



# Riding the Crazy Horse

Two takes on Paris nude cabaret documentary

Frederick Wiseman's documentary *Crazy Horse* — a behind-the-scenes peek at the famous nude cabaret in Paris — is either an elaborate ruse that slowly seduces you before yanking out the proverbial rug, or it's a brilliantly conceived *cinéma vérité* with a winking Socratic irony about its controversial subject matter. Whether Wiseman is a carnival barker or a shrewd savant is irrelevant: *Crazy Horse* is no lap dance. Though it takes its sweet time, the film finally resolves into an eroticized meditation on art — more specifically, on creating art in an era when nostalgia, glitz and carnal kitsch are repackaged as chic peepshows for the nouveau riche.

Wiseman deftly opens with a triptych of scenes: a shadow-puppet fantasia; a woman reproducing an elegant orgasm; a backstage glimpse at half-naked dancers applying makeup in the surgical reflection of cosmetic mirrors. Artistry, artifice, hard work and dreamy erotica — these conflicting elements pirouette across the screen with the intimacy of a home movie. There's zero voice-over; you are simply a spy in the house of burlesque.

Sex sells: At *Crazy Horse*, asses are commodity fetishes, tits stand perfectly pert. Then all these intense, intelligent discussions rage among the show's creators, until what emerges is a disarmingly complex look at the tension between the clashing demands of art versus commerce. Is this only a fancy tease cloaking the cattle call of female objectification?

*Crazy Horse* is a fascinating, infuriating movie, and so open-ended it goads our anxiety of interpretation. You're tested at the raw level of sexuality. Artists will seek integrity, postmodernist can preach pastiche, feminists may cry foul and voluptuaries will just cry.

And it all comes down to this: There will forever exist an audience willing to pay for that sanctioned stare at the cosmic beauty of the unclothed female form.

— Rick Levin

Wiseman's work in *Crazy Horse* is stellar: Without the benefit of narration, he's able to reveal both the (sometimes silly) erotic beauty of the company's final product as well as the intense and repulsive sides of life behind the scenes.

It's unfortunate that while the cabaret's director and artistic director are able to speak for themselves in the course of giving interviews, no dancer is shown in the same individual depth. Still, this would be difficult to accomplish in *cinéma vérité* style — any dancer who's working

in the most prestigious of nude dancing shows probably wouldn't want to risk her job by being frank about the ups and downs in front of a videographer.

Because of this, Wiseman instead offers glimpses of who the dancers are: women who laugh at ballet blooper reels, love the fabric of a certain costume and stand transfixed at news segments about the biological diversity of species. It might not be enough, but it's an insightful something.

Taken by itself, the way the dancers behave backstage is elegantly unself-conscious. Sure, society reinforces their sense of beauty, but backstage their bodies are just bodies — the great mass of cells that make them exist. And it's beautiful not because the dancers fall into some ideal but because they are moving human forms, concerned about what they're doing, not what they look like.

As a society, we're so afraid of brazen nudity that not having a narrative telling us to love *Crazy* or hate *Crazy* feels almost bizarre. What if the prude/bro/feminazi sitting next to me doesn't get it right?

That's what Wiseman does get right: He trusts the audience to come to their own conclusions without being told "this is what's bad and this is what's good." *Crazy Horse* is a movie for people who can generate their own opinions.

— Shannon Finnell

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TITANIC IN REAL D 3D - EVENT PRICING (PG-13) ★  
Fri. - Sat. (100 PM) 500 PM 900 PM

MIRROR MIRROR (PG)  
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THE CABIN IN THE WOODS (DIGITAL) R  
12:25, 2:45, 5:05, 7:25, 9:45

DR. SEUSS' THE LORAX (DIGITAL) PG  
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12:05, 4:45, 9:25

THE HUNGER GAMES (DIGITAL) PG-13  
12:20, 1:10, 2:00, 3:40, 4:30, 5:20, 7:00, 7:50, 8:40, 10:20

MIRROR MIRROR (DIGITAL) PG  
11:35, 12:55, 2:15, 3:35, 4:55, 6:15, 7:35, 8:55, 10:15

LOCKOUT (DIGITAL) PG-13  
12:15, 2:35, 4:55, 7:15, 9:35

THE RAID: REDEMPTION (DIGITAL) R  
12:20, 2:50, 5:20, 7:50, 10:20

THE THREE STOOGES (DIGITAL) PG  
12:05, 2:25, 4:45, 7:05, 9:25

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SPECIAL EVENT PRICING: \$3.00  
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WRATH OF TITANS (DIGITAL) PG-13  
1:40, 6:40

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