

# Horror: film or fans

By HANK BAKER  
Staff Writer

Late show audiences have found a new way to channel their energy. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is the latest in the line of "cult items" that either didn't or wouldn't make it as a regular feature. But the weekend late show audience managed to "discover," or popularize a few films that might otherwise have sat on the shelf. Soon the word spreads around about what a neat experience going to these films is, and a group of regulars develop with the hopeful purpose of getting others to join their ranks as well as see the movie time after time. The regulars are the cult for whom, evidently, variety is not the spice of life. Usually the behavior of the audience is more interesting than the film itself.

The other late show cult hits hardly got out of New York City, because they had small distributors: late show revenues don't amount to much in the long run, 20th Century Fox, however, has plenty of money, and when *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* caught on as a late show in the larger cities (it was hardly released as a feature) the film got a wider release.

The behavior of some of the audience — some regulars, some hardy newcomers — is surprisingly boisterous. At the beginning of the film, there is a wedding sequence, during which members of the audience throw rice; when someone in the film proposes a toast, pieces of toast fly into the air. Most of the people who do these things have obviously seen the film several times, because everything they do and say is exactly timed. Assorted other sayings are chimed in here and there, and adolescent as this behavior is, it's actually funnier than the movie is. *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* may replace *Star Wars* as the vehicle by which filmgoers can have a second childhood.

There's nothing harmful about this, but when it becomes a weekly ritual, you begin to

wonder just why people keep going. The movie itself isn't even any good. What's worse, those who keep going probably don't care if it's bad (they may say it's great, but I think they really mean what they do during the film). Who'd have thought that tribal rites would come back this way?

That, however, is the point. The usual film experience is one of singular passivity. You may trade quips and jokes with friends, but it is, finally, your own experience. But the audience at *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, with its chants, dancing, and other paraphernalia, is something of a collective, and those eager for a change join in, no matter how silly it all is.

*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* is the perfect movie for this kind of response — it asks nothing of the audience. The movie is an outlandishly campy rock-horror parody with a gimmick — the main character is a drag-queen homosexual mad-doctor. Everyone else residing in his castle is also freakish, and though this could have had a little real humor in it, the film is basically a brassy come-on. It isn't funny, it's dumb. Some people laugh at intervals, but I think they're laughing more at the shenanigans going on in the audience than what's on the screen. The transvestite doctor, his oddball cohorts and the rock music are a necessity to maintain any interest; horror film parodies have been done so often, there's not much you can do with them. Tim Curry plays the transvestite with relish, but he's not particularly funny, just showy. The camerawork is amateurish and the lip-synch in some of the musical numbers is way off.

When I asked some people what they thought of it all, no one really said whether he or she thought the movie was good, just that "the audience was great." An active audience is rare these days, but to turn the chaotic crumminess of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* into a turn-on is simply faddish behavior. But ritualizing it isn't just curious, it's ridiculous. Enjoyment is too easy an excuse.



This past weekend at the American Dance Festival, members of the Paul Taylor Dance Company performed in "Esplanade," an exuberant, energetic number choreographed to the music of J.S. Bach. Carolyn Adams, whose fine dancing had caught the audience's eye in earlier numbers, shined in performing several dazzling leaps — one backwards — landing in the arms of a dancer halfway across the stage.

## Hitchcock masters suspense

By PAMA MITCHELL  
Tar Heel Contributor

Alfred Hitchcock's distinctive style and characteristic subject matter have made him one of the few film directors whose name has represented a box office drawing power comparable to that of the top stars. His works, tales of dark intrigue and murder, have delighted generations of movie audiences and have earned high praise from both American and European film critics.

Hitchcock leads his characters and the audience through a labyrinth of false clues, bizarre twists of fate (or of plot), sinister-seeming people, objects that turn out to be

harmless and, most disturbing of all, seemingly harmless ones that unexpectedly assume threatening, menacing proportions. He lulls the audience into complacency by making it seem that his characters have found a temporary safe haven, then abruptly disenchant viewers of such notions.

As critic Andrew Sarris has noted, Hitchcock's violence occurs not in darkened alleys or eerie old houses, settings comfortably distant from our everyday lives, but in motel-room showers, crowded concert halls, or busy downtown streets. By using common, ordinary characters in equally ordinary settings, the director makes a sham of our cozy delusions about "safety in numbers" and thoroughly shatters our belief that an ordered, middle-class existence will ward off or evade the forces of evil.

Significantly, Hitchcock almost never presents an unrelievedly bleak, frightening world. He spices his films generously with a sardonic black humor that gives the viewer rest and relief from menace and danger.

But this director's reputation rests finally with his "thrillers." The rhythms, the pacing, the headlong-rushing movement of his best films make the viewer feel excitement, anticipation and a strong need to know what comes next.

Hitchcock gains this emotional hold on audiences through his supreme technical prowess. His stylistic method—subjective camera shots, analytical or "psychological" editing—involves the viewer as participant in a film's actions.

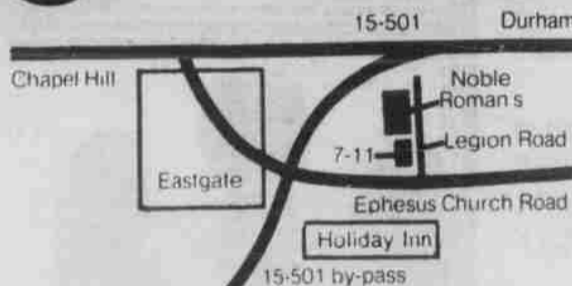
The stories are told directly and economically, with far less reliance on spoken dialogue than on expressively intercut visual images. The most memorable scenes and sequences in Hitchcock's films have little or no dialogue and represent purely visual storytelling.

The Master of Suspense in fact has mastered the film medium, so that we experience rather than simply watch a Hitchcock movie. As a body, his films, always enjoyable and often edifying in their astute observation of human nature, represent a significant artistic achievement that has few equals in the American cinema.

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