

CINEMA

Review: The Killing Fields

The Killing Fields is the true story of Pulitzer Prize winning *New York Times* columnist Sydney Schanberg and his Cambodian interpreter Dith Pran during the years just prior to, during, and after the fall of Cambodia to the Khmer Rouge in 1975. It's a fascinating story.

Schanberg is assigned to Cambodia in 1972 where he hires Dith Pran to be his guide and interpreter. Pran soon proves himself an invaluable colleague—ferreting out the truth through his own

channels and faithfully reporting to and assisting Schanberg. When the fall of Cambodia becomes imminent, Schanberg arranges for Pran and his family to get out. But Pran chooses to stay behind to finish his work with Schanberg, in spite of the certain danger to his own life.

When the Khmer Rouge finally do enter Phnom Penh, the journalists take refuge in the French embassy. But Pran and the other Cambodians are not allowed to leave the country. The Westerners go home, and Pran walks into the hands of the hostile Khmer Rouge.

Schanberg returns to the U.S. and to eventual recognition in the form of a Pulitzer Prize for his Cambodian reporting. He names Pran the co-recipient of the Prize, though Pran has not been found.

In contrast, the next five years for Pran are spent in the relocation camps of the Khmer Rouge—the killing fields. His reality is a truly frightening one—all the more so because we know it to be a true story. Pran becomes a true folk hero by the end of the film. The story—the tragedy—of war torn Cambodia is the story of Dith Pran.

Producer David Puttnam (*Chariots of Fire*), director Roland Joffe (his first feature), and cinematographer Chris Menges (documentaries) have created a realistic and moving drama about the human tragedy of war. As in the *Deer Hunter* and *Apocalypse Now*, *The Killing Fields* is convincingly staged and filmed so we seem to be in the midst of a real war. We experience the chaos, the fear, the insanity of it all.

Sam Waterston and Haing S. Ngor, as well as the supporting cast, are believable in their roles. Waterston portrays Schanberg as a not too likeable man driven by his work but then transformed by his relationship with Pran and the grim realities of war. Haing, a Cambodian refugee in real life, endears us to the sensitive yet street-wise Pran.

The original musical score by Mike Oldfield enhances the tension and realism of the film while the more familiar songs remind us that this is indeed a story of our times. As such, John Lennon's "Imagine" is a fitting conclusion to this moving and memorable film.

—Sonja Ungemach

Review: The Times of Harvey Milk

Directed by Robert Epstein; narrated by Harvey Fierstein.

Harvey Milk's story needs to be told again and again. When he was elected to San Francisco's Board of Supervisors in 1977, he was the first admitted homosexual to win a popular election for public office. As such he became a symbol for gay rights and gay pride, but as a politician he was much more than that. Crusading for all minority groups, including the elderly, the handicapped and the non-English speaking community, he earned the respect and admiration of almost all the citizens of San Francisco. He himself knew that such a public gay figure as himself would ultimately be assassinated, but it was only after serving 11 months that he was shot and killed.

Robert Epstein has created a warm, compelling, involving film in *The Times of Harvey Milk*. Combining testimony from friends, supporters, co-workers and others with period news foot-

age and representative headlines, Epstein provides a study that covers Milk from all aspects—as a politician, as a symbol, as a gay man on the forefront of a cause, as a warm, concerned human being.

The film opens with the news footage where Milk's assassination was told to the world. It sets the history of the film before telling Milk's story, and the parallel story of fellow board member Dan White. Homosexual activist Milk and ex-fireman White became symbols of San Francisco's populist spirit. Where Milk was a politician, a concerned citizen, an idealist and a committed individual, White as the all-American boy who represented traditional values and old fashioned ideas. But White was also symbolic of everything Milk fought—pettiness, ignorance, fear of the alternative. When Milk fought the Briggs amendment head on (a bill aimed at removing homosexual teachers from public schools), White was noticeably on the other side. It is ironically fitting that this all-American figure would be the one to assassinate Milk and Mayor Frank Moscone and literally get away with it. A pathetic confession clears him in the eyes of a jury not much different from him, and a series of justifiable

riots in San Francisco demonstrates the intense feelings brought about from this miscarriage of justice.

The Times of Harvey Milk is a celebration of a man and a movement. Milk was a symbol for thousands of homosexuals across the country as he urged fellow gay and lesbian peoples to come out of the closet. The candlelight procession on the night of his death shows just how important he was to San Francisco. Warm, witty, often sad commentary adds uncharacteristic candor as friends and acquaintances fight back tears when they speak of his death and barely conceal grins as they describe his election campaign, his fight with the Briggs amendment and his genuine concern for all of San Francisco.

If idealism is still a genuine political force, then Harvey Milk epitomized it. Though a surprisingly canny politician, Milk was fueled by belief. Robert Epstein captures the honesty and the warmth behind the figure. *The Times of Harvey Milk* is a film that will excite, uplift and outrage you, a document of a populist dream and the man who led it. Neither the man nor the film will leave you unmoved.

—Sean Axmaker

NOW SHOWING

All of Me: Lily Tomlin and Steve Martin. Shows with *Karate Kid* at Mayflower (345-1022).

Amadeus: Mozart's music becomes a character in this lavishly filmed story of the playfully brazen child-man Mozart (Tom Hulce) and his mediocre musical rival Antonio Salieri (F. Murray Abraham). Cinema World (342-6536).

Beverly Hills Cop: Eddie Murphy is a Detroit cop who comes to Beverly Hills to solve the murder of his best friend. Directed by Martin Brest (*Going in Style*). National (344-3431) and Springfield Quad (726-9073).

