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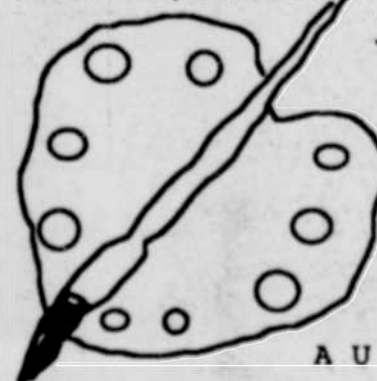
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Lizzie Borden: Tells it like it is

Not one to pull her punches, she demystifies some old myths.

BY ELEANOR MALIN

She has caused lots of fireworks in the past, and she's not going to hang back because people might be hostile.

After her first feature film, *Born in Flames*, Lizzie Borden received much criticism by feminists, who made comments such as, "Women don't use weapons. Men use weapons," as though, Borden says, "Men invented cars, let's let men drive cars."

She admits to liking pornography, and for a bit we shoot the breeze about the relative possibility of ever making the world a safe place for five-year-olds.

Borden's new film, *Working Girls*, was made after extensive research into the subject of middle-class prostitution. Borden knew some women who were working their way through college in this, actually, time-honored way. (One of the women, who became a doctor, still saw a couple of the men she had met while working during college, after she started her new job as a doctor.) Borden went to some of these places, and talked to the women, who were more open with her, since she was making a theatrical film, not a documentary. She found the women communicative, mostly concerned with financial goals, not undereducated and hopeless derelicts, as mostly portrayed by the media (since those are the only "working girls" being mentioned by the press).

We chat some more about the relative nonsense society goes through relegating these women to the underworld. They are not criminals. They are not stupid. Some women would prefer to make \$880 in one long day with only maybe 15 minutes of actual sex during that time; should we insist they get a job at McDonald's instead? Must we overburden our police force with patrolling for these types of behaviors, which seem natural (female monkeys trade favors for bananas), when, most especially, we can't be with everyone during the times when they are in private. Who knows what deals may be going down everywhere, from the poor girls on the street, whose real crime is being undereducated, and getting into trouble, to the women who choose to marry for money, which person should get to weigh which person's values, and to what extent must we be obliged to try to change them? It takes a lot of bananas to make it in the real world, today.

Borden has produced a film from the feminine angle regarding the oldest of professions, that of the prostitute. There will always be a calling for this type of work, and there will always be women who try this, and some who succeed at it, no matter what. No matter how much we think it's a bad idea, and people would be really dumb to do it, some will. They will find ways to rationalize the work they do (mostly by the funds they make), and ways to stand the job, make the time pass, deal with the bitchy madame.

Borden is a young woman, not afraid to think thoughts outside of the politically correct mainstream. She is a pragmatist, and has done a good job of putting across the idea of her image (the woman's image) of a bordello. I'm sure it is right on, and Borden says whenever working girls have



Lizzie Borden.

attended the film, they have been enthusiastic and supportive.

Borden mentions the typically male stereotype of the prostitution situation: Violence, degradation, shame. Actually, that's likely the male's overactive imagination. For example, she cites *Klute*, in which the early "sessions" were right on, then later, Bree is stalked by a psychotic killer. Actually, the average bar maid would probably be more apt to be stalked by a psychotic killer, and the average hooker in a middle-class bordello would be insulated by the privacy of the environment, and the screening of customers, thus less likely to.

At any rate, Borden's film is provocative politically, realistic sexually, rather warm from the standpoint of sisterhood. We are all in this together, and if some sets of people reject other sets of people, that doesn't make for eradication of the "unwanted" element; merely in the cosmetic treatment of going undercover. Borden's point is that the middle-class bordello, run by a madame, is not like what you think it is. The customers are not like what you think they are. The girls are not like what you think they are. And she makes her point.

Working Girls

Directed by: Lizzie Borden

Starring: Louise Smith, Ellen

McElduff, Amanda Goodwin

Now Playing at: KOIN Center Cinema

This film lays it on the line. If you've ever wondered about the ambience of a middle-class brothel in Manhattan, this sure looks like the real thing. What is presented here is a perfect microcosm — encapsulated, subdivided (the "jungle room," there's a towel room, a kitchenette and a mini living room, whose most prominent feature is a stairway up and down which these "working girls" traipse, leading their Johns.

Yes, the women are in control here. The customers bring lots of money, and swag-gers or tell awful jokes to cover their embarrassment. The women, on the other hand, have united in disregard for the men who rent them for sex. They set the prices and collect the fees, and do set the limits

beyond which they will not go (which seems to be based on each individual's gag reflex). The whole process is one big negotiation; from the basics of the madame, here terminal yuppie, Lucy, (played by Ellen McElduff), with the landlord, paying fees to the doorman, for example, who monitors the traffic allowed up to this poshly appointed, yet dismal love nest.

The sex scenes are explicit, but not especially appealing, nor are they meant to be. The message here is that these young women are disappointed sexually, it's almost a self-fulfilling prophecy, by these guys, nice though they may be, who are nevertheless a pretty pathetic lot. The men are paying exorbitant prices for the favors of these women, who resent them as unwelcome interruption to an otherwise boring job, with a bitchy boss. For what the women are renting, they are not getting paid enough, and for what the men are getting, they are getting ripped off. Still it goes on.

Some of the women save the money to start businesses, go to college; some support their children. Others want to make a lot of money in not so many hours, for freedom in the schedule.

And, yes, good citizens all, many young women, nice young women do this, (and not a few old broads, too).

As Molly, Louise Smith seems convincingly feminist, artsy, liberated, even. She's pretty, in a girl-next-door sort of way, and enjoys a position of some prominence in the closely-knit sisterhood.

There's a young loudmouth, Dawn, played by Amanda Goodwin. She manages stress with sarcasm and tightly woven expletives. She creates it the same way. She hates the men, and will practically not do anything, even answer the phone. Her tough exterior only plays up her vulnerability and frustration.

The female characters are nicely drawn, and the men are, (I'm guessing here), fairly represented. They are not viciously obnoxious, but embarrassingly obnoxious. They have their hat in their hand; none is a raving lunatic, ready to commit mayhem.

Still, as the project goes, there was a directness to the political positioning that seemed a little overdone. I would have preferred a little subtlety. In places, one almost felt as if cue cards were being preferred, and in a somehow femininely equitable way, each of the women is given her point or two to make. To her credit, however, Borden has at least taken some unusual, daring even, viewpoints.

Unlike those poor girls who start working the street because they can get there, and you don't need any education, women who work in an upscale arrangement, will be more careful, control the situation, not get worn out (not much physical happens, at least not for very many minutes), and though this oldest profession may fall off during the AIDS crisis, many "nice girls" you would never guess have been making a lot of money performing this form of entertainment.

This film was made on a slim budget, in the apartment of the director. The production values are a bit shaky, and there aren't any special effects. There's quite a bit of humor, though, and the acting is passable. But in the last analysis, it is in the concept and the carefully put across images about a world many of us never get to see, that makes this film worth viewing.