



Beat the Devil

PICTURE TALK

SAN FRANCISCO FILM SOCIETY

NOVEMBER 2006 V16 N3

1974: CAPOTE AT THE FESTIVAL

ANNUAL FUND CAMPAIGN

POSTER SALE

FESTIVAL HISTORY SITE GROWS

Upcoming Events

- November 12-19: New Italian Cinema
- December 13-14: Film Society Poster Sale
- April 26-May 10: 50th San Francisco International Film Festival
- For information about copresentations visit www.sffs.org/events

Film Enthusiast

- \$60 single / \$110 dual
- \$45 for seniors, students, disabled, educators (single only)
- Discounts to SFFS-ticketed events
- A subscription to **Picture Talk** and **eNews**
- Discounted tickets to select movie theaters
- One Le Video rental coupon and one Balboa Theatre pass (two of each for dual)
- Invitations to members-only screenings and events

Join us now to become a part of a growing film community in San Francisco. Or give membership as a gift, a must for any film buff that lives in the Bay Area. Call 415-561-5020, email members@sffs.org, or visit www.sffs.org for more information. This is our most popular membership:

SAN FRANCISCO FILM SOCIETY™

SF FILM SOCIETY
39 MESA STREET
THE PRESIDIO
SAN FRANCISCO CA
94121

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
SAN FRANCISCO CA
PERMIT NO. 13681



“I just took my foot and put it behind his leg and gave him a good push, and he fell down and broke his arm.”

Truman Capote: An “Infamous” Writer Discusses His Work for the Screen

By Kyle Otsuki

Today’s audiences base their idea of Truman Capote on movies like **Capote** and **Infamous**. In 1974, however, when the now legendary writer appeared for an onstage tribute at the San Francisco International Film Festival, the popular image of Capote was as the author of the enormously popular novel **Breakfast at Tiffany’s** and as the witty raconteur who frequently appeared on the Johnny Carson show. But in contrast to the throwaway tone of late night talk shows, at the Festival Capote talked seriously about his work and his career.

The tribute opened with a neglected 1969 movie called **Trilogy**. Clips were shown from four films: **Beat the Devil** and **The Innocents** (on which Capote shared script credits with other writers) and **Breakfast at Tiffany’s** and **In Cold Blood** (which were adapted from Capote books, though he did not work on the scripts).

“He was a real character,” recalls Claude Jarman who was the Festival’s executive director at

the time. “He was very moved, he really was” by his selection as the first Festival screenwriting honoree. “He was not at all like the legendary Truman Capote,” recalls Marty Rubin, the producer of the Festival tributes at the time, who prepared the clips program. He was very cooperative, very low key, very intelligent, and had very good suggestions to offer about his clips.” And as far as being a razor-witted raconteur, Capote did not disappoint.

When asked about life on the set of **Beat the Devil**, he replied with a delicious anecdote. “Bogart was a very good friend of mine,” Capote recounted. “He was one of those people who loved to come around and give you big hugs and punches and things like that all in the name of joviality. But he sort of came up and gave me this big clap on the back, and I told him to stop that. ‘Don’t do that again.’ And he said, ‘What’s the matter with you, anyway?’ And he did it again. And I said, ‘OK,’ and I just took my foot and put it behind his leg and gave him a good push, and he fell down

and broke his arm,” said Capote, to the great amusement of the Festival audience. “Which caused the film to go about \$200,000 extra over budget because he couldn’t work for several weeks.”

An audience member inquired about his script for **The Great Gatsby**, which was rejected by the studio. “[Paramount] asked me to do the screenplay. I agreed because I love the book, though I hadn’t read it for many years,” Capote said. “I did

complete a script that was faithful to Fitzgerald and fast-paced. There were three producers on the picture and finally one of them told me, ‘The difficulty is your script *is* **The Great Gatsby**. It’s just too literal!’ I said that in that case they should get someone else to do it. They did so and you know what happened.” The film was not successful, to say the least, either with audiences or critics.

The recent films Capote



The Innocents, starring Deborah Kerr

and **Infamous** focus on Capote’s work on **In Cold Blood**. Today that seminal work of reportage has become his greatest legacy. Significantly, that is what Capote chose to talk about the most in 1974. “I spent four years on and off in that part of Western Kansas there during the research for that book, and then the film. What was it like? It was very lonely. And difficult. Although I made a lot of friends there. I had to, otherwise I never could have researched the book properly. The reason was I wanted to make an experiment in journalistic writing, and I was looking for a subject that would have sufficient proportions.

“I’d already done a great deal of narrative journalistic writing in this experimental vein in the ‘50s for the **New Yorker**. . . . But I was looking for something very special that would give me a lot of scope. I had come up with two or three different subjects and each of them for whatever reasons was a dry run after I’d done a lot of work on them. And one day I was gleaning the **New York Times** and way on the back page I saw this very small item. And it just said, ‘Kansas Farmer Slain. Family of Four Is Slain in Kansas!’ A little item just about like that. And the community was completely nonplussed, and it was this total mystery of how it could have been, and what happened.