The Bostonians: Vanessa Redgrave is a wealthy and powerful suffragette in turn of the century Boston. Christopher Reeve stars as the courtly Southern gentleman who rivals Redgrave for the loyalty of her young protegee. Fine Arts (747-2201).

Brother From Another Planet: E.T. grows up, turns black and becomes sexy in this science-fiction comedy from versatile writer-director-actor John Sayles (*The Return of the Secaucus Seven*, *Lianna*, *Baby, It's You*). A black alien from Outer Space (Joe Morton) crashes near Harlem and is pursued through Manhattan by extraterrestrial bounty hunters. (Sayles plays the fair-haired bad guy in black.) Bijou (686-2458).

City Heat: Burt Reynolds and Clint Eastwood play private eye and cop in this 30's gangster thing. Shows with *Garbo Talks* at the Oakway (342-5351).

The Falcon and the Snowman: True story of young idealist Christopher John Boyce, who, while working for TRX Corporation in 1974, decided (with friend Andrew Dalton Lee) to sell U.S. spy satellite data to the Soviets. Timothy Hutton (*Ordinary People*, *Iceman*) plays Boyce, and Sean Penn (*Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, *Bad Boys*) plays Lee. Directed by John Schlesinger (*Yanks*). Cinema World (342-6536).

Garbo Talks: A loyal son sets out on an impossible mission to grant his mother's dying

wish: she wants to meet her idol, Greta Garbo. Ron Silver (*Silkwood*, *Best Friends*) is the son. Anne Bancroft plays the mother. Directed by Sidney Lumet. Shows with *City Heat* at the Oakway (342-5351).

Heavenly Bodies: Take-off on *Flashdance*. Shows with *Teachers* at West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Heaven Help Us: The Brothers at St. Basil School preach against vice, lust and disrespect, but it never stops these guys. Donald Sutherland, John Heard. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Improper Conduct: Documentary. Cuban refugees, homosexuals in particular, give a picture of Cuban society, myths and revolution. Directed by cinematographer Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jimenez-Leal. Shows with *The Times of Harvey Milk*. Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Karate Kid: L.A. Weekly calls this film "a Zen-Rocky that combines sappy emotionalism with high-thinking oriental philosophy and loads of boisterous brawls." Sentimental story of an older man teaching a young kid karate. Stars Ralph Macchio as "the kid." Mayflower (345-1022).

The Killing Fields: This British film shows the transformation of Cambodia into a concentration camp after the American evacuation from Saigon. The true story of N.Y. Times correspondent Sydney Schanberg (Sam Waterston) and his Cambodian interpreter-friend Dith Pran (Haing S. Ngor). The men were separated and the journalist spent years trying to find Pran, who had been interred in the camps of the Khmer Rouge—the Killing Fields. British stage director Roland Joffe makes his film directorial debut. McDonald (344-4343).

Micki & Maude: Dudley Moore, Amy Irving and Ann Reinking in a Blake Edwards comedy about a man with two wives. This film has been called "dumb." Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Mischief: Teen sex comedy. Springfield Quad (726-9073).

Mrs. Soffel: A true story. In 1902 a warden's beautiful Victorian wife (Dianne Keaton) fell in love with a handsome inmate (Mel Gibson) of the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh and helped him escape. Script by Ron Nyswaner, directed by Australian Gillian Armstrong (*My Brilliant*

Career). Valley River Twin (686-8633).

The Natural: Robert Redford is a gifted baseball player and Robert Duval is the journalist who dogs him during his late-in-life career. Wilford Brimley (the patriarch in *Country*) is the sweet and crusty coach who encourages him. Valley River Twin (686-8633).

A Passage to India: Set in a richly colored, politically fragile British Colonial India (1926), the story is an impassioned treatment of racially forbidden loves—one a deep and honorable friendship between two men, Indian Dr. Aziz and British schoolmaster Fielding (Victor Banerjee and James Fox); the other a forbidden yet uncontrollable connection between the vibrant Dr. Aziz and the beautiful Adele Quested (Judy Davis, *My Brilliant Career*). West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Purple Rain: Bijou Late Nite (686-2458).

Starman: E.T. grows up, turns white and becomes sexy in another in a series of "alien" movies. Jeff Bridges (*Tron*, *The Last Picture Show*, *Against All Odds*) is the gentle alien who materializes in the form of the dead husband of Karen Allen (*Animal House*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). Light comedy, escapist, family fare. PG rating. Cinema World (342-6536).

A Soldier's Story: Murder mystery, historical drama, racial prejudice. A soldier from a black platoon is murdered outside a military base and a black lawyer is sent from Washington, D.C. to investigate. Directed by Norman Jewison (*Fiddler on the Roof*, *In the Heat of the Night*). West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

Teachers: Absurd, topical comedy. A school district gives a diploma to a student who can't read or write. The high school faculty is incompetent and insane. Stars JoBeth Williams, Nick Nolte, Judd Hirsch, Ralph Macchio (*The Karate Kid*). Music by Joe Cocker, ZZ Top, The Motels, Freddy Mercury. Shows with *Heavenly Bodies*. West 11th Tri Cinema (342-4142).

The Times of Harvey Milk: A 1984 documentary of the murder of Harvey Milk, the first gay supervisor elected to office in San Francisco's history. Shows with *Improper Conduct* at Cinema 7 (687-0733).

Witness: Stars Harrison Ford (Indiana Jones). Cinema World (342-6536).

—S.R.

CINEMA 7
687-0733
"One huge surprise hit."
—Seattle Post-Intelligencer
"Passion-filled. A film of intelligence."
—Shelia Benson, Los Angeles Times
"A story told with urgency and passion."
—David Martin, New York Times
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