

Strange stuff

BLUE VELVET

Written/Directed by: John Lynch
Starring: Kyle MacLachlan, Laura Dern,
Dennis Hopper, Isabella Rossellini
Now Playing: The Movie House

Easily the headline grabber of the month, this film has been drawing good crowds. To



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give the devil his due (almost literally), there is a film here, when it's all over, and it does leave room for conversation afterwards.

Auteur Lynch, whose work seems to always go so far without actually arriving, has once again taken the long way home and left us in a place that looks the same, but sure feels different.

Cinema

by Eleanor Malin

What makes this film work, (as well as it does), is the good casting and nostalgia evoking, and I don't mean just the song, *Blue Velvet*. Clothes and furnishings are left vague. Kyle MacLachlan and Laura Dern, as the young WASP couple, remind you of that high school couple nominated "Best" of the breed. And Dennis Hopper. Yo, Dennis.

We've seen Hopper play crazies now for what, 10 or 20 years. And he does it very well. He's effective here as the drug-crazed, sadistic brute, and this movie wouldn't have stood a prayer had it not been for his all too realistic histrionics.

Isabella Rossellini as the night club singer who sings of and wears the *Blue Velvet*, will make you feel nostalgia for Nastassja Kinski. Let me hasten to add Rossellini does good acting in a part that must have been awful to have to work on. But Kinski has been doing those parts in other strange movies, and Rossellini has the same high-cheekboned, thick-lipped, now delicate, now coarse beauty.

This simple suspense story involves a young couple who investigate a mystery. The young man found a human ear, went to a policeman, later was told to forget it. On his own, he checks out a night club singer's apartment, witnesses a scene of violent and kinky sex. Minutes later, he is nude and involved in a scene of violent and kinky sex. The story plays out as the young man is alternately drawn to the exotic night club singer, and the innocent schoolgirl daughter of the policeman. A classic tale of good vs. evil, Lynch has laced the works with simple symbols — bugs munching ferociously on the leaf litter under those beautiful bushes; a skeleton hanging in a store window, a rotting human ear, roses against a picket fence. The audience had all read the reviews, and laughed at nearly every line.

But Hopper is great as the hotheaded hophead with a *penchant* for blue velvet, violence and symbolic song lyrics.

One scene in a whore house ("This Is It") with Dean Stockwell as a raging something pantomiming "Candy-Colored Clown" into a lamp that looks like a microphone will leave you in stitches.

Ethnic, entertaining

BELIZAIRE THE CAJUN

Written/Directed by: Glen Pitre
Starring: Armand Assante as Belizaire Breaux
Gail Youngs as Alida
Just left town. Should be back soon.

Belizaire Breaux ekes out a marginal living as a naturopath. Herbs and potions are his stock in trade, and he's good at it. He also understands voodoo, *gris-gris* medicine, learned from an old Dominican slave woman. These useful skills, plus his innate charm and powers of persuasion serve him well, though he still lives lightly, as do the other Cajuns.

This film opens with Belizaire making his confession. He draws five rosaries for penance (an all-day job). Belizaire negotiates by holding out on the medicine the priest needs for his sore shoulder, getting the penance reduced to only *one* rosary. One can envision him later trying to negotiate for a higher spot in heaven, or a cooler one in hell.

Negotiating is a theme that reappears throughout the film. When the well-to-do,

late-come vigilantes (wealthy non-Cajuns) ride through the district and decree 20 Cajun families must move within two weeks for alleged crimes, the sheriff later tells them they can't just order these families to move. The vigilantes insist. Then the sheriff says, "All right, you pick five families from the list, and I'll pick five families from the list. They will move, he others can stay." At a later time, Belizaire is to be hung for murder. His cousin has been killed, and the sheriff lets Belizaire pick among the posse who wrongfully shot his cousin to select the men who will hang for the crime. Double irony. Belizaire, himself, was selected by the dead man's brother-in-law, at the request of the sheriff, who just wants a suspect, any suspect. Interesting frontier justice.

Hypolite (Poleet) Leger, Belizaire's slain cousin, had been on the list. His family had already moved, but he had been afraid to go, even though he was wanted for cattle rustling.

In a story replete with surprises, Belizaire first negotiates Poleet's name off the list, dealing with Matthew Perry, one of the most prominent vigilantes. Perry soon learns of the rustling charges and is furious with Belizaire, who, quite clearly, is in love with Perry's Cajun half-wife, Alida. Half-wife, in that she and Perry "jumped the broomstick," although a priest was now available to administer the vows. Perry and Alida had three children and another on the way. Perry spends a lot of time in the big house on his father's spread, but visits Alida, often enough, apparently.

