

entertainment

Native arts fest: before we came



Photos by
Sandy Zeldin



Scenes from the Festival of Native Arts held last Thursday by Stong and Calumet Colleges and the Department of Music. Clockwise from upper left: York students join in traditional Iroquois dance in Stong JCR; Hubert Buck with turtle rattle necklace; Amos Keye addresses audience as Chief Arnold General, Buck, and Hubert Buck Jr. look on; Detail of *Wisdom and Innocence* by Daphne Odsig in Samuel J. Zacks Gallery.

The ballad of Stroszek: painful humanism

By Colin Smith

Werner Herzog, a young German film-maker whose work is quickly realizing universal critical acclaim, wryly describes his new film *Stroszek* as a "ballad." That it is, but the facile label completely bypasses the other elements that comprise the bulk of this wondrous film.

Stroszek is a rambling, abject 108-minute discourse on the human condition, touched with com-

passion, humour, brutality and a lot of dry irony.

Stylistically the film has quite a lot in common with Robert Altman's better work, particularly *California Split*. Both of them operate in a very downbeat low-key fashion, emphasizing throw-away dialogue and ambiguous protagonists. Both share a superficially common theme (the quest for material success), even though Altman's film was principally about compulsion, and

Herzog's is too diverse to be categorized.

The skimpý plot revolves around three losers in Berlin: Bruno Stroszek (Bruno S.), a rumpled, alcoholic street musician just released from "reformatory" for the *n*th time; Eva (Eva Mattes), a restless streetwalker with a dogged dependence on the two violent pimps that support and beat her when they feel like it; and Herr Scheitz (Clemens Scheitz), an aged fragile skeleton of a man, full of patience and smiles.

After repeated harassment by the two pimps, these three friends decide to strike out for Wisconsin, where Scheitz's nephew Clayton (Clayton Szlapinski) runs a garage.

Once in America the luckless trio are up against greater odds: no-one save Clayton speaks their language. The euphoria of planting roots in new soil quickly deteriorates: payments on a garish mobile home fall behind (the place is repossessed and auctioned off), Eva runs off

with truckdrivers, Scheitz is arrested for a comical hold-up of a barber shop, and Bruno suffers his own kind of grim defeat in the oddball conclusion.

The movie is distinguished by several things, the first of which is sterling performances from the three leads; Bruno S. is particularly fascinating to watch, as his complex Stroszek never fully reveals himself; the passive child-man with a love for life and music pads around the screen like a befuddled panda. The deliberate blurring of character definitions is employed here by Herzog to maximum effect: the film is so low-key, private, seemingly arbitrary, that one never knows where real life or improvisation invaded the script.

Also admirable is Herzog's dual talents as the writer-director. His screenplay is touching and subtle, etching crystalline characters, loading dialogue with double meanings and ironies throughout, and providing some hilariously

dead-eyed satire on Middle American values.

His direction of the film is disjointedly lyric, peculiar in rhythm, and loaded with symbols: circular motifs, dust-smoke, water, ice, clouds, animals, and colours (especially blue and red), to name just a few. Herzog's ambitious treatment of his screenplay requires the spectator to consciously work at understanding both themselves and the film. Those that do will find *Stroszek* a humanist's delight easily worth several viewings.

