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It's funny  
It's weird  
It's crazy  
It's disgusting  
It's religious  
It's me, man, me

## People The Movies They Watch in the Dead of Night

By Joseph Torchia

It's a half hour before midnight and the line for "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" at the Strand Theater is stretching, laughing, drinking, taking and joking its way down Market street. The tattoo parlor is still open and so are the Greyhound bus depot and some bars — but nothing is as boisterous or bizarre as this mob dressed in leather and chains and even as Frankenstein's monster and Dracula in drag.

One man claims he has seen the movie 96 times. Another 36 times. Another says: "I'm not here to see a movie, man — I'm here to be a movie."

Time magazine calls "Rocky Horror" a "rather bizarre film about transvestites that impels people to dress in drag and act as if they were stark, raving mad." Yet the magazine admits it is one of the hottest cult films in memory and notes that it is attracting midnight mobs in Atlanta, New York, Houston, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco — just about every major city in the country.

But Mike Thomas, part owner of the Strand, says it also has been attracting capacity crowds in Fresno, Modesto, San Jose and even smaller places like Petaluma, Mountain View, Arcata and Lodi.

"At first, we thought it was a city phenomenon — that only city people were outrageous enough to handle this film," he said. "But now we're getting people from everywhere — from Martin and Daly City and the rest of suburbia. A lot of them are 15, 16, 17 years old — but many of them are 25, 30, even 45 years old. I can't really explain it, but Rocky Horror seems to have no age barrier, just as it has no geographic barrier."

One thing is certain: "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" has been drawing capacity crowds of 700 mad, mad people

every Saturday midnight for a full year at the Strand. And beginning August 11 the theater will celebrate "Rocky's" first anniversary by initiating a Friday midnight show as well.

Why all this attention over a movie that was made three years ago and received an initial response that, according to one observer, "ranged from indifference to indignation?"

"It's the audience," says 29-year-old Ted Burnough as he stands in line wearing red rouge and purple drag. "You won't believe what's going to happen inside that theater. You'll love it. You'll lust it! It's sensational!"

What actually happens is "strictly religious," according to 31-year-old Maude Kirk, who was about to see the film for her 83rd time. "It's the same thing that happens in church — it's total involvement with something everybody believes in."

Involvement is one way of putting it, but pandemonium may be more accurate. No sooner does "Twentieth Century-Fox" appear on the screen than the audience explodes into cheering, yelling, singing, stomping and non-stop noise that lasts for the duration of the film.

When the movie opens with a wedding scene, most people in the audience toss rice. When this is followed by a rainstorm, some cultists pull out water pistols. And when the actors sing "There's a light burning in the darkness of everybody's life," hundreds of matches, candles and cigarette lighters suddenly send fantastic flickers of good feelings throughout the theater.

"If only the car hadn't broken down," says young Brad in the movie, and the audience shouts in unison: "BUT IT DID!"

"What will we do?" asks his girlfriend Janet, and the audience yells in full force:

"TRY THE CASTLE!" And sure enough, Brad's next line is: "I thought I saw a castle back there..."

What's in that castle turns out to be a mad, horny, hysterical transvestite scientist and his/her very kinky crew of orgiasts, sadists and sinners. One member of that crew is what one woman called "the hot, sexy, scrumptious blond body builder of a monster" named Rocky Horror — who is determined to help debauch the young couple by inspiring them to "give yourself over to total pleasure..."

This B-rated movie is, in the words of theater co-owner Ron Brewer, "an event — not just a film. If you're coming to see a movie, forget it — because you probably won't be able to hear it, anyway."

"It's 80 percent audience and 20 percent film," he says. "And not a very good film, at that. I wish I could explain what has made it so popular, but it baffles me. All I know is I have not had an empty seat for this movie since, well, since I don't remember when."

"Rocky Horror" originally was a London play that was brought to Los Angeles by record producer Lou Adler, who coaxed Twentieth Century-Fox into sinking \$1 million into a film version that was made in England. Its 1975 premiere was uneventful, but as word of mouth spread the film began popping up in city after city. Today the film has grossed four times what it cost to make, and Fox will allow it to be shown only at midnight.

"Cult films have been around a long time, but there's never been anything like this before," an associate professor of film at West Los Angeles College told the Los Angeles Times. "What fascinates me is that it's the first real example I have seen of participatory film, where the barrier between the audience and screen is totally broken."

In some cities, however, the cultists



Photos by Terry Schmitt

get so carried away that they actually throw things at the screen — such as pieces of toast when the transvestite scientist proposes a toast.

"If that happens here," says the Strand's Brewer, who has exclusive San Francisco rights to the film, "we'll start searching people at the door. That screen cost us \$200."

Brewer says the theater not only sells out of seats, but hot dogs, too. "It must be all that audience energy," he says, "but, boy, do they work up an appetite."

When asked if he thought other film-makers would try to imitate "Rocky Horror's" phenomenal success, Brewer replied immediately:

"The thing is, there's no way to figure out what makes 'Rocky' succeed and that's what makes it truly cult. You either join it like a religion or you avoid it like a plague, but there is no way to imitate it."

