

PARTING SHOT

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



Christopher Morgan, left, and Grant Artz, right, both with the U.S. Coast Guard Color Guard, stand under the shadow of the Astoria Bridge before the start of the Seamen's Memorial ceremony last week.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

ODDITY

The sweet spot? Just sit down already

Angsty spats over where to sit at the movies

By LEANNE ITALIE
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Too close! Too far back! Middle? No way, aisle.

When it comes to where you plant yourself in a movie theater, you're either a seat-specific Goldilocks or you're with one.

And if, by some miracle, you and your date, spouse, friend or gang from work DO agree on where to sit, chances are you've been privy to an angsty pre-show spat or two among the seat-selecting stressed.

Are movie-seat beefs legit, in the scheme of not-hugely-important problems, or have we lost our minds to the point where not even assigned seating can save us?

"My best friend has very strict rules on movie theater seating and it drives me insane," said Gina Mazzone in Bloomfield, N.J. "Originally, she would make us change our seats multiple times until she was happy."

But wait. Said best friend, Caitlin Quagliato, has her reasons.

'Super picky'

"I'm just super picky. I try to avoid distractions. I don't like to sit too close because my neck strains. I don't like to sit too far away because I can't see," she said. "It drives my sister crazy, too. I get headaches and nobody wants



A wide awake crowd watching the 2012 premiere of "The Dark Knight Rises" inside the Liberty Science Center IMAX theater in Jersey City, N.J. When it comes to where you plant yourself in a movie theater, you're either a seat-specific Goldilocks or you're with one.

AP Photo/Julio Cortez

to deal with me during migraines. That could be what started it."

The two 24-year-olds who met in college about four years ago remain regular movie companions, but they now stick mostly to a theater that allows for assigned seating, though — Mazzone said — "she still complains."

Anthony Pomes, 43, in the Suffolk County hamlet of East Northport, N.Y., doesn't complain so much as feel very, very passionately about the subject. And he doesn't routinely have the benefit of assigned seating.

It's all about "maximum movie-ness," he said, noting in particular the importance of center screen viewing and sound balance for digital systems used in theaters today.

So where is his sweet spot?

"For at least the past 15 to 20 years, I have very persistently insisted that those with whom I see movies in a theater join me smack dab in the middle of the aisle somewhere between 10, but no more than 13, rows away from the movie screen," Pomes said.

Irene Myers, 34, in Philadelphia isn't having it. She goes to a movie most weeks, about 60 percent of the time by herself to avoid the "where-are-we-sitting conversation."

It's all about control when grouped with a huge theater full of strangers, she surmised.

A religion

Movie seating, to a film buff like Pomes, is "as near to a religion as Scorsese's 'Last

Temptation,'" he said, regularly dragging his wife and 18-year-old twins to theaters at least an hour ahead of show time.

"When we don't get the good seats we want, the whole feng shui is just blown," he said. "To me it's art. I would never go to a museum gallery and not look at everything."

Does this, er, fever have an origin?

"It's some kind of weird hybrid of, like, elitism and sort of trying to get home again, because I do regard film as primal," Pomes said. "My older brother took me to see 'Star Wars' in 1977. I was 5 or 6. It has that shot of that ship that just keeps going over your head. We were between rows 10 and 13. I remember that specifically."

There are other things that make Pomes a "bit batty" about movie seating.

"I don't like there to be lights coming in from another room that you see on the screen. It's ritualistic and it should be. I mean Scorsese once talked about it being like how he felt when he was a kid in church. But my wife does think sometimes that I go a little beyond," he said.

Pit stops

Afam Onyema, 36, in Los Angeles, has other things on his mind. He's a big guy, a former college linebacker, with a wee movie-going bathroom issue. He can't make it through one without a pit stop mid-movie and finds himself in seating negotiations all the time.

The seats he seeks from friends and surreptitiously angles for with dates are on an aisle or front row, second tier behind the rail in theaters that have raised sections separated by a wide walking aisle.

"It's embarrassing. My friends will say, 'It's only two hours' and I'm, like, 'I know. I'm not doing it on purpose! This way I can just hop over the rail without kicking popcorn all over the floor or stepping on some old person's shoes.'"

But inevitable conflicts arise for prime real estate-seeking Onyema, who goes to three or four movies a month.

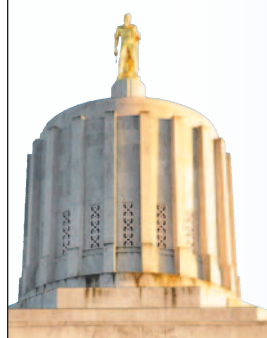
"There are some friends who want to be in the middle and they worry that if we're on the aisle people are going to be bothering us to get out. It's definitely a give and take," he said. "If it's 'Lord of the Rings' length or something like that, I'm going to push to be on the aisle or the railing. If it's a shorter movie, I'll say 'OK, I'll let you have this one.'"

Daniel Collins and his wife don't get to the movies that frequently, but with his long legs, the distinct possibility of a work call he can't miss and some prostate issues at 52, he's an aisle man. Getting there early enough to nab a good one isn't fun.

"My wife, who should be teaching master's courses in procrastination, can be a challenge to get out the door," said Collin, in suburban Baltimore. "But she's working hard at improving, and I'm working hard at not being so, 'If we're not 15 minutes early we're late.'"

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From left: Peter Wong, Hillary Borrud, Mateusz Perkowski