

Film Fest Report

by Gillian G. Gaar

The 12th Seattle International Film Festival is off and running. As I write, we're only into the first week, but it's been a week of frenetic activity, with a lot more on the way.

The opening night film, *La Bamba*, told the story of Rock 'n' roll star Ritchie Valens. His claim to fame was not just that he died in the same plane crash with Buddy Holly and The Big Bopper; he produced some early rock classics, such as "Come On, Let's Go," "Donna," and "La Bamba." The Valens' story was presented as a veritable dream-come-true fantasy tale, with first rate performances from Lou Diamond Phillips as Valens and Esai Morales as Valens' brother Bob.

Luis Valdez, *Bamba's* director, was on hand for opening night, as were three members of the Valens (actually Valenzuela) family, including brother Bob. Valdez spoke movingly about his experience in making the film, which he felt clearly illustrated America as the veritable promised land; the Valenzuela family appeared to be more ill-at-ease. After the question and answer period, the crowds moved on to Neighbors night club for the opening night gala celebration.

The first weekend of the festival included screenings of several films now on regular theatre runs. *Miss Mary* is the story of an English governess who arrives in Argentina in 1938 to look after the children of a family living on a grand country estate. Julie Christie shines as the title character, fighting to keep a tight grip on her emotions, which nonetheless run away from her by the film's conclusion.

Gothic is the new Ken Russell feature. (he seems to be caught up in the Steven Spielberg technique of throwing food around and making great messes). It's a heady blend of fact and fantasy, centering on a weekend with the poet Lord Byron, holding court on his estate, and his visitors, Percy Shelley and his fiance Mary Godwin, along with other guests. Ghosts and evil spirits run rampant through the estate, and it's frequently difficult to know if what you're seeing is actually happening or if it's merely some wild dream being concocted in a character's brain. Russell's grandiose touch was not as successful in this feature, with too much going on in the way of action and not enough that was ter-

ribly interesting. You'd probably get more thrills if you read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* on a dark and dreary night.

There was no doubt, however that a rollercoaster ride was just the ticket for *Evil Dead II; Dead by Dawn*, the first midnighter, which drew a healthy sized (and scary looking) crowd. Those who attended say the mix of humor and gore was just right, so if you've a taste for such things, you're sure to find this film unbelievably entertaining. For myself, seeing the trailer in which a headless ghoul starts cutting itself in half with a chainsaw was enough.

My favorite films so far have been two documentaries. Greta Schiller/Andrea Weiss' 30-minute film *International Sweethearts of Rhythm* and Geoffrey Dunn/Mark Schwartz's *Miss or Myth? Sweethearts* looked at the women's jazz band of the same name, whose heyday was in the '40s. Being an interracial outfit, the group faced a lot of discrimination, particularly in the South, where the white members would have to hide when police arrived to check out reports that there were whites in what was supposed to be an all black band. The audience groaned as the film ended, obviously wanting to see (and hear) more, and I myself wished I could rush out and buy a whole new wardrobe of 40's style clothes.

Miss or Myth? was a different matter all together. The film examined the Miss California Pageant, held in Santa Cruz, and a rival pageant held by feminist groups, entitled "Myth California." Pageant officials are bewildered by the groups protesting, claiming they are concerned with working for women's rights, and the man-on-the-street fails to see the connection between women wearing bathing suits on a stage and violence against women. From the "Myth" camp, "Miss Behavior," a one-time fashion model herself, constructs a bathing suit made entirely of meat, and throws her blood on the steps of the auditorium where the Miss California Pageant is being held. The film as a whole was extremely powerful, and as director Mark Schwartz noted afterwards, both sides were well represented. he said that pageant officials even arranged for the film to screen at their own conferences, in order for other groups to see how to best deal with unruly protestors.

In honor of Paramount studios' 75th Anniversary, free films are being screened at both the Egyptian and the Market. Both *It* (with Clara Bow) and *Morocco* (with Gary Cooper and Marlene Dietrich) went down exceptionally well, and you can be sure it'll be great seeing such classics as *Sunset Boulevard* (5/30, 12:30 p.m.).

Egyptian), *Double indemnity* (5/31, 12:30 p.m. Market) and *Chinatown* (6/6, 12:30 p.m., Egyptian) with a wildly appreciative Film Festival audience. Just be sure to arrive early, especially for shows at the Market.

The Secret Festival? Sssssssshhhhh.

about what's coming...

- May 31, Dennis Hopper day at the Egyptian, with The Last Movie being shown at 4 p.m., and a special "Evening with Dennis Hopper" kicking off at 7 p.m., with Hopper on hand to give a talk and answer questions, and the screening of *American Friend*.
- Also at the Egyptian, *Straight to Hell*, June 5, 9:30 p.m., the new Alan Cox feature (*Repo Man* and *Sid and Nancy*) *Prick Up Your Ears*, June 6, 9:30 p.m.
- Special Poster Auction June 7, 3:30 p.m.
- Good Morning Babylon June 7, 7:30 p.m.
- The Golden Space Needle Awards presentation June 8, 7:30 p.m. You can still place your votes for Space Needle nominees; look for the entry boxes in the lobbies of both theatres.
- At the Market Theatre final days will be taken up with a special *Ausstrian Trilogy*, with films screened June 1-3 at 7 p.m., and their last film being *Tampopo*, June 6, 9:30 p.m. all about the joys of noodle making.