

LOOKING INTO REAR WINDOW

DAVID KLEILER
FOUNDED
SERIES BECAUSE OF HIS
FASCINATION WITH
FILM EXPERIENCE

The Rear Window film program showcases short features, animated films, documentaries and local independent films, under the direction of David Kleiler, right, and his assistant Robert Moses

By John Engstrom

Why name a film series after a 1954 Alfred Hitchcock thriller about a Peeping Tom, played by Jimmy Stewart, who spies on his neighbors through a telescope?

David Kleiler, the multi-talented cineaste who runs The Rear Window, a film program that's shown twice weekly in Brookline and the South End, explains his curious choice.

"I don't think 'Rear Window' is Hitchcock's deepest work, but I think it's the closest he comes in all of his films to a metaphor for the film experience. It's a film about film. And The Rear Window is certainly about the film experience.

"Ultimately when I watch a film myself, I see myself on the screen. My favorite films are intensely private experiences. And I think Hitchcock understood the voyeurism in the relationship between the individual audience member and the actors on the screen.

"I love watching people watch film," he says. And given the arrangement at Puppet Showplace in Brookline, where The Rear Window holds weekly screenings, this is easy. The projection "booth" is really a kind of ironing board that folds out of a back wall to make a table for the projector. The hall seats about 90.

From 1968 to '80 Kleiler was a film instructor at Babson College, where he founded Babson's arts and media management program and created a communications major. Kleiler now teaches "The Language of Film" at the Brookline Adult and Community Education Program.

Meeting him, you imagine his classes must have been... well, different. He talks a mile a minute and lurches from topic to topic. His conversation is a little like driving in a car with somebody who keeps the accelerator on the floor and never touches the steering wheel.

At 42, Kleiler has been a filmmaker and teacher, a film programmer, exhibitor, distributor, cochairman of the Brookline Arts Council, and a board member of Theater Works, a local experimental theater company that Kleiler sees as "a dramatic equivalent of independent film." He also is trying to found his own cable television distribution company. Robert Moses, a former student of Kleiler's at Babson, assists him in managing and running The Rear Window which he started two years ago.

But he always returns to his first love, programming: "It's the thing I love doing the most - putting together film programs and showing them to people..."

The Puppet Showplace in Brookline is only one of a number of homes The Rear Window has had in its brief history.

The sleazest was a strip joint on Broad street in Boston where the strippers, an irrepressible and exuberant bunch, sometimes kept performing even when Kleiler's high-class art films had commenced. Kleiler recalls a memorable screening of Eisenstein's "Alexander Nevsky" in which the Teutonic Knights fought a losing battle with shimmering female silhouettes on the screen.

The Puppet Showplace is a little more wholesome than that, of course, but Kleiler is searching for a permanent space for The Rear Window. Its two current venues are homey but inadequate. The Puppet Showplace screening room consists of rows of benches, and The Space on Thayer street in Boston's South End, where Kleiler gives programs on Sundays, is a converted artists' loft that seats about 30.

Kleiler describes the atmosphere at these screenings as "an expanded living room."

"If anything, I'm not detached from my audience," he says, "and I like it. During intermissions, I'll sometimes discuss

the films with audience members. I really do follow through on the policy that every program is based on the suggestions of people who come here."

The Rear Window showcases many short features, animated films and documentaries. Sometimes the repertory reflects Kleiler's gently warped sensibility. Program titles from last season included: "Films for Cynics," "Obsessions," "Festival of the Bizarre and Insane."

This commitment to the offbeat began two years ago when Kleiler went to hear some new wave music at an Allston nightclub which also showed experimental films. He was thunderstruck. "It was an instant realization. These films were on the wavelength of what The Rear Window is about... Black sense of humor, safely experimental... I thought: This is it, this will set the tone for The Rear Window collection."