“And I don’t know what it was. I think it was that I knew nothing about Kansas or that part of the country or anything. And I thought, ‘Well, that will be a fresh perspective for me. . . . And I said, ‘Well, I’m just going to go out there and just look around and see what this is.’ And so maybe this is the subject I’ve been looking for. Maybe a crime of this kind is . . . in a small town. It has no publicity around it and yet had some strange ordinariness about it. So I went out there and I arrived just two days after the Clutters’ funeral. The whole thing was a complete mystery, and was for two and a half months. Nothing happened. I stayed there and kept researching it and researching it and got very friendly with the various authorities and the detectives on the case. But I never knew whether it was going to be interesting or not.

“You know, I mean anything could have happened. They could have never caught the killers. Or if they had caught the killers . . . it may have turned out to be something completely uninteresting to me. Or maybe they would never



In his onstage interview, Capote said that he would have cast Tammy Grimes in **Breakfast at Tiffany’s** instead of Audrey Hepburn. Listen to the entire Capote interview at the 1974 Festival, as well as several other historic Festival interviews, at www.history.sffs.org/closeups. Digitized recordings courtesy of Pacifica Radio Archives.

have spoken to me, or wanted to cooperate with me. But as it so happened, they did catch them. In January, the case was solved, and then I made very close contact with these two boys and saw them very often over the next four years until they were executed. But I never knew . . . when I was even halfway through the book, when I had been working on it for a year and a half, I didn’t honestly know whether I

would go on with it or not, whether it would finally evolve itself into something that would be worth all that effort. Because it was a tremendous effort.”

Kyle Otsuki was an intern for the Festival’s History Project. He can be reached at kotsuki84@gmail.com.

Festival’s History Web Site Grows

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the San Francisco International Film Festival next spring, the Film Society has launched a history Web site featuring audio, photos and video from the past 50 years of the Festival. You can listen to Bette Davis talk about her career, read about Michelangelo Antonioni’s 1968 tribute and watch video of Lily Tomlin and Robert Altman entertaining the crowd at the 2002 Film Society Awards Night.

In the past month, we have posted more than 500 stills (from films screened at the SFIFF since 1987) to our searchable database of Festival films and added recordings of onstage interviews with Shelley Winters, Alec Guinness, Jack Nicholson, Truman Capote and Akira Kurosawa. The history site is

updated regularly. Check the site in the next week for new articles on Festival appearances by the Talking Heads, David Lean and more.

In addition, viewers can add to the collective memory of the San Francisco International by emailing thoughts, experiences

Holiday Gift Ideas

Film Society Poster Sale

As the San Francisco International Film Festival approaches its 50th anniversary, it has shown nearly 6,000 films. And with those films come posters. So the time has come to have a San Francisco Film Society poster sale.

We have posters from all over the world, often in the language of the country of origin. Countries represented include France, Italy, Argentina, Russia, China, Mexico, Hong Kong, Korea, Poland, Japan, India, Spain, Netherlands, Chile, Germany, Brazil, Taiwan, Iran, England and, of course, the United States.

Most of the posters are typical theater lobby size, but some are larger (approximately 4 x 6 feet). We have posters from mainstream films, independents and obscure treasures. Film stills and Film Festival posters will also be available for sale, including oversize posters.

Posters from films directed by Robert Altman, Andrzej Wajda, Jean-Jacques Beineix, Manoel de Oliveira, Wim Wenders, Arturo Ripstein, Jonathan Demme, Hou Hsiao-hsien, Robert Frank, Juan Pablo Rebella, Richard Linklater, Fernando Solanas and Jim Jarmusch will be available. Film posters featuring Sean Penn, Salma Hayek, Andy Lau, Catherine Deneuve and Jacky Chung will be up for grabs as well.



The Glamorous Life of Sachiko Hanai is one of hundreds of film posters available at the Film Society’s poster sale.

There will be a special preview sale for Film Society members only Wednesday, December 13, 5:00–8:00 pm, with complimentary refreshments. The sale will open to the general public on Thursday, December 14, 12:00 noon–8:00 pm at the San Francisco Film Centre, 39 Mesa Street in the

Presidio. Most posters will be priced at \$5–\$15, with some priced higher. All film stills are \$1. Visa and Mastercard are accepted. Film Society members may also pay by check. For directions, go to www.sffs.org/about/directions.html.



New Experiences from America’s Film and Media Frontier

SF360 Film Club: Mixing the SF club scene with film and music

SF360 Live: Animated discussions about experiences surrounding filmmaking

SF360 Movie Night: One City, One Night, One Film

SF360.org: Read about the Bay Area film and media scene

For more information visit SF360.org or email info@sfi330.org



Shelley Winters at the 1976 Festival.



