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Narrative Features

9 films of merit to look for at the festival.

By Floyd Lawrence, Contributing writer

Editor's note. Below, Floyd Lawrence previews nine recommended narrative features. On Page 24, Scott and Kim McClelland recommend their choices for narrative shorts. For other film categories, please visit the festival Web site www.greatlakefilmfest.com.

When Steve Opsanic, the grand pooh-bah of the Great Lakes Film Festival, called me in the spring to see if I'd be a judge for this year's narrative feature film category, I agreed.

I should have known, however, that watching approximately 75 feature films over two months wouldn't always be satisfying. Although each of the submitted features revealed strong commitment on the part of the filmmakers, the quality varied widely.

But Opsanic and I finally agreed upon nine feature-length films of considerable merit for exhibition. In fact, I actually selected 14 films, but time and space constraints didn't permit the inclusion of all. Below are descriptions of the nine that may help you to plan your viewing.

Of course, you'll need to consult the full festival schedule for complete listings of all the films. The festival begins today and goes through Sunday. Dozens of animated, experimental, documentary, and short features will be screened at the Roadhouse Theatre.

So if you're committed to film as an art form that takes many different shapes, if you believe that aspiring but anonymous filmmakers need support and exposure, and if you simply like to watch and talk about movies, drop by the Roadhouse. You'll see much that simply doesn't appear in any other venue in Erie.

TONIGHT

9:30 p.m. YARD SALE. One day in the life of thirtysomethings Harley and Renee Atwater. Their divorce will be final in two days, and today they're

selling off, one by one, "the pieces of their life" — the accumulations of their 11-year-marriage — in a yard sale. Naturally, they don't always agree on what to sell or who gets the unsold items. That's especially true with regard to the couple's prized '94 Jeep Wrangler. Director Bobby Logan employs flashbacks effectively to lend the principals some dimension.

FRIDAY

12:30 p.m. DRUMMER BOY. Canadian filmmaker David Dawson has created a moving dramatic portrayal of teen depression. And lead actor Timm Zemanek does splendid work as the 18-year-old boy whose interactions with friends, parents, teachers, doctors, and girls are credibly written. Although the film is a bit long at 107 minutes, you'll stay involved throughout.

2:30 p.m. FOGBOUND. I'd be the first to admit that Ate de Jong's ambitious and deliberately "artsy" film doesn't always succeed. I'd also argue that it's the perfect subject for disagreement among cinephiles. A haughty English businessman, his Irish wife, and their American friend (Luke Perry) are stranded in mountain fog in a Mercedes van. It's an erotic thriller that also takes on parenting, psychotherapy, and 18th-century French aristocratic mores with equal ease.

4:55 p.m. PHOTO FINISH. A compelling British psychological drama about lust, betrayal, and revenge. A photographer is devastated when a woman leaves him to pursue an affair with a wealthy man. Jealous obsession leads the photographer to plot revenge. Director Douglas McFerran, a veteran actor, leads his cast into some impressive acting of their own.

6:55 p.m. THE ART OF TRASH. Struggling artist and trash collector Arthur Roselli finally makes a breakthrough into the world of art through a dubious piece of abstract art he creates. But things begin to fall apart fast in this quirky comedy when his tyrannical art dealer insists that he abandon his favored real-life scenarios in favor of even more abstract ... art or trash? There's a gentle love story that also moves things along.

8:35 p.m. TALES FROM BEYOND. A mysterious shopkeeper, played by TV's Batman, Adam West, runs an antiquarian bookstore and leads a young couple through an unpredictable anthology of strange adventures. Two of the four filmmakers — who jointly wrote, directed, produced, and took on numerous roles in the film — are Carnegie Mellon grads. So go cheer for the home team.

SATURDAY

11:25 a.m. PEOPLES. I loved this film, and not because sleazy porn star Ron Jeremy has a small role as a strip club emcee. Set in Kentucky, it's a coming-of-age story about three friends who, in their last summer of avoiding responsibility, smoke dope, get drunk, chase women, and just generally make trouble. Though it has its fair share of clichéd comic and dramatic situations, its ultimately serious purpose — not to mention some fine acting — has no trouble emerging.

3:55 p.m. SEX SELLS, THE MAKING OF TOUCHE. With characters bearing names like Pearce Boyle, Chuck Steak, and Lance Long, you won't be surprised to learn that this is a mockumentary about life in the erotic-film industry. Director Steak wants to cap his career off with the world's largest orgy scene. His female lead is sexy and shrewd Priscilla Barnes, who in real life starred for three years on TV's "Three's Company." It's R-level raunchy fun that also has some authentic dramatic interest.

6:10 p.m. THE FALLEN. First-time director Ari Taub has fashioned a highly ambitious tale of World War II — told from three different points of view and in three languages. A beleaguered German lieutenant, a depressed American sergeant, and an Italian officer are brought together on the Gothic Line, a strategic German defensive position. Complete with subtitles (when needed), vintage costumes, and some wartime realism, it's an impressive debut film.