Perry is found dead, and a lot of action ensues, as a group sets out after Poleet, who has finally fled. Belizaire confesses to the crime to save Poleet. There is action aplenty in this folk tale, the filming is the type of gorgeous cinematography we now expect, the acting is generally pretty good, and Armand Assante as Belizaire does a fine job. He handles the wry humor dexterously, and he looks the part. In his closely curled beard and long hair, in the way he wears his homespun clothes, and with a plausible Cajun accent, we get what the film is saying. Much attention to detail was paid here, and the payoff is that you get even more than the filmmakers realized is there. The clothes for one thing. With the look of handspun cotton or linen, you can see by the texture and cut of the Cajun clothing two things — the clothes are relaxed, as are the Cajuns; the clothes are practical, and, largely, so are the Cajuns.

We are given leave to wonder why the Cajuns never prospered. The vigilantes' families didn't get there until 100 years after the Cajuns did — but now they all are buying slaves and working big plantations, and now that they have something to protect, they really want to get rid of those pesky Cajuns. What were the Cajuns doing those 100 years? Surely not prospering. It's not that they couldn't or wouldn't work. But their total disregard of the Puritan ethic, their hand-tailored Catholicism, and a seductively hedonistic lifestyle are some of the elements that made it so hard for Cajuns to fit in. You really understand more about their buffeting around from one place to another, and why others in North America didn't like them. This country wasn't built on good times.

It is no surprise that Belizaire was able to learn *gris-gris* from the old slave woman. As she must have spoken in a broken and idiomatic French, so do the Cajuns. As she must have had a handle on how the mind works and how to control that, so does Belizaire. You not only have to know which herbs to use, but how to convince the patient the process of healing will work — a fact only recently gaining popularity in our own western medicine.

At any rate, this film comes at a good time. Cajun music is finally getting the recognition it deserves as a true American art form and the little bits played in a dance scene and the background music are just great.

Armand Assante really did his homework here, and it shows. He's just beautiful as Belizaire, and Gail Youngs holds her own as

Alida, the passionate Cajun who dearly loves her husband, but who still has plenty of feelings left over for Belizaire. When she comes to the dance (without Matthew), carrying her baby and with two kids in tow, one of the guests at the dance says, "Well, here's Alida (and her three half-Americans)." Writer-director Pitre, himself a Cajun, manages a scenario that skillfully depicts the timeless Cajun lifestyle once again in conflict with a world in transition.

How it might have been

by E. Jane Westlake

In her article, "The Challenge of Community," which appeared in last month's issue of *Just Out*, Cathy Siemens quoted Audre Lorde. A sentence from that quote still rings in my ears: "Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged." This is contrary to the intolerance that seems to permeate society, intolerance which has created some of the greatest catastrophes throughout history.

One such catastrophe, and one that immediately comes to mind for a lot of people, is the Holocaust, a disaster based on intolerance that took the lives of millions of people. Today we look back at the Holocaust from mixed perspectives. There is much debate over what really happened and the events leading up to it. Some people even believe that it didn't happen. There have been countless books, movies and documentaries covering many different aspects — from the TV miniseries, *The Holocaust*, to *Bent*, a Broadway play. We all agree that what we ended up with was a race of people who set out to destroy all that was different. The victims were many: Jewish people, poor people, homosexuals, Catholics, disturbed people, differently-abled people, sick people, people with different political beliefs.

The Women's Eye View Film Series brings us a film this month with yet another look at the events surrounding the Holocaust. *November Moon* presents a relationship between a German Jewish woman, November, who emigrated to France and a French woman, Ferial, who ends up working for the Fascists to keep the police from suspecting that November is hidden in her apartment.

Director Alexandra von Grote has had a difficult task because history is commonly written from a male viewpoint. The lesbian position in history is fuzzy. There's little to no documentation on what was happening with lesbians during the Holocaust.

Also, the Holocaust is still a sore spot for both the German and French people. Von Grote said in an interview in the San Francisco-based publication, *Beef*, last June that this is a "difficult movie for Germany" and that there is also "a lot of anti-gay feeling in Germany." *November Moon* was even rejected by the Berlin Film Festival and the Women French Film Festival.

The research for the movie took nearly two years and many who lived through that time were interviewed. I find it amazing that Von Grote could produce such a film using what little she had to go on. Leveritt and Guse wrote in their article in *Hot Wire* last July, "It is close to impossible to imagine what (lesbian) lives were like in past times and in diverse cultures. *Novembermoon* shows that, yes, lesbians were there, and this is how it might have been."

And so the film provides a myriad of contrasts and differences. It shows acceptance and intolerance. And it reminds me that Audre Lorde is right on as is Irena Klepfisz: "... anti-Semitism, like any other ideology of oppression, must never be tolerated, must never be hushed up, must never be ignored... it must always be exposed and resisted."

Novembermoon plays on November 6th at 7 p.m. at the Irvington Theatre, 1333 NE Broadway.