

Why all the hard stuff?

"So why do you show all this heavy stuff?" is a question I often get when I choose to screen titles like this month's **Sophie's Choice** and **Interiors**, and previous titles like **Regeneration**, **Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?**, **Ordinary People**, **Dialogues With Madwomen**, **Dead Man Walking**, **Curtis' Charm** (and soon I hope, **Trainspotting** and **Tu as Crie; Let Me Go**, about drug addiction and the paradoxes of street life). In a psych hospital especially, shouldn't we keep it light?

Simply, I care most about these kinds of films. Even when I was a patient and deeply depressed I could still intellectually engage in the heavy issues dealt with in these stories. I always am thrilled to see a well made, provocative film. It's uplifting to share a piece of high art which is what these films exemplify.

There's high art in comedy, adventure and light romance and I enjoy those movies as well. But I think that many of us who have tangled with some of the more emotional extremes continue to be intrigued with those situations. We continue to explore those places in search of better understanding of the most profound parts of our experience. There's something particularly rich about plumbing the deep, uneasy relationships and life/death peak experiences vicariously through film. Reflecting on them in my own life has been most valuable and the results of risking to share them with an audience have been fascinating.

The film **Fearless** played a pivotal role in my dealing with some of my issues around a suicide attempt. My writings, on into that night, after seeing that on-the-edge experience are still in my psychiatrist's file. That issue had not been tackled appropriately until then. A year later I shared **Fearless** in my own theatre.

When we showed **Dialogues With Madwomen** recently I had some trepidation that I might cause people difficulties by stirring up memories of past abuse and mistreatment. It was a hard film to present but we did it right and the feedback was uniformly positive (for some profound) from ex-patients and professionals alike. Just to draw a full house together for this experience and to communicate about the project with the filmmaker was deeply rewarding.

When I started programming films there was concern about showing subtitled or esoteric films (like **My Dinner With Andre**), but then we realized that, although sometimes a mental illness can cause problems with reading and concentration, we're generally pretty bright and enjoy a foreign or thoughtful film like anyone else. A mental illness is not synonymous with mental handicap. William Styron *authored* **Sophie's Choice**. People who've spent time "upstairs" are responsible for much of the most creative stuff up on the screen. And in the end, just like a regular theatre, with appropriate description, people have a choice whether or not to come. I refuse to cater to the sensibilities of the 'lowest common denominator'.

But you'll notice as we head into our 7th year of great year of entertainment, our lineup is as eclectic as always; 2 angst ridden challengers, a terrific doc about a great film, 1 very personal film you won't see elsewhere including a chance to talk with its creator, a new, pop, light romance guaranteed to charm everyone (especially Starbucks and Chapters patrons), the latest computer animated marvel from Disney, totally for fun, and a classic caper romp with Newman and Redford in their prime.

The mix makes it fun, keeps it challenging, keeps the people coming, it's why I'm still doing it. It's what makes MM successful - and hey, as of June 14 it'll be 6 years - 346 events, without a miss - we're doing something right!

Bruce Saunders June /99