

Ex-Hippies and Smartasses

Underground  
Comedy Shorts  
of the 1960s  
and '70s

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

Grand Illusion Cinema

Co-presented by The Sprocket Society

## DE DÜVA

(George Coe & Anthony Lover, 1968) 15 min

*Awards:* Academy Awards (nominated), Chicago International Film Festival (nominated)

A deadpan spoof of Ingmar Bergman, with Madeline Kahn in her screen debut.

Co-director Anthony Lover got his start in the mid-'60s as cameraman for several sexploitation movies by Joe Sarno (coincidentally known as “the Ingmar Bergman of 42nd Street”).

The Oscar nomination for *De Düva* gave Lover a springboard to found Liberty Studios, a prolific and long-lived New York City production house that made countless commercials, industrials, bumpers, and title sequences. Lover also made commercial parodies for the 1983-84 season of *Saturday Night Live* (“Texxon: Do what we say, and nobody gets hurt”).

George Coe started as an actor on Broadway in the 1950s, appearing in the original produc-

tions of *Mame* and *Company*. After *De Düva*, he was a bit player in the first season of *Saturday Night Live*, and went on to a long and prolific career of dozens of supporting roles in film and TV, including *The Stepford Wives*, *Kramer vs. Kramer*, *Hill Street Blues*, *L.A. Law*, *The West Wing*, and *Archer* (as Woodhouse).

Sid Davis, who plays Death, acted in hundreds of shorts, and was a frequent stand-in for John Wayne. But he is best remembered as the maker of many educational scare films like *Boys Beware* (homosexuality), *Seduction of the Innocent* (marijuana), and *Live and Learn* (scissors).

## CAPTAIN MOM

(Chuck Menville & Len Janson, 1972) 13 min

Superhero Captain Mom meets domineering superhero-tamer Kathrin Victor through a dating service. Will they find true love together?

Menville and Janson made their name with independently produced comedy shorts like *Stop Look and Listen* (1967), *Vicious Cycles* (1967) and *Blaze Glory* (1969), all of which used a stop-motion technique called “pixilation” to animate real people to appear as though they were

driving invisible cars, motorcycles, and horses. *Captain Mom* was their last independent film.

They went on to work in TV, producing and writing dozens of children's shows, such as *Groovie Goolies*, *Star Trek: The Animated Series*, *The Smurfs*, and the 1990s reboot of *Land of the Lost*.

## MAKE ME PSYCHIC

(Sally Cruikshank, 1978) 8 min

*Award:* American Film Institute Maya Deren Award

Anita the duck buys a psychic device at a novelty store in an alternate universe and creates mayhem at a crazy party.

Cruikshank began animating in college, then did post-graduate studies at the San Francisco Art Institute in the early '70s, where she was taught by the legendary avant garde animator, Larry Jordan. She got a job creating animation for commercials at local Snazelle Films, where she was allowed to experiment.

Her Quasi character first appeared in an underground comic book, and then her cartoon *Quasi at the Quackadero* (1975). That short won awards and was widely seen. Its success led to this sequel and, ultimately, a career as an animator for segments on *Sesame Street* (1989-1999) and in many Hollywood films.

## CEDRO WILLY

(Irving Saraf and The Congress of Wonders, 1972) 14 min

The un-PC tale of an emotionally challenged orphan who rises to the presidency.

An obvious dig at Richard Nixon with an inexplicable reference to Sedro-Woolley, WA, this is the only film by the Bay Area hippie comedy duo Congress of Wonders, based on a skit from their second (and final) album, *Sophmoric* [sic].

Between 1968 and 1973, comics Richard Rollins (aka "Winslow Thrill") and Howard Kerr (aka "Karl Truckload") were regulars on the West Coast coffee house and psychedelic rock circuit, often opening for (and even touring with) bands like Big Brother and the Holding Company, Love, Blue Cheer, and Quicksilver Messenger Service. They also recorded radio skits for KSAN-FM.

After the group broke up, Rollins continued to perform on radio in Los Angeles. Kerr became a professional gardener until the success of his wife's fantasy book series, *The Deverry Cycle*, allowed him time to pursue painting.

Irving Saraf co-founded the KQED film unit in 1963, and was later manager of Saul Zaentz's production company Fantasy Films. There, he produced many movies and served as the post-production supervisor of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. Saraf made a dozen documentary features, including the Oscar-winning *In the Shadow of the Stars*.

*Cedro Willy* is not listed in his IMDB profile.

## HOT DOGS FOR GAUGUIN

(Martin Brest, 1972) 22 min

Award: Library of Congress National Film Registry (2009)

A down-and-out photographer concocts a wild plot to stage a sure-fire award-winning news photo.

Brest's NYU undergrad student film stars Danny DeVito in his third film role, with Rhea Perlman in her screen debut.

Brest's next major work was his MFA thesis film at the American Film Institute, the criminally underseen feature *Hot Tomorrows* (1977), with Hervé Villechaize and The Mystic Knights of the Oingo Boingo (pre-*Forbidden Zone*), and featuring darkly surreal production numbers a la Busby Berkeley. Brest went on to direct mainstream

Hollywood hits like *Going in Style* (1979) *Beverly Hills Cop* (1984) and *Scent of a Woman* (1992). The infamous flop *Gigli* (2003) effectively (and unfairly) ended his career.

DeVito and Perlman met in 1971, when she went to see a friend in the one and only performance of the play *The Shrinking Bride*, which also featured DeVito. They moved in together two weeks later. The couple married in 1982.

## HARDWARE WARS

(Ernie Fosselius, 1978) 15 min

“You’ll laugh! You’ll cry! You’ll kiss three bucks goodbye!”

Made for about \$8,000, this legendary spoof of *Star Wars* wound up earning over a million bucks. George Lucas liked it so much, he had Fasselius dub in some voices for *Return of the Jedi*.

Fosselius began his career in the early 1970s as an animator for segments in the first three seasons of *Sesame Street*, including the famous Pinball Number Count series. His early satirical shorts included *The Hindenburger* (1976), which aired on WGBH-TV. After *Hardware Wars* he made

*Porklips Now* (1980), a spoof of *Apocalypse Now* that doesn't land nearly as well.

He went on to work as a sound recordist and voice actor, before retiring from film work to focus mainly on sculpting and puppetry.

The “special” effects crew for *Hardware Wars* included John Allardice, Andy Lesniak, Glen David Miller, and Fred Tepper. All went on to notable effects careers working on major Hollywood films like *Titanic*, *Man of Steel*, and *Top Gun: Maverick*.