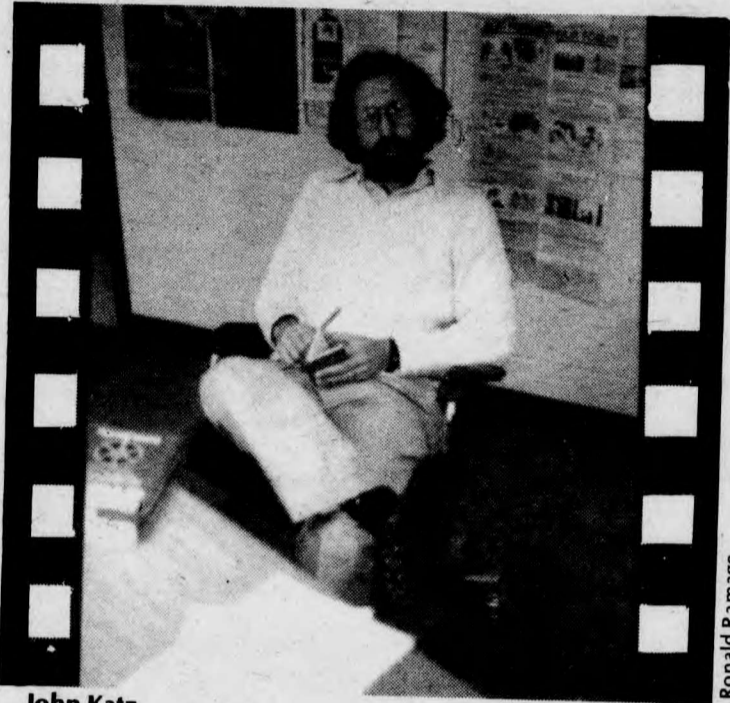


Entertainment

"... We live in the ruins of an equation."
from *The Spiral Stair*
—J.B. Mays—

Best Boy

Raining Katz and Docs



John Katz

Ronald Ramage

Ronald Ramage

York film professor John Katz is currently involved in the promotion and distribution of Ira Wohl's *Best Boy*, voted the Most Popular Film at this year's Toronto Film Festival. The film opens for commercial release November 16, at the Uptown Backstage One.

How did you bring *Best Boy* to the Festival?

About 9 months ago I was invited to a seminar in New York. One of the films there was *Best Boy*, shown in an incomplete version.

At the end of the film, I went up to Ira Wohl, and I said, "If you can complete that in time for the Toronto Film Festival, I will open the Festival Documentary series with it. I'll have the world premiere there." We opened at the Festival and we turned away 200 people, so decided to have a second screening. Turned away 200 people at 9:30 on a Saturday morning. Then, because of just public demand, decided we would have a third showing, and we turned away people for that.

It is intimate, touching, moving, and exhilarating.

What classes do you teach at York? I'm teaching a history of documentary film, which goes all the way from *Nanook of the North*, up through contemporary documentaries. And I'm also teaching a course called Alternative Cinema, dealing with non-commercial films, documentaries, experimental films, and political films.

I'm also doing the Flaherty Film Seminar. It's a very prestigious seminar that used to be held at Robert Flaherty's house on his farm in Vermont. It's been going on for 30 years. It's about one hundred film-makers and film professors and film critics, who get together for a week of screening documentary films.

I will be programming it this year. It has been the place where a lot of critical theory on film has evolved from. I think that the experience I've had with the Flaherty seminars and with the Festival of Festivals and with *Best*

Boy, and other things is all blending in with my classes. I think there's a strong interface between the two.

Could you exist without school? Could I? No. I like teaching. It forces me to organize my thoughts, it forces me to organize what I've been seeing. I like the interaction with young film-makers, with film students. My major work is at York. My professional work is all part and parcel of the research that I'm doing at York. Which in turn, of course, is beneficial for my teaching.

What got you into the field?

I was always interested in documentary film. I began doing research in film, and slowly over a period of years, moved away from literature, away from English, and into films. Then I had the opportunity to see some documentary films, which just showed me what films are capable of, what a powerful medium it could be.

When you say you have a broad definition of documentary, what

are the furthest outposts? Where do the grey areas lie?

Potemkin's getting towards a grey area. But I'm always pushing out the edges. I don't want to say this film is not a documentary, or this film is a documentary. It might have documentary values, or it might have aspects of documentary film. Or it might not.

What are "documentary values"?

There tends to be less mediation between the audience and the film-maker. Scripts used are based on actual events and the film-makers try to stick close to the actual events. They frequently do not have professional actors although they sometimes do have professional actors, but frequently there's a lot of improvisation. They tend to be in some way factual. They tend to be things that can or actually have happened.

