

'Sugar Cane Alley's' problems lie in its genre

A new genre is developing on the filmic horizon, and *Sugar Cane Alley* belongs very much to this trend.

The "cultural epic" can be characterized by five major traits, toward which *Sugar Cane Alley* and another recent film, *El Norte*, show strong tendencies.

The first characteristic of the genre is a concentration on an individual's struggle to transcend his rich, albeit suppressed, cultural and social environment. *Sugar Cane Alley* takes place in Martinique in the 1930s, telling of a young boy's self-realization amidst the deprived class of black harvesters on a sugar plantation.

Steve Carr

Review

Garry Cadenat, who plays the boy Jose, instills a wonderful sense of innocence in his character, and this marks the second distinction of a cultural epic: The central character is an innocent. He is, in fact, so good that his embodiment of all that is universally admired borders on being bland.

In contrast to the main character, the satellite roles prove much more markedly defined in their personalities and their environment. Jose's grandmother, M'Man Tine, and his quasi-spiritual father, Medouze, give the picturesque story its backbone with their deeply felt, fully realized personifications of African culture. Particularly outstanding is Darling Legitim as M'Man Tine, who despite her cruelty desperately wants her grandson to escape the will-breaking work of the sugar cane fields.

Inspired in part by Medouze's tales, Jose shows himself to be an unusually gifted student, and is accepted into the competitive high school at Fort de France. This marks the fourth characteristic of the cultural epic: The hero



In the form of a cultural epic, 'Sugar Cane Alley' tells the story of black harvesters on a sugar plantation

overcomes his obstacles and limits, but not without hardship.

Once at the school, Jose learns he will receive only a partial scholarship, which means his overworked grandmother still will have to provide for him.

Only after Jose writes a brilliant essay does he obtain a full scholarship, and even that occurs after the teacher wrongly accuses Jose of plagiarism.

The production values of *Sugar Cane Alley* are surprisingly high but not extravagant. This is the last mark of the cultural epic: It attempts to reach a large portion of the audience through conforming to certain esthetic and dramatic expectations. Hence the film's smooth, somewhat glossy style is in marked contrast with the gritty, harsh way of life that it depicts.

To regard *Sugar Cane Alley* only as the product of a genre would be a mistake, however. Individual scenes give the film an identity of its own.

In one scene, Jose's mulatto friend Leopold listens in as his dying father disowns him because "It's only a white man's name."

Another scene shows a girl learning of her acceptance to the high school, only to have her father explain that she must help him in the fields.

At other times, however, *Sugar Cane Alley* becomes too pat. Jose's scolding a black box office cashier for a self-denigrating, racist remark is one example, as the cashier is shown behind a screen.

The main weakness of *Sugar Cane Alley* lies not so much in the film itself

as in the qualities of the cultural epic.

Jose does not have to be a multi-faceted character, but he needs more delineation. The blandness of his personality relegates him to a lower level of identification with the audience, which finds itself more interested in the plights of Leopold or M'Man Tine. There should be some middle ground between the innocent and the worldly characters.

When a film comes along that treats its main characters with a clearer, more distinct and less allegorical focus, the genre will have come to fruition.

Textbook reserve set up

Student Government and the UNC library system have combined forces in sponsoring a textbook reserve program for UNC students.

The program will start with 40 textbooks which were financed by a \$800 donation from the library. UNC professors have been asked to donate desk copies of books for use in the program.

The reserve textbooks will represent 10 to 15 different classes with attendance of 250 students or more, and success will determine expansion of the program, said Student Government textbook task force leader Michele Killough.

The textbooks will be in place by Oct. 15 but won't be available to students until next semester.

Texan band at Cradle should appeal to students

The most popular bar band in Austin, Texas is coming to Chapel Hill. Zeitegeist, a neo-psychedelic group, will play tonight at Cat's Cradle.

Zeitegeist is a German phrase that, by extension, has come to refer to the spirit of an age as well as the trend of thought and feeling in a period.

The band *Zeitegeist* echoes the thought and feeling of American rock 'n' roll of the late '60s, sharing the neo-psychedelic label with R.E.M., Dream Syndicate and Green on Red.

The band plays Velvet Underground-influenced power pop with a dance beat. *Zeitegeist* has opened for Rain Parade and Dream Syndicate but has more of a pop feel than either of those bands.

The group compares favorably with the exuberance of R.E.M. and Austin's now-disbanded Standing Waves.

Standing Waves was a long-time Chapel Hill favorite, and *Zeitegeist*

probably will appeal to fans of that band. In fact, *Zeitegeist* has opened for the Optimistics, a band formed by two members of Standing Waves.

Zeitegeist formed late in 1983 with John Croslin and Kim Longacre singing, writing songs, and playing guitar. Garrett Williams is the drummer. Cindy Toth replaced original bassist Kelly Bradley four months ago to complete the band's current lineup.

Popularity in Austin clubs led *Zeitegeist* to record its first single, *Freight Train Rain*, which was backed by "Electra" and "Where's Jamb," an instrumental. The band hopes to spread its success through sales of *Freight Train Rain* and through its energetic live show.

Tonight's show will be *Zeitegeist's* first appearance in Chapel Hill. No opening band is scheduled, and the music will start around 9:30 p.m.

—EDDIE HUFFMAN

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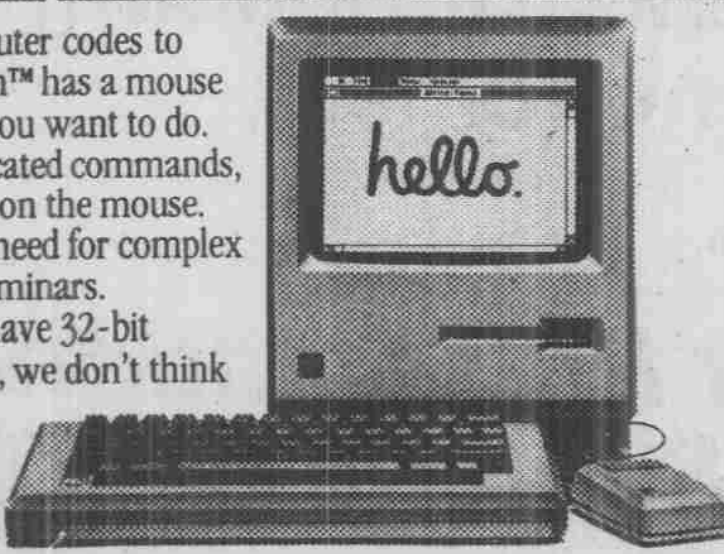


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