

Summer movies, deep meaning meet in 'Gaudhi Beach Party'

by PAT CLARK

Summer in Lincoln, or anywhere else for that matter, brings with it the summer movie releases. Summer movies differ from those that play during other times of the year in much the same way that summer itself differs from other times of the year — they're hotter.

Relying heavily on the use of scantily-clad young adults and a wafer-thin formula plot for audience appeal, summer movies tend to do easily what the Oscar-quality "major motion pictures" do only with great difficulty:

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they make large sums of money. So much money, in fact, that some studios are cranking them out well in advance of summer, apparently hoping to wrestle a few more ducats from the perennially willing moviegoers. Two such movies, the typical-of-the-genre "Spring Break" and the relentlessly bad "Joysticks" are already in Lincoln, and are certain to be just the advance party of the summer movie invasion.

You know the story: The adults (read "bad guys") want to close down a favorite hangout of the young crowd (read "good guys"). The favorite hangout is usually a beach, but it can be a drag strip, an arcade, a nightclub, or just about any other location at which irresponsible fun is the password. Whatever the location, the kids use a combination of street smarts (beach smarts?) and true grit to save the location, and disgrace the snooty adults back into the drab suburban homes from whence they came. In the meantime, all of the kids manage to fall in love, or at least in lust, with each other. Once the hangout is safe, all that's left for the newfound lovers to do is to have more fun than you'll ever have. The sun shines bright, a rock band plays, everybody can dance, and they all live happily ever after, or at least until the credits roll.

THESE MOVIES generally are innocent enough wads of mental cotton candy, and there's really nothing wrong with them. The people who make them are not out to win Oscars, and the people who go to see them aren't out to watch Oscar-winning performances. Nevertheless,

there's always somebody around to criticize the summer movie for being exactly what it sets out to be — a mindless, fun way to waste two hours and three bucks. The upwardly mobile, trendy culturevultures who frown so knowingly on summer movies contend that the movies lack depth. There's no message, it doesn't speak to us, no growth-oriented experience, nothing new to say about society and the individual's experience in it and relationship to it, ya' know? And the gratuitous close-ups of all that human flesh — simply revolting.

So, just to see how it would work, let's try a summer movie with a little bite to it. A summer movie for the ages, the story of one of the greatest voices for peace in the history of the world, Mohandas K. Gandhi. "To the beach," this unassuming young man said, and a whole subcontinent followed him all the way . . . all the way to "Gandhi Beach Party."

The scene: A beach in India. While revelers dressed in white muslin cloth play volleyball on the beach and wait for the surf to come up, Gandhi and Pandit Nehru are talking to a man known only as Deadhead, played by Bob Denver. Deadhead, a transplant from Laguna Beach, Calif., is the kindly owner of Deadhead's Snack Shed, a little hut on the beach that feeds the local beachcomers.

"You know how it is," Deadhead says to the peaceful revolutionaries, "three-fourths of the country starving, impure water, almost no medical care, English landlords gouging even the poorest people for more and more rent." Nehru and Gandhi solemnly nod their agreement. "And now," Deadhead continues, a hint of desperation in his voice, "now the British authorities want to — CLOSE THE BEACH!"

THE STING OF PAIN from a thousand similar stories is written on Gandhi's face, but his first thought remains a logical one. "Why?" he says.

"The salt," Deadhead says. "As long as the beach remains open, we have the potential to refine our own salt, and as long as we can do that the British cannot have a monopoly on it. They want us to have to buy our salt from them."

"Thieves," mutters Nehru with a voice full of anger. "Graverobbers. Next we'll have to pay to kill ourselves. How long can we keep going without killing?"

"Nobody's going to kill anybody," Gandhi says suddenly. "We are aware of the forces arrayed against us, and a show of violence would only incur their wrath. But 100,000 British soldiers cannot stop 350 million Indians from coming to the beach if those 350 million Indians refuse to cooperate."

"What are you saying?" Nehru says. "I am suggesting that everybody in India come to this beach Saturday for a day of fasting and prayer."

"You mean a general strike?" Nehru says. "I mean a day of fasting and prayer," Gandhi reiterates. "Think of it. Three hundred and fifty million people at the beach. No work being done; trains halted, no mail, no communication lines, no shops open, no anything. The British would be helpless."

"Gosharoonies!" a giddy Deadhead says suddenly. "This is gonna' be the biggest beach party ever!"

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