

Do you know where your Kidd Sisters are?

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by Scott Neily
Again, the Middle Deck is providing quality entertainment to its patrons with the unique vocal trio The Kidd Sisters. The three singers, Margo Salnek, Arlene Zock and

new recruit Suzanne Gratton, perform covers of vintage hits from the '40s, '50s and '60s, the music of the Andrews Sisters

being a specialty. Noted as the number-one nostalgia act on the convention, concert, and club circuit, the Kidd Sisters use a

variety of wigs, costumes and make-up to provide the proper feel to their show, with styles ranging from highly sophisticated to laughably outrageous.

Their nostalgia act, backed up musically by one-man orchestra Mark Kersey operating a synthesizer and several sequencers, is the commercial outlet that allows the three women to write original material for their conventional pop/rock act Kidd. Indeed, they have been successful enough in both ventures to be in a position to record an album that will include much of their own material. In addition to their pop songs, the trio also writes, arranges and choreographs their live nostalgia performances.

Currently playing at the Middle Deck until January 23, the Kidd Sisters are sure to provide an excellent evening's worth of entertainment.



The Kidd Sisters: l. to r. Arlene Zock, Margo Salnek, and Suzanne Gratton.

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African films showing

by Jayn Ritchie

The festival of Black African Cinema, which kicks off this weekend at the Wormwood's Dog and Monkey Cinema, has been appropriately subtitled "Twenty Years of Struggle". The history of African film is not long; it spans only twenty years. It has taken great leaps forward in a medium that is the most sensible of all contemporary media in the African context, but has also encountered some of the age-old stumbling blocks familiar to African artists throughout the continent.

The collection of the nine African films for this festival is indeed an impressive undertaking, but it would be more impressive if the films were more readily accessible to the African population, its intended audience. In the case of Sembene Ousmane, his decision to break into the field of film-making (at the age of 40) came from his dissatisfaction with his previous career, writing novels. Sembene had written since the mid-fifties, and published in France, but after the European success of his fourth novel, *L'Harmattan*, Sembene seized the opportunity to study film in Moscow. As Sembene knows well, the literacy rate in Africa is extremely low — an average of around 20 per cent, certainly in his home country of Senegal. Film, usually French, Italian, or American, was already culturally much more significant than the literature, although the quality of films that were distributed was always poor.

Like many African writers, Sembene was also aware that local popular culture was being

eroded and in some cases vanishing, along with many local languages. Much of the dialogue in his films is in Oulouf, except for *Emitai (Lord of the Sky)*, which is in the minority language of Diolla. This allows for the films to have a sense of immediacy and also to reach a far greater section of the local population than any book or foreign film. In fact, Sembene goes on to say that (in Senegal), "my movies have more followers than the political parties and the Catholic and Moslem religions combined." (*Film Quarterly*, 1973).

The promise of success in Africa for African directors and filmmakers is quickly dampened by setbacks in the areas of production, distribution, and finance. Formerly, distribution was controlled by two French companies, and although an association was established in 1981 (the CIDC) to distribute films among 14 Francophone African nations, their success has been limited. Films are usually done in cooperation with the French government, and it may be a number of years before the distribution system works specifically to the benefit of African films.

One final obstacle to African filmmakers is censorship. Sembene's works have been banned in many African countries due to their political content or the portrayal of political circumstances within Senegal. But hopefully the demand for African films by African audiences will encourage further investment in the projects, despite the setbacks. The series Black African Cinema begins on Friday, January 22, at Wormwood's. Two of Sembene Ousmane's films are features, *Black Girl* and *Emitai*.

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