

## "Streetwise"

a documentary by Cheryl McCall,  
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by Eleanor Malin

The crusty little moppets in *Streetwise* smoke, swear, steal, and spend a lot of time burnishing their tough images. I guess that's what they think being an adult is. You can't blame them, really. Childhood has never been so undervalued and all kids spend as little time on it as possible.

Survival takes on different forms for the two sexes in *Streetwise*. The boys steal, panhandle, dumpster dive, sell drugs, pimp, mug homosexuals. The girls, too proud to panhandle or sort through garbage, ironically, turn to prostitution.

The little prostitute, Tiny, who is pictured in the movie ad, has only had two periods, but she has been turning "dates" for quite a while. She has had three kinds of V.D., but she's not sure what "sexually active" means. She says she likes some of her young "dates," but most of her clientele are old guys, she calls pervers. Her little mouth droops down; she has a mod haircut; it droops, too. She looks, despite her youth, used. Later, we see her with her mom. A waitress in a burger joint. Same droopy hair, droopy mouth. Alcoholic. Really, rather proud her daughter made \$200 in one day, and relieved Tiny can finally buy her own make-up and trinkets and stop nagging her mom.

The filmmakers portray a mini-world contained in and near Seattle's Pike Street Market, but it could've been anywhere. We've got lots of kids like the ones they interview in Portland.

These kids don't go to school. They go downtown. Most of them don't have a home. Their folks are lost (drunk, again), strayed (moved, left no forwarding address), stolen (still got three years to go in prison). The role models the kids have had for work and family are either not there at all or failures at everything.

Certainly school is failing these kids, as they're not engaged enough by it to attend. Certainly the parents are failing these kids, as they do not have enough wherewithall to get their own acts together. Some of them aren't even trying with their children, and if anything is to be done to fix these castoff kids, someone will have to also fix the castoff parents.

The kids gang up in a society of their own, teach each other the tricks of surviving in a hostile environment, talk about the dangers inherent in their chosen lifestyle. And that's one of the drawing points. It's not boring. These little girls, especially, might be hired one night by the Green River killer, and they know it.

The film's subjects are aware of the camera, but give honestly of themselves, although their verbal communication skills are small. If you bleeped out the three or four most popular expletives, some of these kids wouldn't be able to form a thought at all.

The interviewees relish the attention they are being given as the film unfolds, which is one of the few things that saves it from being a total downer. The kids are at least having a good time, for once. What they need most is attention, but they don't know how to ask for it nicely. They act tough, because that's the only chance they have to survive. They would sooner eat their liver than appear vulnerable.

Here, where Seattle meets and breeds with sleaze, the filmmakers have delineated and fleshed out a rapidly evolving subculture — one of dependent scavengers, waiting for the other shoe to drop. One of the obvious reasons for the burgeoning (and basically the viability) of this subculture is made clear in the film — so many people are giving them what they ask for — handouts. Don't do it! It's not helping!

This is one of the most gripping, entertain-



Tiny, the waif from *Streetwise*.

ing documentaries ever. So much has been included that the patterns are crystal clear. We've got a real mess on our hands here. Somebody had better do something, quick!



*Variety* has been playing at the 5th Avenue Cinema to mixed reviews. The film is interesting, but fatally flawed. The story revolves around a young woman who would like to be a writer, but can't get motivated, doesn't want to compete, or maybe both.

Directed by a woman, Bette Gordon, it stars Sandy McLeod as the young woman, who takes the first job that comes along, that of selling tickets at a porno house. Fascinated by the ambience of the place, she starts to get hooked on voyeurism, concurrently getting interested in one of the regular customers, a businessman in an expensive suit, who occasionally makes advances to her.

She starts to follow the man when he leaves her abruptly on their first date — a ball game. She starts to follow him, right then. I had trouble swallowing that. She'd have to be pretty hyper to take such immediate action, and after all, she couldn't bring herself even to scabble for a job.

She starts making up pornographic monologues she recites to her "sort of" boyfriend. He remains unamused. The monologues get bluer and bluer, and let's face it, if such language, plus some of the clips from the porno film sequences showed up in a general release film made by men about men, quite a few women would be screaming bloody murder.

But the actress remains dispassionate as she recites these monologues, and it's not clear what is intended here. It must not be to arouse her boyfriend, as it serves the opposite purpose, and like a charm, the third time

she does this, he leaves in a huff.

In her relentless stalking of the mystery man, she suspects he must be in the Mafia. She sees him in what surely must be shady streetside deals. It looks like laundering funds or drug dealing to me. Towards the end of the movie, she begins to fantasize about herself and the mystery man, although the fantasy remains enigmatic. She has been hanging around a sex arcade, and buys herself a blue satin merry widow, which she fails to fill out. Nonetheless, she is wearing it when she calls the man she's been following to set up a date. He doesn't know what she wants. She doesn't either.

*Variety* played also at the Northwest Film Study Center Contemporary Women Director's series. It was a good entry. I'm criticizing the film because it's slow (the director loves long shots of nothing much going on — the train pulling away, the merry-go-round going around — and around and around). And I didn't like the ending, which leaves everything up in the air and goes on for what seems like many minutes of absolutely nothing. The director might well argue that

this is refreshingly non-commercial, expressing the women's viewpoint — whatever it was. I say if we women are to compete, we must be commercial, must be entertaining, can't settle for incompletely done stuff and think that's all right. This film hits part of what seems to be the prevailing female attitude, at least in our culture, right on the head. That making a profit is not all right. If women are to compete on an equal basis, they must prostitute themselves as shamefully as men do.



*Desperately Seeking Susan* starring Rosanna Arquette, Aidan Quinn, and, of course, Madonna, is a film written by, directed by (and starring two) women. It's funny all the way through, moves right along at a fast clip, and pokes fun at the various trips of all the characters represented without being mean (easier said than done). Rosanna Arquette plays a desperately bored housewife, so starved emotionally that she gets her kicks reading the personals. She gets mixed up in a case of mistaken identity, taking on the role of Susan, played by Madonna. Susan is a flamboyant drifter, mooching off of and stealing from most of the people she meets.

As the pathetic little housewife-turned femme fatale, Rosanna Arquette scores a point for neuro-linguistic programming. If you don't know you're a mouseburger, you won't act like one.

I really liked this movie. I loved the campy clothes and the situations and the photography. Susan Seidelman, the director, did a good job with the characters and the story. And as for all those nay-sayers who are complaining because of Madonna — phhhht! She is perfect for this part. Never mind she can't sing. It's not a musical. No one is holding guns to people's heads to get them to buy Madonna records and videos. So what if you can sing better than she can. Are you willing to go about in see-through underwear? Would people pay to see you do it?

If you've stayed away from *Desperately Seeking Susan* because you feel Madonna has already been overcompensated for her work, don't cheat yourself. Don't let the negativism and jealousy of lots of no-talent, no-fun people spoil your good time. Go!

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