

Open Cities Goes DVD: Local Film Buffs Attempt to Rejuvenate the Movie Experience

Written by Mike Schulz

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Ted Priester, the new president of Open Cities Cinema - formerly the Open Cities Film Society - knows he has a fight on his hands.

He admits that Open Cities, as it nears its 30th anniversary, is widely considered "rather a *gran dfatherly* organization."

He's aware of the difficulty in marketing a weekly film series - one featuring titles readily available to home viewers - to a modern audience, saying, "Anymore, in our society, people work themselves into a frazzle. They want to go home at night and maybe watch a little TV and then lights out."

And he understands that when the organization opens its new season on September 22 - beginning with the Oscar-winning Danish film *Babette's Feast* - cinephiles may balk at the group's decision to screen DVDs as opposed to 16- or 35-millimeter prints, ceding that "there's

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a certain richness of sound that can't be replicated" with DVD.

Priester knows all of this.



But he also knows something that everyone in Priester's self-professed "film generation," and everyone who simply loves *film*, knows- that there's nothing quite like the joy of sharing a terrific movie experience with *others*.

"If you go to a film with a group of people," he says, "and watch the film, and then get together afterwards for a few beers, the topic of conversation is ready-made. You can talk about that film - and the context of *other* films - for *hours*. There's just no end of conversation about films and various directors, actors, thematic content. ... All these things generate and spin off into other directions for conversation."

With Open Cities Cinema, Priester says, "We're hoping to create an environment where people can enjoy the *experience* of the film."

In the organization's heyday, says the new president, "We averaged well over 100 people a night." Yet that number significantly declined over the years, and during the organization's 2005-6 season at the Figge Art Museum, after a move from Davenport's Nighswander Theatre, "it was as low as 15 or 20."

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<http://www.opencitiescinema.org>