My particular interest in documentary film now is in Personal Documentary films, films which film-makers make about themselves or their families. Autobiography.

Crackling with realism

Andrew C. Rowsome

I spent Friday night watching the private/public hell of an "archetypal" Canadian family. It was alternately intriguing, exciting, repulsing but always fascinating.

The intimacy of Atkinson Studio provided a perfect setting for the Theatre department's presentation of Michel Tremblay's *En Pieces Detachees*. A stunningly versatile set transformed effortlessly from Montreal balconies into a restaurant and then into a country and western bar. Even the most reluctantly shy audience members were drawn into the play, eventually clapping along with the marvellous "Aurora Sisters" or even daring to answer a cast member's comment.

At one point I found myself peering through one of the suspended windows and inwardly cursing (along with the more vocal Mme. Belanger) when the family drew their blind. Stretched deliciously between the play's reality, my role as voyeur and my

awareness of myself as voyeur (audience member) was driven home and then twisted.

This entire effect was enhanced by flawless work in the group scenes. It felt like a specific moment in Montreal and every character became a living individual. The atmosphere literally crackled with an odd sort of realism.

Smaller scenes were unfortunately less effective, hampered partly by the melodramatic elements of the play. But even these moments were redeemed by



Bryon Johnson

performances that outclass most of the work I have ever seen at York. Pam Haig carries "Helene" through some moments which are phenomenal. To assign such a role to a "student" actress is nervy, to have her succeed so brilliantly is amazing.

Toni Laraso as Lise, Frances Gibson as Robertine, and Athena Voyatzis provided other powerful segments. It seems a shame that the play had such a short run before closing. To see these performances evolve over a longer period of time would certainly produce a remarkable show.

The Theatre Department should be commended for tackling such an ambitious work with such a wide range of emotions. Alan Richardson and all involved should be congratulated for succeeding so well. At a time when much of York is forced to apologize for its student sensibilities it is nice to see professionalism attained.

Off York

Film

The Hungarians, showing at the Festival Cinema as part of the Hungarian film series on November 18, is a film that belongs in the category of epic, like the Swedish film, *The Emigrants*. Both are dedicated to the life of the common man: his struggles, joys, family and friends. The director Zoltan Fabri has chosen to tell his story with no individual stars. Instead he has captured a very earthy, humane atmosphere through the strong but low-key handling of his actors. Like a pastoral symphony the picture is divided into four movements corresponding to the seasons with an extra Winter thrown in to underscore the tragic side to the story. The superb camera work and editing make this film richly deserving of its Academy Award nomination for the best foreign film of 1979.

Sonny Forest

Music

A knock on the door: "If you haven't heard Thelonius Monk, you haven't heard jazz." Monk's work is among the best recorded music that has been released in this past half century. Now Terry Adams, a piano player with the New York-based group NRBQ, has compiled a collection of some of Monk's greatest and more obscure work: *Always Know* (Columbia). It is a tasteful production that serves as a good introduction to novices and a necessity for the serious jazz fan. Adams comments that Monk's quartet has "a beat as strong as the best rock 'n' roll."

Elliott Lefko



Never too tender

Gary Action

The Sand, a play written and directed by Marion Andre, opened Monday night at Burton to some not-so-dry eyes—people remembering the chillingly calculated Nazi genocide of European Jews. A somewhat autobiographical work, *The Sand* is basically about a young Jewish boy (Marek) living in Poland 1942, learning to come to grips with his Jewishness and with death. Surviving with dignity and hope in a god. As Andre writes in a pamphlet distributed for the play, "I do not ask for pity. Only for remembrance of deeds that were done."

With such scenes as German soldiers kicking a crutch out from under an old man, a mother dragged screaming from her baby, and a young boy shot and

bleeding, I wondered if Andre was contradicting himself. Certainly pitying sighs could be heard from the audience, but the leap from Aryans shoving people into ovens to those particular scenes is disturbing.



The acting was with few exceptions mediocre. Shawn Zevitt as a water-vendor does an exceptional job, though. He could have hammed up his part horribly but he uses conscientious restraint. It was at times unnerving to hear well-pronounced English from some

characters; akin to watching a sword-and-sandal flick about ancient Rome with the actors speaking in clipped British accents. The stage lighting coordinated with Andre's uses of sudden stop-action integrated with Marek's narrative voice-over nicely.

I can still remember seeing Montgomery Clift's performance as a mentally and physically wrecked witness in *Judgement in Nuremberg* when I was 14.

That for me was more effective in my first revelation of the Holocaust, but when I read of the recent occurrences in Greensboro, N.C., I know we must remember the crimes of four decades ago.

The Sand plays until Nov. 17 at Burton Auditorium.