

Paris in '20s: the feminine side

A new film speaks up for the other expatriates

By TIM APPELO
of The Oregonian staff

Movie review

Paris Was a Woman

★★★

STARRING: Josephine Baker, Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, Janet Flanner

DIRECTOR: Greta Schiller

RATED: Unrated, probably PG-13

RUNNING TIME: 75 minutes

PLAYING AT: Cinema 21, today through Thursday

THE LOWDOWN: A bunch of white women sitting around talking about the feminist (and to some extent lesbian) paradise of Paris between the world wars.

FAMILY TIP: Extremely brief still photos of a few breasts, much extolling of bohemian lifestyles.

What a time it was! A total business ignoramus like Adrienne Monnier could just open her own bookshop, invent the lending library and wind up publishing Joyce's "Ulysses."

Her Anglophone pal Sylvia Beach did the same thing with her famous Seaside bookshop, Shakespeare & Co.

As "Paris Was a Woman" goes on to show, these intellectuals knew how to kick up their heels. We get dizzy from the social whirl: the parties Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas threw, the cafe debates with Djuna Barnes and Janet Flanner, the literary salons formed in defiance of the misogynist French academy.

Think of it: Any obscure woman could bring a manuscript in, hand it to a famous literary figure and get it

back two weeks later with incisive criticism and an eager publisher's phone number.

Try to pull a cultural-ambition stunt like this in Paris today, and you'll wind up bankrupt from two weeks of \$40 coffee at Deux Magots.

Will somebody please invent a time machine, so that we can all escape drab, modern America and go see the rest of the fabulous Josephine Baker stage show excerpted in "Paris Was a Woman"? She plays a drunken sailor, and her performance conveys a contact high.

The film has hagiography problems, like a lot of feminist cultural study. It's particularly grating to hear Catharine Stinson, director of the MacArthur "Genius Grants"



James Joyce confers with his patrons Sylvia Beach and Adrienne Monnier in "Paris Was a Woman."

GISELE FRIELAND

program, telling us what a genius Stein was. The film gives us insights into her work: The word "cow," for instance, was Stein code for "orgasm." (Bart Simpson, listen up.) But Schiller fails to support the idiotic claim that Stein achieved anything as a writer.

"When I wrote 'A rose is a rose is a rose,'" Stein is quoted as saying in the film, "I addressed, I caressed, I possessed and expressed the word — and I am the first person in 200 years to have done that." Nice try, Trudy, but no sale. A pose is a pose is a pose. But Stein was the avant-garde

hostess with the mostest with the coolest Julius Caesar hairdo. And "Paris Was a Woman" gets us invited to the party.

"Wonderful, Wonderful, Wonderful!"

You will absolutely love this movie. Guaranteed."

Jim Sweide, KNX/CBS RADIO

BACK ON THE BIG SCREEN!