

# Arts & Entertainment

## Movie builds on James Dean myth, nostalgia

By Eric Peterson

"Come Back to the 5 and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" which is currently showing through Monday at the Sheldon Film Theatre at 7 and 9 p.m., is a wonderful and exuberant picture. Even its melodramatic quality and obvious weak moments



### Film Review

don't seem to affect our acceptance of this Texas-town-epic; it becomes a myth like the James Dean myth which is so important to the characters.

Several of the actors — Sandy Dennis, Cher and Karen Black are the main ones — are grand. Dennis plays the kind of role she usually does: confused and endearing, vague but reflective. She is transfigured here into a saint and devotee who keeps the faith in James Dean, goes every year to the nearby town where the Dean film "Giant" was made to pick up more relics for the shrine, and — most importantly — claims to have had James Dean's child, to have been chosen like the Virgin Mary.

Cher is refreshing and blunt. She lives with both feet on the ground, or would like people to think so. She matter-of-factly suggests sleeping with "some nobody" first if you want to get a famous person to fall for you: "It's like homework for the big test later."

#### Film about illusion

However, since this is a film made from a play about illusion, all the characters must have some little facade they need to have torn down, and the character that Cher plays still wants to think that she is as sexy as when she was a disciple of James Dean. She wants to think her onetime husband loved her.

Joanne, played by Karen Black, is the character who works the hardest at making the others see the bitter truth. She walks into the place like a movie star and everyone is clearly impressed. It turns out



Photo courtesy Sheldon Film Theatre

Robert Altman is director of "Come Back to the Five And Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean," which currently is showing at the Sheldon Film Theatre.

that Joanne used to be Joe and was fired from his/her job at the drugstore for his/her penchant for dresses and — apparently — men.

"He is a sick boy and should be treated before he grows up into a Communist," the owner of the five

and dime says in her own defense.

Now Joanne returns as the sophisticated intellectual out to make people see the truth about themselves (or more simply, wreak revenge on the bigots) and clearly enjoys doing it.

#### Transexual element

The transexual element is the key device in this after several implausible developments it turns out that Joanne in fact fathered Mona's child, which she named Jimmy Dean, and this revelation is the last in the film.

More than anything else in "Come Back...", it's the drugstore that counts; we never leave the Woolworth's drugstore where the characters gather for the 20th anniversary of the death of James Dean. The film begins with a long, slightly satiric, slightly affectionate look around the store before anybody comes in. And what all the characters do in the process is try to decide how they feel about their hometown and to come to grips with what happened here.

What you see at the beginning of "Come Back..." seems to have faded in the Texas sun; the drugstore, with its neon Christ picture and perpetual motion orange drink machine, looks flat and muted, dusty and overwhelmingly nostalgic.

#### Grainy feeling

Robert Altman's latest picture was made on cheaper 16mm film to be blown up to the 35mm stock which most theaters show. It's a good way for independent filmmakers to get work done and the grainy, less slick feel it gives to this picture is very nice.

"Come Back..." began as a play in New York City and failed there; one reason it succeeds so well as a film is the magic of the camera — how one image can be put on another, so our eyes see in the way our memory works. Mona, so beautifully played by Dennis, sees her old friend Joe fading in and out in the real and present Joanne, and a connection is made in our minds which is much stronger and more convincing than it would be on the stage, because we can see it.

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## 'Forum' worth seeing

Review by David Creamer

The Lincoln Community Playhouse, 2500 S. 56, opens its 1983-84 season with the musical comedy, "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum," which is playing weekends through Oct. 1.

From the beginning, the play is light as the orchestra plays a short overture before the curtain rises. This enables the audience to get in the proper mood for what is to come.

The story in this musical is about Pseudolus, a plotting Roman slave, who desperately tries to win his freedom from his master, Hero.

In order to win his freedom, Pseudolus must first introduce Hero to the beautiful-blond-next-door. This, because of the fact that she is a virgin and is to be sold to a captain from the military for him to marry, becomes a difficult task.

The play draws frequent roars of laughter with well-timed punch lines and some ridiculous songs and dances.

The role of Pseudolus is played by Thomas O'Neill who, in 1982, was winner of the Playhouse Elsie award

for his performance in "Oklahoma." Pseudolus is a conniving trickster who, with a few persuasive fibs, convinces Hysterium, his boss, played by Scott Spence, to help in his schemes.

Hero, played by Larry Logsdon, sets up the storyline of the play when he agrees to grant Pseudolus his freedom if he can help Hero win Philia (Kristin Cohn), who plays the blonde.

The acting is convincing as a whole, and the comedy is good, although on a couple of occasions, the songs seem a little long. Generally though, the songs are humorous enough to support the length.

Another very impressive element in the play is the set. The action takes place on a street in Rome in front of three houses. The houses are painted in light pastel colors and resemble Roman stone houses with marble pillars and balconies. The part of the stage where the acting was done was set off by a dimly glowing blue backdrop.

The play is worth seeing by anyone who enjoys laughing. It does what a play should do — entertain.

## Film spans life of cinema great

Review by Eric Peterson

A witty and affectionate look at one of the pioneers of early cinema, "Before the Nickelodeon: The Early Cinema of Edwin S. Porter," played at the Sheldon on Tuesday and Wednesday. Charles Musser, the filmmaker, was in Lincoln to talk about his work with audiences and various classes as part of the Sheldon Film Theater's Film/Video Showcase.

Musser showed his documentary, a survey of Porter's film career, and then followed with three complete short films by Porter: "The Teddy Bears," "The White Caps" and "The Ex-Convict." The documentary and the short films vividly contrasted because of Musser's liberal use of sound and color in the excerpts of Porter films he chose to use in "Before the Nickelodeon."

The colors, in fact, often were quite striking: a black and white cowboy would shoot a puff of orange smoke, or a still of a city street or the inside of an opera house would live in oddly beautiful and artificial pastel colors. These colors were very painstakingly painted onto the film frames by Elizabeth Leonard. A similar technique was used in "The Phantom of the Opera House"

when Lon Chaney appears at a ball as the figure of death, dressed in the warmest and richest of reds and wearing a delicately yellowed skull.

Musser defended the authenticity of using sound effects and color in his handling of Porter's film, pointing out that music, sound effects and even actors were liberally employed in the early silent films.

It was clear that Musser handled his material with scholarly respect while still maintaining a whimsical wit — employing, for example, title cards with old fashioned lettering which said things like "Porter Gets in on the Ground Floor."

Most of the film is wonderfully narrated by Blanche Sweet, who became a silent film star under D.W. Griffith; her idiosyncratic voice seems to border on sarcasm at times.

Much of the documentary details what has since been a continuing theme of American film — the thwarting of an artist's work through the commercial demands of producers and studios and the film industry. And thus, although Porter's and the audience's hearts are clearly on the side of the "Teddy Bears" a dark-haired and very greedy Goldilocks has them shot or put on leashes and grabs all their stuffed animals for herself — which, one is told, was the ending that the studio wanted.

By Dan Wondra

## Madmen and Englishdogs



## NETV to air series on Henry's 6 wives

For six weeks, King Henry VIII, England's legendary monarch, will wed and shed a new wife each week in "The Six Wives of Henry VIII." The 90-minute shows will air Saturdays at 10 p.m., beginning Sept. 24, on the Nebraska STV Network.

The series examines Henry VIII (portrayed by Keith Michell) from several different perspectives: as a roving tyrant, a genius, a lover and a ruler.

The show can be seen in Lincoln on KUON, Channel 12.