

# (Sur)really good flick

**"Montenegro"**  
**Susan Anspach**  
**Bijou Theatre**  
**Rated R**

The 37-year old fur-wrapped housewife walks slowly to the end of the dock. The sun glistens on the water. A huge, expensive house looms in the background. She halts at the end of the dock. There's no place left to go.

Marilyn Jordan (Anspach) is a transplanted American housewife who feels trapped by her luxurious lifestyle and her upper class family, and lost in the Swedish culture she's emigrated into. She's struggling to hang onto her sanity in the face of incredible pressures, and it shows clearly in her bizarre behavior.

She pours milk and a small bottle of clear liquid into the dog's dish. "I know you're a wise animal," she says. "Wise animals must be able to make decisions. Now, I'm going to put poison into your milk. You must decide whether to drink it or not. It's your choice, and you have to live with your decision."

The dog sniffs the milk, walks away, returns, and looks up at her.

"Well, it's not my decision. But if you want my advice, don't drink it."

Jordan is on the brink of a major breakdown, and it shows. She teaches her daughter how to cook Schnitzel for the family's dinner, then eats the whole plateful. One night after sex, she playfully sets fire to the bed (and her husband's rear) with her cigarette. If her life doesn't change soon, it'll be the end of the line for Jordan.

Her life changes. A lot. Through a series of circumstances beyond her control, she finds herself in ZanziBar, the seediest, craziest dive imaginable. She is immediately welcomed by the patrons of the bar, immigrants who, like Jordan, feel alienated by the Swedish culture.

ZanziBar is an absurd world where violence is commonplace, sex is uninhibited, and outside rules have no meaning. Alcohol lubricates the spirits of the patrons, who are in a state of constant celebration.

The decaying world of ZanziBar, with its weathering walls, animal sexuality and total abandon, is a far cry from the pink and purple velvet world of Jordan's women's club. She soon adapts to the new environment, and finds the freedom she so desperately desired.

This is the setting of "Montenegro," Yugoslavian writer/director Dusan Makavejev's 1981 surreal comedy. Surrealists often deal with irrational behavior, dream-like images, the liberation from social restrictions and the pursuit of personal and sexual freedom, and Makavejev seems to fit the bill.

Unlike the heavy, sometimes unfathomable images of earlier surrealists, Makavejev blends comedy and a light form of surrealism with the flair of an artist. In an introduction to the film, Makavejev writes, "Looking for Marilyn Jordan's secret face, a composite image of Disney's Pluto and (Luis) Bunuel's Chien Andalou appeared." Makavejev strikes a perfect balance between the two extremes of humor and surrealism, and it is upon this point of balance that the whole film pivots.

'Montenegro' is a bridge between Hollywood narratives and European experimentals.

The acting in the film seems intentionally one-dimensional. The characters become too horrible to be likeable, and the emotions are so shallow that we are removed from the action of the film to a point where we can better examine what's happening. Despite this intentional shallowness, Anspach is good as the besieged housewife, and Svetozar Cvetkovic is excellent



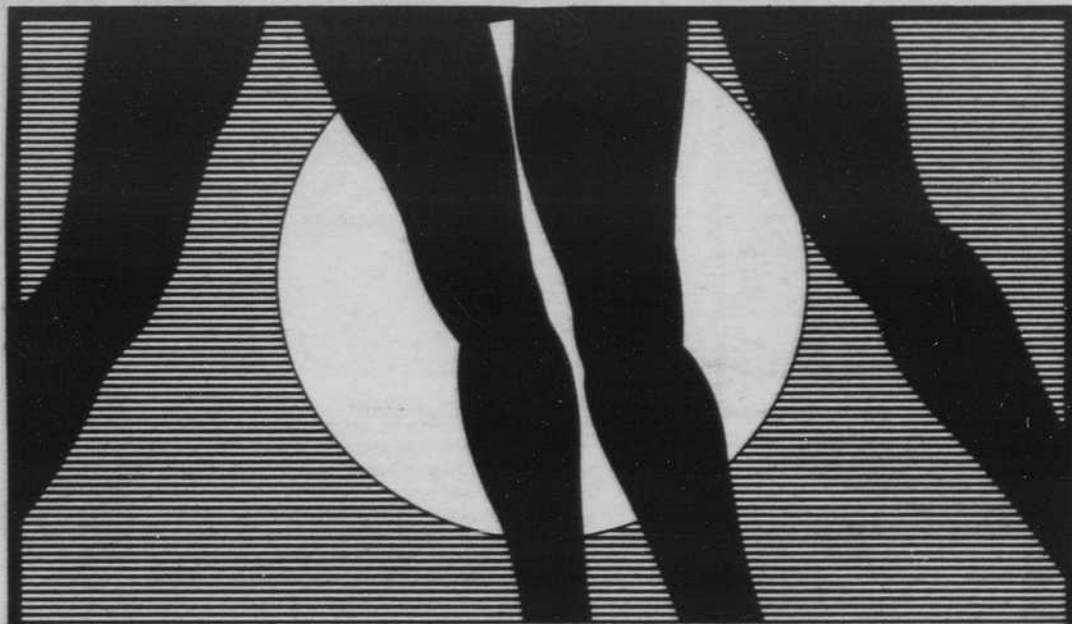
Susan Anspach and Svetozar Cvetkovic whirl their way through "Montenegro," Dusan Makavejev's surreal comedy.

as her lover, the mysterious Mr. Montenegro (kind of a strong, silent Bruce Springsteen).

What really makes the movie, however, are the visual images. Cinematographer Tomislav Pinter, art director Radu Borusescu and set designer Eric L:son Johnson have created a number of stirring shots that illustrate Makavejev's script perfectly.

The combination of the visual images and Makavejev's delicate balance between light surrealism and comedy make "Montenegro" sail. Although its frequent violence and raw sexuality may offend some, "Montenegro" is particularly accessible to American audiences not used to the heavy surrealism of other European filmmakers. Makavejev provides a bridge between Hollywood narratives and European experimentals that will be surprisingly palatable to both types of audiences.

by matt meyer



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