

Fitzcarraldo is the proof

# Making pix the stuff of romance & adventure

Two & a half hours of old-fashioned colour & sound turn-of-the-last-&-the-next century great movie value--a magnificent obsession played against a primeval landscape by a marvelous actor goaded on by an Ahab of a director--who in his turn was deserted by his bankable stars & unable to realize his dream & is finally forced by his bankers to fake success, right down to an insanely happy ending--losing all his battles but winning his war. I don't say that *Fitzcarraldo* is a great film. It isn't. Because it doesn't fail.

You see, you see this attempt by producer-director-writer Herzog, on a denuded South American jungle hill, to get a system of ropes and pulleys with a few hundred men on them to pull a 320 ton steamship up a 40-degree slope--but the world doesn't budge. But in the story they fiddle about & succeed. But in the filmmaking not even a 40 ton D-8 Cat made much difference. But they finally got what equipment was necessary and & but & so we get to see this whale of an image--the ship, impossibly, climbing its mountain, & the movie, special-effectively after all, getting made.

"I am my films," Herzog has said, wanting to be one-to-one with his art. In the great film we don't get to see, such a director could have altered the story to fit the reality the movie-making encountered. Unfortunately, feature filmmaking is seldom that agile. Filmmakers design films from the dream out, paying little attention to the simple reality of the people & or peoples portrayed. There's a lot of angry folks around the world just waiting for that persuasive filmmaker to dare show his face there again.

In *Fitzcarraldo* we see the passions of the Indians & our hero merge, the Europeans entering dreamtime, the natives entering European culture, by mistake, but in deed. In the film's finale, on the ship, on the Amazon, costumed musicians & singers, played by contemporary urban Peruvian native musicians & singers, are performing happily Bellini's opera, "The Peruvians", set in 17th century New England. The same New World we still live in, the one German romantics still long to conquer.

*Fitzcarraldo* is a film made on the real wild frontiers in Peru & Brazil, & for the people there the filmmaking was as much an imposition of European spirit as the opera company in the narrative imposed, 75 or 80 years ago, on the silent scream of the jungle. *Fitzcarraldo* is not about politics or native rights or ecology--but Herzog does succeed in getting a story out which shows who the grandfathers of the present politicians, natives & developers thought they were; & he shows be-jesus missionaries saying the natives are starting to think of themselves as citizens not Indians, & he shows how immense the trees are that make our oxygen; & the very making of *Fitzcarraldo* did become an issue locally; & the image stands, of music as the religion of imperialism (religion is just the music)--in our time, John Lennon died everywhere,

even more than Caruso lived everywhere.

The great film we do get to see, creating *Fitzcarraldo* more than Herzog, & more than Herzog did, is Les Blank's *Burden of Dreams*, the documentary on the making of *Fitzcarraldo*. The fictioneer may take advantage, but the observer has the advantage--he has the audience when it's awake. Or, poetry is bringing it back alive, fiction is bringing it back dead?

Other films that *Fitzcarraldo* has to live beside: *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre*, Herzog's own uncompromising *Aguirre: The Wrath of God*, *The African Queen*, *Apocalypse Now* (as unsatisfactory in its way, especially when compared to *The Deer Hunter*), *The War Game* (how to succeed out of failure, & a model for regional anti-war film/video-making), the great work of the Brazilian film industry, & the world news itself--which reminds me how sweet & smooth (unlike the surly character in *Burden of Dreams*)

Herzog was on NBC the other night, mogulling around with crunchy young David Letterman (I remember how Jack Paar cooked, & Johnny Carson came on as a lid on free American comedy)--which reminds me that we're what's left of the audience after Jack Nicholson, Warren Oates (R.I.P.), Jason Roberts & Mick Jagger jogged away from parts in *Fitzcarraldo*.

It's tough enough for an actor to be shoved out front to meet all creation with icons as fragile as a face & a few words & a few Caruso records & a rotting white linen suit. *Fitzcarraldo* is so far beyond travelogue that one really isn't sure what's gonna happen next, which must bother mainstream actors as much as it does mainstream audiences. (Imagine the Canadian film industry not knowing what was gonna happen next!) The stately pace of the film (an hour to get ready, an hour to get set, & a half an hour to get it gone) gives the spoiled & spoonfed an awful lot of time to

