

The Reel World

1980 Movie Review

campus Digest News Service

1980 was not the year of "Heaven's Gate" and perhaps that sums up this lethargic movie year best. In other words, 1980 picked up where 1979 left off: Successful directors and extravagant background settings. Randal Kleiser was allowed to film "The Blue Lagoon" on an exotic tropical island, John Landis used Chicago as a demolition-derby background in "The Blues Brothers" and "The Empire Strikes Back" had Darth Vader performing in a multi-million dollar outer space. It is no coincidence that the men responsible for these high budget movies had first made "Grease," "Animal House" and "Star Wars" only a few years earlier.

Then came "Heaven's Gate" and our standard, big budget movie system blew up in United Artists' face. The movie flopped, of course, and they reeled it in for re-editing. As a result, movie studios may think twice before giving young directors such freedom and extravagant financial privileges.

1980 was the year of one of the most disturbing movie trends of the decade: the women-in-danger horror flicks. Movies like "Prom Night," "Friday the 13th," and "Silent Screams" all used women in a degrading way. Lacking any artistic integrity, they seemed to exist only for their brutal attacks on defenseless women and not for the fun of giving the audience a thrill.

Most surprising was that the big stars failed at the box-office this past year. Summer was a disaster, Christmas a disappointment. In between, little worthy of mention was released. When January 1 finally rolled around, 1980 at the movies was a sad disastrous memory.

And yet, even within this disappointing year, the studios occasionally managed to spew something other than junk from their less than aspiring factories. Studios took fewer chances than ever before but what is amazing is that some of these chances paid off.

Without further adieu then, here is my list of the ten best movies of 1980, all of which stood out in one of the darkest and most years of celluloid.

THE BLACK STALLION

Usually, the best movie on a critic's top ten list is a recent release, one that played in theatres across the country within the last three months of the year. That's because the January and February movies have a way of getting lost in memory with so many recent features having come and gone by then.

But "The Black Stallion" is an exceptional exception because it has stayed fresh in my mind for the last twelve months. Technically a 1979 feature, this mini-masterpiece didn't reach the majority of the country until late last January.

The story is directly lifted from the child-animal fairy-tales of yesterday. A boy and a beautiful stallion are stranded on a deserted island, alone with nobody nearby. Their rapport is developed in front of glorious scenery that does more for the picture than just serve as something nice to look at. In fact, it metaphorically clarifies the human-animal relationship we are about to see. Once the boy and horse learn to love each other, they almost disintegrate into the lucious photography. As they ride across the crystal blue ocean, we get the feeling that they are as much a part of this natural world as the water, sun, and sand that inhabit.

Francis Coppola produced the movie meaning that he gave the financial support that allowed Director Carroll Ballard to carry out his vision of taking old material and giving it a fresh approach.

ORDINARY PEOPLE

This year's "Kramer Vs. Kramer" was the directing debut of Robert Redford. Adapted from Judith Guest's best-selling novel, the story spends time with the perfect family who, through one severe 'mess up,' shows just how imperfect they really are. In the end, the once perfect Jarrett family is fatally destroyed.

The family lives in a posh suburb of Chicago where they exist under the social norms of their environment. Unfortunately, their life style is shattered when the oldest of the two Jarrett boys dies in a boating accident leaving the youngest to consume the guilt.

Redford is wonderful at the visual observations and, thus, his movie doesn't just look right but feels right too. The world inhabited by the Jarretts is filmed in soft, cool colors; leaves fall like a scene from a hallmark card, landscapes are perfectly manicured and the grass is almost too green. Women and especially Mrs. Jarrett maintain such a meticulous appearance that you almost want to knock them in the mud. Redford's picture penetrates this perfection and exposes the real colors of this decaying family.

The performances are all exceptional including Mary Tyler Moore as the mother, Donald Sutherland as the father, Timothy Hutton as the suffering son, and Judd Hirsch as the understanding psychiatrist. In 1980, the American Movie Industry found a talented new director named Robert Redford.

RAGING BULL

Martin Scorsese's brutal black & white movie uses prize-fighter Jake La Motta, a vicious puncher, is seen as animal from the opening. The movie is honest in that it doesn't make excuses for its violence; "Raging Bull" is ugly because it is about a universal ugliness. The fight scenes are spectacular, and Robert De Niro as La Motta is a knockout and a sure Academy Award winner come April. Scorsese's direction is superb as he carries this dark movie through the very course he intended to.