"Rocky Horror" is not the only midnight cult film in town. At the Roxie near 16th and Valencia streets is "Eraserhead" — a much more subdued film that is drawing much more subdued crowds. "In fact," said one woman who has seen both, "this crowd is downright morbid compared to 'Rocky Horror'."

Nobody shouts at the Roxie's screen. Nobody tosses rice or lights candles or goes crazy. But something does happen to the capricious crowd who see "Eraserhead." One man described it as "profound and perverse" — that's why I've seen it 12 times.

"Some of my friends told me it was

When the actors in the film sing "There's a little light burning," the boisterous audience at the "Rocky Horror Picture Show" lights candles and lighters, when the film shows a wedding, below left, they throw rice

really disgusting," said 23-year-old Al Hillis. "Other friends said it was a masterpiece. That's why I'm here — to decide for myself."

Basically, "Eraserhead" is the story of Henry, his shocking head of frizzy hair, his money-grubbing Mary, his urban blues, his repulsive dreams and his even more repulsive baby.

At least it cries like a baby. But there is no real way to describe what happens to this bathhouse creature that provides a lush landscape for nightmares.

"Frankly, I don't know what people see in 'Eraserhead,'" admitted the Roxie's part-owner Richard Galkowski. "All I know is it's been playing every Saturday midnight since January 8 and by the looks of things it's going to continue until next January."

"My theory," he said, "is that in order to develop a midnight cult, a film's got to appeal to the dark side of the psyche in some way. It has to generate a kind of mutant atmosphere."

"And that's one thing 'Rocky Horror' and 'Eraserhead' have in common. They both contain creatures and create atmospheres that give them good reason for being shown in the dead of night."



## A Rebuilt Face and a Lost Romance

By Suzi Knickerbocker

Maria Berenson, whose face was badly gashed in a recent automobile accident in Brazil, was operated on again in Rio by Dr. Ivor Pitanguy, the famous Brazilian plastic surgeon. The first operation was more of a clean-up job to remove bits of windshield glass. The second, for cosmetic purposes, was a big success.

Maria, who is separated from her husband, Alex Ponti, producer of the in-production movie "Grease" and son of producer Carlo Ponti, are very much in love, by the way. They were inseparable in Rio — holding hands, hugging and cooing — before Maria flew back home to California.

If they ever get married, Sophia Loren would be Maria's stepmother-in-law. Wouldn't that be exciting? But don't hold your breath.

The fine romance between Frankie Fitzgerald, author of "Fire on the Lake" and good-looking George Butler, the photographer-writer-producer ("Pumping Iron"), is not all that fine any more.

Frankie, daughter of the fascinating socialite Marietta Tree, and George traveled around the world

### The Chatter Box



Surgery for Maria Berenson (left), competition for writer Frankie Fitzgerald

together, wrote a movie script together and smiled a lot.

Now, all of a sudden, enter Brooke Hayward, another writer ("Haywire") and daughter of the late Margaret Sullivan and Leland Hayward. Just back from Europe, Brooke ran straight up to New Hampshire and George, who had

fled New York to escape the summer. Brooke doesn't exactly broadcast her movements, but romances have a way of leaking, don't they?

The jury is divided on Christina Onassis' "marriage" to Nikolai Kazou, head of the tanker division

of a Soviet freight organization. Some of her friends say she's Christina does that she'll never marry him, others say she's planning to marry him, and still others say they're already married.

What is known is that Christina got a divorce from Alexander Andreadis, and Kazou got his divorce the following day.

Just this month, Andreadis prevailed upon her one-time step-father, Stavros Niarchos, the shipping tycoon, to talk Christina out of the marriage. Niarchos replied that he couldn't talk her out of anything.

Bianca Jagger has decided — at least for the moment — to drop the divorce action against Mick. There are two schools of thought as to why: One is money, money, the other is her desire to establish a holding pattern, a sort of wait-and-see deal.

Mick had Bianca sign a prenuptial agreement, you see, allowing her no money in case of divorce.

No one thinks Mick could for-would cut Bianca off financially, but she may have come to the conclusion that more is to be gained by staying married to Mick. She is, after all, the mother of their little daughter, Jade.

### Fashionwise

## Does He Care What She Wears?

By Lee England

Dear Lee: My husband never seems to notice when I'm wearing a new dress. Do you think that he isn't interested or that he doesn't approve of my selections?

On the contrary, he probably does approve. If he didn't, you would not doubt hear about it. Many husbands, unfortunately, have a way of taking their wife's clothes for granted.

According to a recent item I read, tracers of missing report runaway wives can't even remember their wife's height, measurements, or eye or hair color, let alone what they were wearing. However, these same men do remember the make, year and color of the cars the wives ran off in. Make what you will of that.

Dear Lee: I keep hearing that hats are coming back. Does anybody wear them any more?

Personally, I love hats — for some very practical reasons. For example, large, soft, floppy hats are marvelous to wear in the summer. They offer some shade from the hot blistering sun. On cold, nippy days I like wearing a snug little knit cap that I can pull over my ears to keep them warm.

Hats are great for hiding hair that needs attention. I much prefer wearing a jaunty poplin or slicker hat but in place of those silly plastic kerchiefs. Of all the items that fall into the so-called accessories field, I believe hats serve the most functional purpose.