

# Flickers continues its international festival

Flickers begins the second part of its International Film Festival with the state premiere on Thursday, August 22 of John Cassavetes' *Love Streams* at 8 p.m.

Vulnerable, brave and loopy, a panicky paradigm of middle-aged desperation, Gena Rowlands is again on display as Sarah in *Love Streams*. In it, Cassavetes (her real-life husband) also creates an answering male character, Sarah's brother, who has taken up womanizing in an attempt to cast the demons from his soul.

Rowlands' Sarah is fully focused. She is a woman of excess, whose efforts to rid herself of that quality are thwarted by her very excessiveness. She loves her husband and daughter to pieces, and when we meet her at a divorce hearing she is sweetly, distractedly explaining that she cannot be too precise about times and dates when her mate can visit their child; they have this very busy schedule flying about the country, visiting sick and dying relatives. Later, trying to forget her troubles by touring Europe, she is undone by excess baggage. Landing finally at her brother's place, she decides that the cure for his glum raffishness must be pets on whom he can practice a responsible form of loving. Forthwith, she goes out and buys a menagerie of ducks, a goat, an affably neurotic dog and a pair of miniature horses that trot, puzzled but agreeable, through the house. It is as she tells her psychiatrist: "I'm going to get my balance. Then I can go back to being obsessed with my family."

On Friday night, the focus

changes with a premiere from Australia: Paul Cox's *Man of Flowers*. According to writer/director Cox, audiences are starving for a bit of humanity on the screen. In his newest film, he doesn't give the audience as much to think about as he gives them something to respond to emotionally. It is a humanistic comedy about the very sad subject of loneliness—a subject that has very broad appeal.

The title character, Charles Bremer (played with great control by Norman Kaye), is a sad-faced, middle-aged man who has a great appreciation of all things of beauty: flowers, fine representational paintings, sculpture and naked young women. A good inheritance has given him the financial resources to indulge fully in his passions. And like a dutiful son, he writes daily to his dead mother to keep her abreast of the events in his life, such as the relationship he is cultivating with Lisa (Alyson Best), a model from his painting class whom he pays handsomely to strip to the music of the "Love Duet" from Donizetti's "Lucia Di Lammer Moor". When Charles is not writing letters to his late mother, he is having somber Freudian flashbacks in Super-8 about his rich cultural upbringing and the strong sexual stimulation that he received from his parents. (The disciplinarian father is played without dialogue by the renowned German filmmaker, Werner Herzog.)

If the main character seems a little nutty, the supporting characters are sheer lunatics. But the movie in the end is a slice-of-life about ordinary people who are try-



NORMAN KAYE and ALYSON BEST in "Man of Flowers".

ing to cope with their loneliness. The final scene, which is filled with positive affirmation, shows Charles for a full-minute-and-a-half standing on a hill enjoying the view of the ocean while he is very much alone with three other people who are evidently also just as alone.

*Man of Flowers* will be shown twice at 7 and 9:15 p.m.

On Saturday night only, the Society concludes its festival with two highly acclaimed films rarely seen in recent years. Beginning at 7 p.m., the critically praised *Whistle Down the Wind* by Bryan Forbes is screened.

Filmed in 1962, the film marked the screen debut of Hayley Mills and featured sterling performances by Alan Bates, Bernard Lee and Diane Claire. The story is a poignant drama of a murderer on the run seeking refuge in a barn. Three country children find him and believe him to be the Christ.

The film touches a universal chord and addresses the vulnerability of youth and innocence when contrasted with the harsher realities of the adult world. Based on the novel by Mary Hayley Bell (Hayley's mother), the film charmed critics and audiences alike upon its release and remains a special testament to the power of faith and the human spirit.

Immediately following at 9:15 p.m., another buried treasure is brought back to the screen by the Society: Charles Laughton's *The Night of the Hunter*. While many films are spoken of as offbeat or unusual, it generally becomes evident with the passing of time that these films are more conventional than they once appeared to be. They are conventional, though in a classic scene, withstanding the test of time and relating to a rich cinematic tradition. It remains possible, however, for an occasional film to be extremely idiosyncratic, and one film

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that may be so described is *The Night of the Hunter*, the only film directed by the celebrated actor Charles Laughton. This work remains unexpected and strange after 30 years; far from being simply a curiosity piece, however, it is an important achievement, reflecting directly the silent cinema in a highly personal way.

*The Night of the Hunter* has much of the feeling, both visual and emotional, of a D.W. Griffith pastoral romance, and this was the avowed intention of Laughton. The style of the film runs counter to expectations, which may account for its failure at the time of its release. However, its singularity has ultimately proved to be to its critical advantage, not surprisingly as Griffith himself is one of the most modern of directors; the existence of both innocence and sophistication in his work remains challenging to modern audiences. *The Night of the Hunter* explores some of the implications of this blend of innocence and sophistication, bringing dark and horrifying intrusions into the pastoral setting to create a story in which good and evil are almost mystical forces which shape the passage from innocence to experience.

The perceptions of good and evil in this story are those of children. For this reason the characters of "Preacher" Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum), who malevolently pursues John (Billy Chapin) and Pearl (Sally Jane Bruce) and their protecting farm woman, Rachel (Lillian Gish), are created in almost fairy-tale terms. The irony of Powell's pose as a preacher is that he himself states the struggle between good and evil very early in the film, illustrating a "sermon" with his two hands on which have been respectively tattooed the words "love" and "hate". Powell convinces the children's mother Willa Harper (Shelley Winters), that he represents "love", making her ashamed of the sexual feelings she has for him which he treats as sinful.

Appropriately, *The Night of the Hunter* is like a fairytale in the way that it simultaneously frightens and charms the viewer, creating terror and then dispelling it by ending the film in a mood of serenity and sweetness. The first part of the film introduces the possibility

of children being murdered, and the fear this evokes is based on vivid remembrance of the darker fantasies of childhood. The comforting mood of the last part of the film is partly the result of the presence of Lillian Gish, the extraordinary actress who also provides a direct link to the cinema of Griffith. Gish carries the most difficult moments of the film in which simple ideals must be affirmed and embraced, and she makes these moments beautiful and true. Her presence is like a lullaby, softly casting out thoughts of darkness and death.

Finally, there is the presence as scenarist of James Agee, a man who never quite found his place in cinema although he was one of its most passionate defenders long before it was fashionable to think of film as art. *The Night of the Hunter* demonstrates most successfully his ideas of what cinema should be, just as it inspires the conviction that Laughton should have had further opportunities to direct.

Flickers screens its films at 3 Charles St. in the former Oddfellows Hall (off Washington Square). Admission for doublebills is \$5 and a single feature is \$4. Tickets are sold on a first-come, first-served basis. For further information, call 847-7590.

There will be no film on Sunday, August 25 since that will be the Annual Society bustrip to Tanglewood.

## THE BLUE PELICAN

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