KAGEMUSHA

Akira Kurosawa's Japanese epic is a great success in the important steps of epic movie making. "Kagemusha" tells its story with great narrative drive, bigger-than-life battle sequences and quiet humanistic moments. Kurosawa's story is about a Japanese Samurai who also is a crook but happens to physically resemble the warlord. When the warlord dies, he takes over to rule the people. Kurosawa stages some great battle scenes but just as effective are the smaller moments like when the little girl realizes her grandfather is a fake. He let his themes of greed, power, and people using other people, emerge through his powerful telling of this bold tale.

CLOSE ENCOUNTERS—SPECIAL EDITION

Yes, it should be eligible for a 1980 top ten list because director Steven Spielberg's changes make this a significantly better movie. Spielberg went back, edited, added, deleted and came up with a story that moves swifter and holds on closer to his characters. Although most of the material is old footage, this new "Close Encounters" is an essentially a new cinematic experience. The ending has you inside the ship for a brief time and unlike other viewers, I am happy they did not take us on an extensive tour. Spielberg still realizes that the greatest element of science fiction is not only the spectacle of it all, but our own vast imagination.

THE TIN DRUM

Gunter Grass' allegorical story is brought to the screen with fine cinematic flair. At three years of age, the boy of this German movie consciously decides he will stop growing to protest the atrocities of his world. "Tin Drum" takes place during World War II and the boy moves through these times with a drum over his shoulder ready to start banging when he sees the injustices of his universe. The stunted growth of the boy is a good tool to stop and see what one man can do to another. The "Tin Drum" like all great allegories, is filled with striking images. There is one unforgettable scene where we see the birth of a human being from that child's point of view.

THE SHINING

Instead of concerning himself with surprising and manipulating his audience, Stanley Kubrick made a far more fascinating picture. "The Shining" not only studies a sane man turning insane but actually enters his warped mind. Jack Nicholson plays a caretaker who moves into an ominous resort with his family to perform the janitorial duties for the winter. His family is alone in the great, big castle and as usual, Kubrick's technical wizardry has a great influence on the characters who populate his story.

In memory of our dear friend, Doris Huges, on the first anniversary of her passing:

from THANATOPSIS

So shalt thou rest -- and what if thou withdraw
In silence from the living, and no friend
Take note of thy departure? All that breathe
Will share thy destiny. The gay will laugh
When though art gone, the solemn brood of care
Plod on, and each one as before will chase
His favorite phantom; As the long train
Of ages glides away, the sons of men...
Matron and maid, shall one by one be gathered
To thy side.

William Cullen Bryant

The Art Association of Harrisburg, 21 North Front Street, will present the photographic works of two young women March 2 through 13, opening with a public reception on Sunday, March 1, from 1 to 4P.M. Sharon Ament and Sheila M. Smith, both of Harrisburg, will exhibit their photos in the two main-floor galleries. Monday through Friday gallery hours are 9:30A.M. to 1:30P.M. Saturdays, 1 to 5P.M.

Sharon Ament, a graduate of Pennsylvania State University, was photographer for the Democratic Party in the House of Representatives 1979-80. She has taught photography and art in the summer program for Youth in the Arts, the Boys' and Girls' Clubs of Harrisburg, the Harrisburg School District, and the Harrisburg Recreation Bureau. Presently a free-lance photographer, Ament has exhibited in numerous area galleries and shows since 1972. She has won awards in the Women in the Arts and Arts Festivals exhibitions, and has served as judge in several photography contests. Ms. Ament's work, dealing mainly with the human form, is familiar to local exhibition-goers. She is also a talented painter.

Sheila Smith, graduate of HACC's Associate Degree program, went back to college at age 29 and became interested in photography while striving for a degree in journalism. Only 35 years old, Ms. Smith is the mother of five children and the grandmother of one.

Sheila Smith coordinated and participated in a Black Art Exhibit in March, 1979, and wrote columns for Harrisburg Magazine and "Scoop, USA." Calling herself a freelance writer and publisher as well as a photographer, Smith has recently published a book of poetry and photographs entitled *Ebony Fire*, by Paula Ecole and Sinbad, to be released later this month. Ms. Smith's photographs deal mainly with subjects drawn from the local black community, and show a refreshing vitality, sensitivity, and an intuitive sense of composition.

Robert Bissett and Susan Hauschildt, exhibition co-chairmen, plan to feature more photography in future AAH shows, and hope the Ament/Smith exhibition will encourage local photographers to join the Art Association