Schoolchildren fill out audience award ballots after a screening of Juan Carlos Cremata's *Viva Cuba*.

Seeing Beyond

Annual Fund Campaign Launched

By Graham Leggat

The San Francisco International Film Festival is about to make history as the first film festival in the Americas to reach the 50-year mark. One of the world's most respected film events, the International has brought together a truly astounding array of film talent. Visionary from the beginning, it has been the benchmark for innovative, farsighted and provocative film presentation.

On the eve of this historic occasion, I'm writing to ask for your help in achieving the expansive and bold vision that we have set forth for the 50th International Film Festival. In order to continue to set the standard for film presentation worldwide, we need the support of people like you now more than ever—people who believe in film as a tool for cultural understanding and artistic innovation.

Our ambitious goals for the 2007 Festival include not only presenting the very best in world cinema, but also inaugurating a number of innovative new programs and events that will further our explorations into how technology is changing the way we make and watch movies. These programs will help us more finely weave the Festival into the fabric of San Francisco city life in all its variety and diversity, while maintaining our stature as one of the world's most forward-thinking Festivals. With your help, we will be able to:

- Enhance our core programs, including World Cinema feature films, documentaries and shorts; New Directors debut films; State of Cinema Address; and Schools at the Festival.
- Expand our newest offerings, such as KinoTek, work made with and for new technology platforms; From the 20th Century, preserved and/or restored films; SF360 Live book signings, seminars and



The first annual Chris Holter Humor in Film Award, honoring the work and life of the inspirational San Francisco teacher and filmmaker, will be awarded in memoriam at the 50th International thanks to the generosity of Holter's partner, producer/director Ron Merk (pictured above right) with Film Society Executive Director Graham Leggat.

panel discussions on Bay Area film and media; and citywide SF360 Satellite Screenings.

- Introduce new programs, including works-in-progress presentations and discussions; events coordinated with digital sister cities around the world; Cinema by the Bay, showcasing the best in San Francisco film and media.
- Support Bay Area youth, through an expanded Schools at the Festival program, film screenings at and filmmaker visits to schools and teacher training in media literacy in addition to curriculum support and enhancement.

We've come a long way since our first festival, which screened 15 feature films from 12 countries at the Metro Theatre in December 1957, for an audience of 11,000 film lovers. At SFIFF 49 this past April, we screened 237 films from 42 countries with 15 days of cinematic discovery enjoyed by over 80,000 attendees. Some

organization anew. In the past 12 months, our unwavering focus has been on the four pillars of our mission: Internationalism, Education, Citywide Outreach and Digital Exploration. As a result, we have increased year-round programming, introducing new projects and creating initiatives that have begun to change the landscape of film exhibition in the Bay Area. We have also reinvigorated our most prominent program, the San Francisco International Film Festival.

This is an exciting and exhilarating time at the Film Society. Clearly, the momentum for the 50th has begun, but there is still much to do if we are to truly honor the International's legacy of promoting the very best in cinema from around the world to audiences in the Bay Area.

Like most nonprofit arts organizations, the San Francisco Film Society depends on gifts and grants to balance its budget every year. Only 12 percent of our costs are covered by ticket income; the



Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi and Bruno Todeschini in Nobuhiro Suwa's *A Perfect Couple* in the Festival's World Cinema section.



Jim Van Buskirk and Will Shank sign copies of their book, *Celluloid San Francisco: The Film Lover's Guide to Bay Area Movie Locations* at the International.



Alice Braga in Sergio Machado's *Lower City*, in the New Directors section.

of these films, in spite of their compelling nature and fine quality, will likely never again play in a San Francisco theater. The 49th was also marked by a record number of filmmaker appearances, by greats such as Werner Herzog, Ed Harris, Jean-Claude Carrière, Guy Maddin, Tilda Swinton, John Turturro and Matt Dillon, and by more than one hundred lesser-known—yet equally interesting and inspiring—filmmakers, actors and producers. The original spirit of exploration and adventure that marked the very first International has never wavered as we've brought thousands of extraordinary critically acclaimed and award-winning films by the world's greatest filmmakers to our community.

I have been at the helm of the Film Society for a full year now and have had the great pleasure of working with the Board, staff and volunteers on remaking this

rest comes from contributions from institutions and individuals throughout our community. As government funding for the arts declines, we need loyal, enthusiastic and generous donors like you to come forward to show your support for one of San Francisco's most important cultural institutions.

In the film world, all eyes will be on San Francisco in Spring 2007 as we unveil our 50th Festival. Please go online and make a contribution today at www.sffs.org/about/fund.html or by calling Jeanne Sweet at 415-561-5005. With your generous support, we can, and will, make history with the grandest, most dynamic and successful Festival ever.

Graham Leggat is the executive director of the Film Society. He may be reached at graham@sffs.org.