



Courtesy of Sheldon Art Gallery

Director John Cassavetes

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## Director started as stagehand

By Sarah Knight  
Staff Reporter

After rearranging movie lights and scenery props for the late director John Cassavetes one night, Seymour Cassel was invited to study with and eventually work for the directing legend.

"He (Cassavetes) was giving out scholarships to study on a feature film, and I went for an interview," Cassel said. "The scholarships had run out but he interviewed me anyway, then asked me to help him move

some props."

Afterwards, Cassel asked Cassavetes if he could return the next day and Cassavetes agreed. Cassel and Cassavetes worked together in various projects for the next 30 years.

Cassel comes from a show-business family. His parents worked in the circus and he travelled with them until the age of six, when he started school.

While growing up, Cassel said he liked a wide variety of films, including westerns, action pictures and those of directors Frank Capra ("It's

a Wonderful Life") and George Stevens ("A Place in the Sun").

After graduation, Cassel continued his studies with the American Theater Wing in New York and then met Cassavetes in 1958.

Cassel appeared in Cassavetes' films "Love Streams," "Shadows," "Too Late Blues," "Faces" and "A Woman Under the Influence."

Cassel will introduce Cassavetes' movie, "Minnie and Moskowitz," which is showing Saturday at 7:30 p.m. in the Sheldon Art Gallery as part of the Flatwater Film Festival. A festival button will be required for admittance.

Cassel has toured with the Cassavetes film series before, recently shown at the University of Tennessee and Stanford University.

Cassel said working with Cassavetes could better be called a collaboration than a job. Cassavetes would let his actors in on the camerawork as well as the editing of his films.

"He would say, 'Who wants to shoot this shot' and we'd all jump at the chance," Cassel said.

Cassel also said that because Cassavetes was once an actor himself, he knew the problems that actors had and was very sympathetic.

"He's the best," Cassel said. "I've worked with a lot of people, and he's the best."

Cassavetes died earlier this year from cirrhosis of the liver and hepatitis caught while on two trips to Mexico.

Cassel currently is working on "Dick Tracy" with Warren Beatty and Madonna as well as "Sweet Bird of Youth" with Elizabeth Taylor.



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