.

The poems spoken by Stevie, sitting very still and looking at the camera, did not hold my attention as well as the scenes that integrated poetry, action and the interplay between Stevie and the other characters.

The film played at Sheldon Film Theatre Friday through Monday.



Cartoon by Billy Shaffer

Pink breaks "The Wall"

By Billy Shaffer

Some people look at a wall and see it as security. Some see it as a barrier they can't transgress. By the same token, some people look at Roger Waters' *tour de force*

"The Wall" and see it as a self-indulgent, confusing and obscure poke at a musician-turned-filmmaker. Some see it as an explosive, emotional and personal statement. I'm of the latter and, in fact, consider "The Wall" to be one of the best movies I have ever seen.

"The Wall" is *much* more than a vehicle for a double-album or an extended rock-video. The movie is a very introspective look at a person who was (unfortunately) born sensitized. Through a series of traumatic experiences, such as the death of his father in WWII while still an infant, to the breakup of his marriage while on tour in the United States. Pink Floyd (superbly portrayed by Bob Geldof of the Boomtown Rats) shows us the total range of human emotion. Although there is no actual dialogue in the movie, Pink (Geldof) depicts his life in the most realistic terms. There is no happy ending to "The Wall." Life stinks sometimes, and Waters doesn't pretty up that fact.

"The Wall" opens on an individual sequestered in a hotel room, locked up from the cleaning lady and the rest of the world. That's the first "wall" we're presented with, a superficial one at best. The lead character has chosen to block off life with a dead bolt, a TV and a vengeance. The TV in this case becomes Pink's symbolic father, and the lock is symbolic of the walls the protagonist must build to preserve his sensitive sanity against the cruel inhumanities dealt to his life. Although the idea might sound trite in print, it is portrayed beautifully and poetically on screen. This movie is stacked with just such images that reek of poignancy without getting "schlocky." If a picture is worth a thousand words, this flick merits a library.

The plot of "The Wall" is based on a single evening in the life of an English rock star, spent in the cold atmosphere of Los Angeles. The movie includes numerous psychoanalytic flashbacks to childhood that involve a younger Pink. As he loses that precious innocence of childhood, he eventually comes to that desensitized, walled-off, "comfortably numb" stage that provides some solace from the raging emotions inside himself. Pink finds TV a solace at home, but in public, it's Pink's control over an audience that dishes up his life/motivation. In an ironic twist of fate, Pink becomes an influence over others in much the same way as Hitler influenced his behavior. The goal is to control the people. Power is the motivation. Fascism is the result.

At once, the movie sums itself up. The real effects of a fascist movement can be boiled down to the impact it has on one individual. Pink's life was devastated by the loss of his father to the war. And in emotional retaliation, he becomes very similar to a Hitler-like personality in mind-controlling his audience to fascist extremes.

The cycle becomes self-perpetuating. Pain bequeaths pain. Self-serving leaders tell us what to do. We listen, we fight, we build a new wall. We are not men, we are just bricks.

"The Wall" is a visually beautiful movie with some incredible animation thrown in at times. It's intellectually stimulating, it's emotionally stirring, and it's aurally exciting. This movie should be up for no less than four academy awards, if there is any justice: best film, best actor, best screenplay and best soundtrack.

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