"Cruising" Draws Local Reaction

Gay men from Chapel Hill distributed leaflets in front of the Varsity Theatre during the recent showing of the movie Cruising.

The United Artists/TransAmerica film about homosexual murders opened at the Varsity on Feb. 15 for a contractual two-week run.

A spokesperson for the group said the leafletting was intended as an educational effort "to correct the false and incomplete information about gays provided by the film."

The quiz-format leaflet was written by five gay men and women from Chapel Hill and Durham after screening the film with the cooperation of the theatre management.

Leaflet distributors said they did not see their act as a protest. Lightning Brown said, "It's silly to protest a movie that's so bad. We have concentrated our energy on providing the film's small audiences with further information ignored or distorted by the film."

Questions in the leaflet deal with distribution of the film by "blind bidding," stereotypes as oppression, and the legal status of same-sex love in North Carolina.

In a summary statement, the leaflet says gays are linked to criminality by State laws that outlaw sexual acts that can be performed by same-sex partners.

Leaflet distributors in Chapel Hill said that most people reacted positively to their action. Many movie goers as well as passersby stopped for conversations about the film.

Varsity Theatre manager Lonnie Davis in a story in the Daily Tar Heel (Feb. 27, 1980) described audience reaction to the movie as one of bewilderment. "'(The plot) is not very clear. It seems to be violence for its own sake.'"

The ambiguity of plot and lack of character development have been criticized by many reviewers.

UNC-CH drama graduate student Paul Miles said the novel by Gerald Walker on which Cruising was based is "straightforward."

"But the movie is convoluted," he said.

Cruising actor Larry Atlas said the script was changed by director William Friedkin numerous times during the filming to make the plot ambiguous. Atlas played the role of the murderer for the first three murders in the movie. He was in Chapel Hill recently for the Playmakers Repertory Company's production of Othello.

Miles said the film was the "epitome of sloppy film making." He said he also questions the subliminal effects in the film.

"Several gay men are shown in possession of the same style of steak knife as used by the murderer. Such subliminals are saying that all gay men are murderers," he said.

UNC-G Alumnae Protest Group

Several alumnae of Women's College, now UNC-G, have written letters to the Greensboro Daily News and Record protesting the founding of the Gay Students' Union at their alma mater.

The letter writing began after GSU gained University recognition last Oct. 15 as an official student group. A University Vice Chancellor replied to the letters to the editor with a letter defending the rights of GSU. This prompted letters to the newspapers from other Greensboro residents, again protesting existence of the GSU.

The Rev. Joe Flora, faculty advisor to the group, said, "Some of the students in GSU have been disturbed by the tone of the letters to the editor, as well as the manner of newspaper coverage, particularly in the choice of headlines."

The University has reactivated the Human Relations Commission in light of the recent letter-writing campaign and the anti-gay student protest around Strong Dormitory last fall (Lambda, Dec. 1979). Flora said the Commission would "investigate any reported violations of student's rights and try to resolve tension that develops between groups on campus."

Commission member Thomas Fitzgerald said one task of the Commission would be a series of seminars for dorm counselors next fall. "We've got to do some educating about gay issues," he said.

Flora said, "There is no organized administrative or student government pressure against GSU."

Attendance has been low for recent GSU meetings. A spokesperson for the group said members were tiring of hassling with the controversy. "We're new to all of this. We could use some encouragement from other groups.".