

'American Movie' not just another sweet success tale

MOVIES

American Movie
Starring Mark Borchardt, Mike Schank and Mark's Uncle Bill. Directed by Chris Smith. Sony Pictures Classics.
★★★★☆

By Sara Jarrett
Oregon Daily Emerald

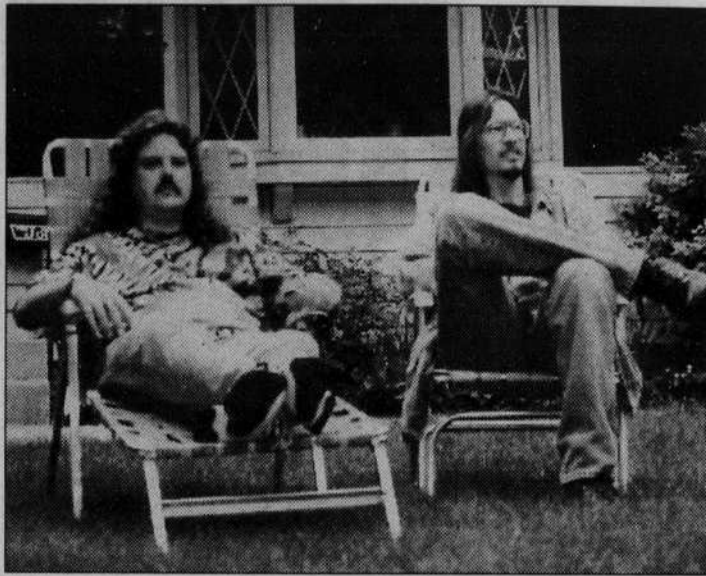
Mark Borchardt has dreamt of making movies all his life. Now, at age 30, he is finally on his way.

"American Movie" is a hilarious exploration of low-budget movie-makers and lower-class American lifestyles. The film is about Borchardt's perseverance through the muck of life to fulfill his dream to make films— drinking beer at 7 a.m. to tackle a long day of work ahead and playing the lottery instead of doing drugs. As he likes to point out, when you play the lottery, you have a fifty-fifty chance of winning, whereas doing drugs always makes you a loser.

The making of Borchardt's life and times comes alive thanks to director Chris Smith's vision in "American Movie."

In full documentary style, "American Movie" seeks to find out what makes Borchardt tick, by interviewing his family and friends. Through these people, it's revealed that since childhood his favorite pastimes were anything but conventional.

Borchardt is shown smashing cars in the junkyard by the Milwaukee trailer park he calls home,



skipping school to party and watch his favorite movies, "Dawn of the Dead," "Night of the Living Dead" and "Texas Chainsaw Massacre," in that order. These activities consume his formative years.

While his family expresses concern that he will amount to nothing more than a truck driver or factory worker, our hero decides to prove them wrong by attaining the "good life." To Borchardt this means money, sex, power and a house that isn't as obnoxious as the ones in the suburban neighborhoods he drives around to drool at when he's depressed.

At age 14, he buys a video camera and makes the first of a series of horror films called "The More

the Scariest." Patterned after his favorite flicks, he strives to make these first films "real," alarming and grotesquely bloody.

Still, to earn money at film making, Borchardt realizes he can't yet give up his paper route and job vacuuming the floors at the local mausoleum. The cemetery, incidentally, is a source of inspiration for him because he believes the people there "never bitch at you or talk back." They have finally become decent human beings, he muses.

Harnessing a business savvy that surprises everyone he knows, Borchardt manages to rope his rich, senile uncle Bill into producing his cinematic vision, "Northwestern." Halfway through, however, Borchardt discards that project and returns to making "Coven," a 35 minute, black-and-white documentary he dropped two years previous.

"Coven" is a look into the life of a substance-abusing writer who seeks help from a support group that actually brings more evil into his life than he could have ever imagined.

Involving everyone he knows, and drawing upon his doctrine made up of "one part Satanism and one part Christianity," Borchardt finishes "Coven." By the end of that film, he also resumes his "Northwestern" project with a \$50,000 inheritance he receives after his uncle dies.

The film opens Friday at the Bijou Art Cinemas. For show times, call 686-2458.



Photos Courtesy Sony Picture Classics

Filmmaker Mark Borchardt (upper photo, right) lounges with musician/childhood friend Mike Schank. 'American Movie' director Chris Smith (center photo, right) with producer Sarah Price. The cast of Borchardt's 35-minute short 'Coven' (bottom).

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