



"THE BRANDON TEENA STORY" extends its run at the Ross Theater for two more days. But despite its anti-hate message, the movie only conveys more negative images: not of gays, but Nebraskans.

Nebraska bashing

Stereotypes ruin 'Teena Story'

BY SARAH BAKER
Senior staff writer

The crusade against perpetuating stereotypes has grown ever stronger over the past few years.

But with the release of the anti-homophobia documentary "The Brandon Teena Story," it becomes questionable if this movie helps or hinders that crusade.

"The Brandon Teena Story" has been playing at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater, 12th and R streets, as part of The Return of the Gay/Lesbian Film Festival for the past two weeks.

Because of the overwhelming popularity of the film, the Ross is holding the movie over for two extra showings Thursday and Friday.

The film, which has been critically acclaimed all over the world, tells the story of 20-year-old Teena Brandon, a woman who dressed as a man and dated other women. Later she was brutally murdered when her true sexual identity was uncovered by two Falls City men.

The documentary film was shot entirely in Nebraska and explores the cultural phenomenon that take place in and around both Lincoln and Falls City.

Having made its Nebraska debut Oct. 22, "The Brandon Teena Story" was directed by Susan Muska and Greta Olafsdottir, and it won numerous awards including the 1998 Teddy Award for Best Documentary Film at the Berlin Film Festival.

Critics around the world have touted the film as something that must be seen by all because of its powerful message and jarring realism.

The poignant and emotional story is something that is more common than most people would think and deserves to be known. But the way in which the film perpetuates many stereotypes makes the message a little less powerful, especially for Nebraskans.

The most astonishing aspect of the film is how, ironically enough, while attempting to raise awareness on the subject of hate crimes, the film at the same time supports and proves true many other long-standing stereotypes, debatably of equal importance. The story begins when Brandon moves to Falls City, and it focuses on the last tragic weeks of her life.

The film is organized in the traditional documentary style, using close-up shots of people telling personal accounts.

The picture itself has a gritty, unfinished feel to it, and viewers may be confused as to whether this is intentional or just a result of meager budgets and poor composition.

Most scenes are crafted with straight-on camera shots of people involved in the murder drama who each played a small part in the sad last weeks of Brandon's life.

Most of the participants paint an unflattering, and only partially realistic, portrait of "small-town"

Please see BRANDON on 10

Watt to set sail at Ranch Bowl tonight

BY JASON HARDY
Senior staff writer

Concert Preview

For the past 28 years Mike Watt has captained his ship of innovation through a number of musical realms.

Tonight he docks at Omaha's Ranch Bowl for a performance of Watt's latest release, "Contemplating The Engine Room," a punk-rock opera that follows three sailors through a day of work in a ship's engine room.

Watt and his band, the Black Gang, are currently on the last leg of his "Puttin' the Opera to Bed" tour, which, as the name suggests, is the last tour for his punk-rock opera.

Watt himself is known and respected for his work as a punk pioneer in the early '80s with The Minutemen and later for planting the seeds of early alternative with his group FIREHOSE. As a solo artist, Watt continues to laugh in the face of Father Time and industry stereotypes by committing to originality and musical innovation.

Unlike most people just entering their 40s, Watt (soon to be 41) forges ahead by sailing into the unknown with each musical endeavor.

"After FIREHOSE, I wanted to put myself in a weird situation and reinvent myself with every new project," Watt said in a phone interview from Minneapolis. "It's my own version of Madonna, I guess."

With invention often comes the unexpected, and "Contemplating the Engine Room" is clearly that. Released in October 1997, the album uses a sailing metaphor to tell tales of Watt's

past.

The three sailors in the story represent the three members of Watt's first group, The Minutemen, arguably one of the most influential, if underground, bands of the '80s. He also addresses his friend and former band mate D. Boon's death, which he bundles together with his relationship with his father. These are subjects Watt found hard to sing about in previous works.

While the album has been met with a multitude of critical acclaim, the live shows have been received a bit differently. Since the album is set in a distinct time frame, the live shows play out in the same order and style as the album, beginning in the morning, as the sailors wake up, and ending at night, when they retire to their bunks.

"Most people aren't used to a gig getting slower, and that trips some people out," Watt said. "Some people are afraid, but for other people it draws them in, and they want to know what happens."

"I tried to make music that goes to the time of day. In the early morning it's very clear, and when they get drunk it gets all crazy. I used the cycle of the day, because the day is very real. One life is made through many days."

The concept for the album came about while

Watt was on tour as the bassist for Porno for Pyros. He came upon a copy of Richard McKenna's "Sand Pebbles," a story about a sailor who worked in an engine room.

The 1966 film version of "Sand Pebbles," starring Steve McQueen, was a favorite of Watt and his boyhood friend Boon. Inspired by the novel, Watt began to draw similarities between the life of an engine room worker and his own life.

"My dad worked in an engine room, and the way he saw the world was to join the Navy. The way I saw the world was to join a band," Watt said. "It was a way for me to relive my past. It's like going back and being a kid without trying to fit into those clothes and stuff."

As another source of inspiration, Watt found himself riding a bike instead of driving, something he hadn't done for nearly 25 years. He bought a 10-speed for \$5 from a man who was moving away, and much of the album's music and lyrics were thought up while riding that bike every morning over the course of four months.

During those morning rides, Watt said he drew on the stories and experiences of his father, who is pictured on the cover of "Contemplating the Engine Room," and related them to his experiences with the Minutemen and the way his



A PIONEER OF ROCK in the desolate '80s, Mike Watt continues to forge new territory on the trail of his current tour — a punk-rock opera. Watt (center) tours with Nels Cline (left) and Bob Lee on the drums.

view on mortality has changed since those early years.

"In a lot of ways, the record is about boundaries and how a lot of these things seem so clear and clean-cut, but when you get older things get fuzzy," Watt said. "The equator isn't a line in the ocean, but when a sailor crosses it, he goes through a big ritual."

With the release of this album, Watt says he's dealt with his past in a way that helped him graduate to the next level of his life.

"Because of this opera, I think I'll be able to sing about today more," he said. "I think I've found a way to say goodbye to the past, or maybe not goodbye, but just thank you."

Tonight's show at the Ranch Bowl, 1600 S 72nd St., in Omaha, costs \$9 and starts at 9.