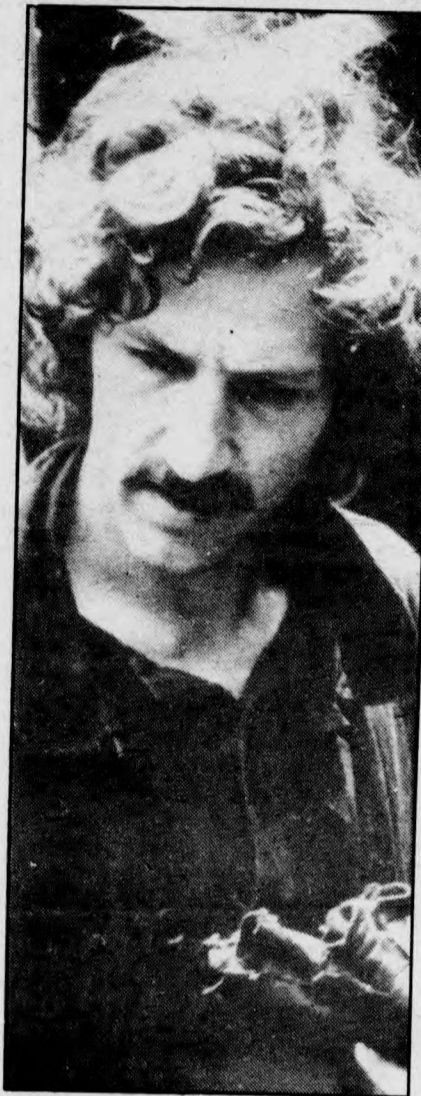
think about it all, the bugs swirling in the nightlight, the wall of rainforest swimming in the grain of the filmstock, the deaths in the mud, the saliva wine, the tableaux of human natural obsession, the women left behind to raise families

humour (shades of Magritte!) or appreciate Klaus Kinski (shades of Laughton!). Kinski looks & there's a clearing in the jungle.

The camerawork in the film is expressive in a kind of long-armed, supple-wristed way, following or leading or spotting action, then the editing can cut us to Kinski close-up, whose flinch in time saves 9 miles of exposition. I saw the sub-titled version in German--the Toronto print is a dubbed version. Almost every performance is clear & memorable. The ship's captain is a thin role, though. Claudia Cardinale has one wonderful moment trying to explain to someone Kinski's urgent need for opera, & she sets up his character in our sympathies for the whole show, lucky guy. There's an Indian chief whose concentrated attention is the pivot of the main human events portrayed--he's the only civilized man around. The Indians are as much the slaves of the Europeans as are the dripping rubber trees.

The film is studded with moments of Indian music in performance, but not enough to counter the grand opera--I wish it had been a fairer fight, musically. The background is the work of Popul Vuh. God sure is an old fart.

Generally Herzog has exercised a lot of discretion in his presentation & it doesn't bog down when it's not supposed to. What does *Fitzcarraldo* say? Making pix is still the stuff of romance & adventure. Breaking into the US market is still the stuff of dreams. Taking brown people images & fitting them to white people ideas is still the stuff of northern hemisphere real life.



Warner Herzog

like money or is it money like families. Hmmm, sounds like I enjoyed it--& I did, but a tiny-minded audience might not recognize Herzog's grandiose sense of

Gerry Gilbert is a Vancouver poet whose latest book is *From Next Spring* (Coachhouse Press). He was recently seen in the *Poetry A Go-Go Show* at Scuffers in Toronto.

## CYSF Liquor Manager planning pumpkin party for Hallowe'en

Sheree Lee Olson

Despite efforts of city governments to tell us otherwise, Hallowe'en falls this year on a Sunday. And the "Hallowe'en Ghostly Gathering" to be presented that night by Q107 at the Concert Hall will be the only show in town. But that's not the sole notable about this "Party" featuring Blue Peter and The Sharks, as well as Tic Toc and Private Union. The whole affair is the brainchild of a young entrepreneurial partnership, one half of which is 3rd-year York business student, Jeff Drutz, who also happens to run CYSF's Liquor Management Agency.

After spending first year "roaming about the halls", Drutz went to work for CYSF because he thought "school had to have more to offer". As he puts it, "I walked in, I wanted to help, I wanted to get my hands dirty." Although he's a paid employee, he puts in many extra hours. The LMA, says Drutz, has five bar services for clubs on campus, but CYSF "gives the best deal". Since "we are the sponsors of the clubs anyway we split the profits 50-50 and any loss we absorb." And along with organizing, hiring and keeping inventory, Drutz, "always observing and keeping my ears and eyes open", has learned much about the business of promotion, something "I never knew I wanted to do till I got involved with CYSF."


He and his partner, Rob Sugar from Ryerson, got their toes wet last year when they organized a Beatlemania Party at the Concert Hall--"a success"--but had never booked bands before. This Sunday's "Ghostly Gathering" has been six months in the planning, during which time "we really learned the hard way. Things happen. You're never sure what's going down. You've got to get the bands committed. You've got to negotiate. You've got to set yourself a budget. Then you have to promote it."

Promotion involved hundreds of posters, inserts in the *Sunday Sun*, *Now*, and *City Nights* notices, and ads on CFNY. But the real coup was successfully presenting their project to Q107 for backing. "That means we get honorary mentions (DJ plugs), ticket giveaways on the air--using a Hallowe'en trivia questionnaire that Rob and I worked out--and they also provide a lot of the best costume prizes." Several DJs will be present to enhance the evening.

Why hasn't Drutz offered his

promotional talents to CYSF? It's "a little limiting," he says, "because we don't have a hall." The legal maximum in one dining hall is 350 people. Burton Auditorium holds 600, but "people don't seem too receptive" there. For CYSF to break even "they'd have to charge \$5 for Blue Peter alone." Drutz's bash is \$8 at BASS, \$9 at the door.


But a large hall for students is one of CYSF's goals, says Drutz, and he's full of praise for the "vital" experience that working for the Federations provides. "It's got a lot to offer and doesn't ask for much in return."



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