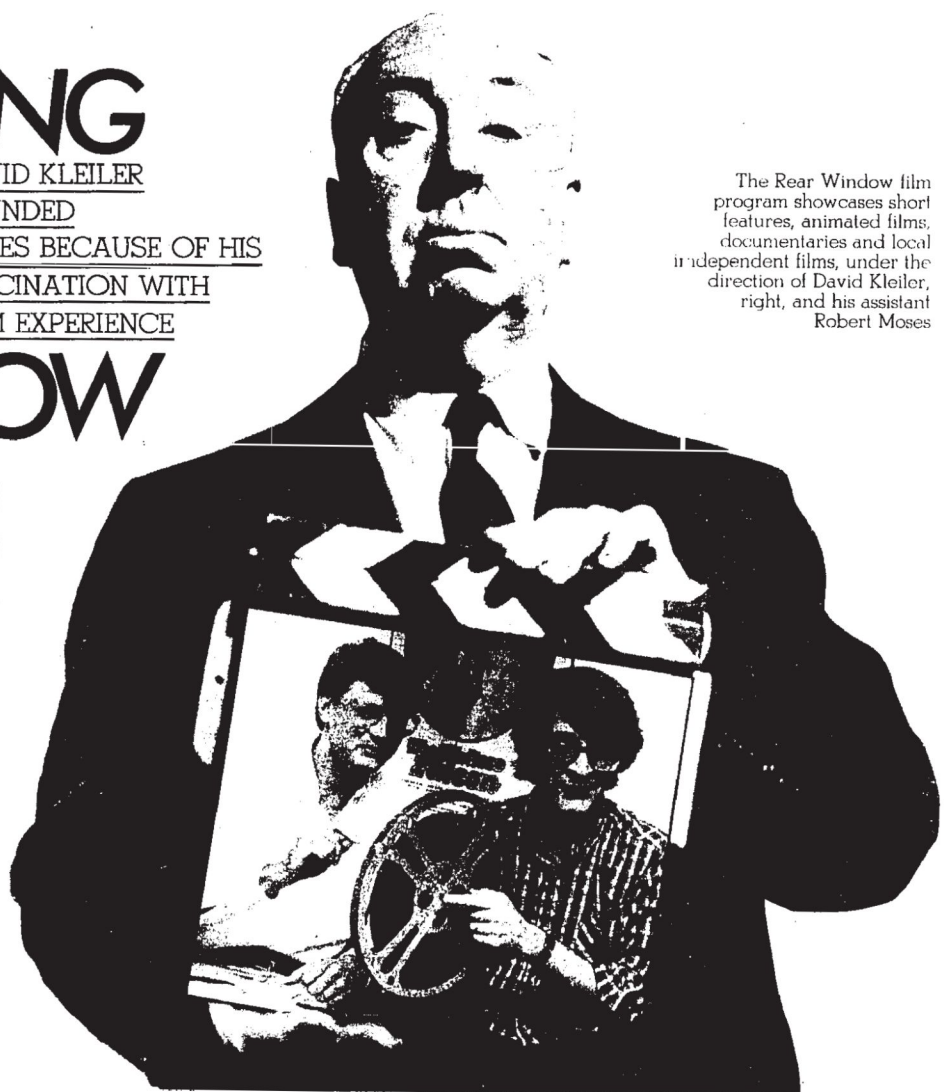
Not to say that he is only interested in underground cinema. He's a fanatic about expanding the market for local artists: "In any program, no matter how far-fetched it is, I will always show a film by a New England independent filmmaker."

Kleiler owns the Boston Black and

White Movie Show, a company that produces and distributes local independent films. One of his goals is to secure all the distribution and exhibition rights to the films he owns. One of these, Rufus Butler Seder's 8-minute "City Slickers," can currently be seen in tandem with "Chan is Missing" at the Nickelodeon Cinemas. "City Slickers" is The Rear Window's first 35mm engagement.

As all this suggests, Kleiler is terminally obsessed with film. "My son has firm instructions that when I die on my 60th birthday I will be laid in an open casket, with the last 15 minutes of '8 1/2' playing continuously above the casket." [3]

The Rear Window - Fridays at 7:30 p.m. at the Puppet Showplace, 32 Station st., Brookline Village, and Sundays at 8:15 p.m. at The Space, 8 Thayer st., 2d floor, South End. Tonight Rear Window will present "Hollywood on Trial," a documentary about blacklisting during the McCarthy period, at Brookline High School's Roberts Auditorium, 115 Greenough St., Brookline; and on Friday and Saturday at its Brookline and South End locations respectively. Tickets are \$2.50. For more information, call 277-4618.



INSET: GLOBE PHOTO BY JACK O'CONNELL