

Free the Film

Walk in to Victoria's newest alternative movie theatre

By JOHN THRELFALL

Tired of paying ever-escalating movie and popcorn prices for flicks you don't really end up enjoying all that much? One group of artsy anarchists are fighting the corporate cinema power by taking movies to the masses with Victoria Guerilla Drive-In, a somewhat sporadic event that's been catching on in local parks and parking lots since its debut last October. But more than just taking back the screening nights, VGDI is also an ongoing experiment in temporary community.

"Victoria Guerilla Drive-In exists as an effort to create a sense of community and enjoy ourselves in a non-commercial way," explains Steve, spokesperson for the local GDI. And while he notes the event as a whole succeeds thanks to the collective efforts of participants, the VGDI team—Steve, Rob, Ibby and James (no last names, please, they're guerillas)—note they are "fortunate enough to have the skills, energy and gumption to pick the movies, make the plans, and facilitate the event itself on behalf of the larger community." (Thanks, guys!)

Originally started in Santa Cruz, California, GDIs have since sprung up in Berkeley, Portland, Maine and Westchester, Pennsylvania.

But why start one here? "Victoria lacks events—particularly night-time events—which allow people to gather together socially without spending money," explains Steve. "In fact, with the rising costs of real estate and the efforts of the city to push out the homeless, these opportunities are likely to decrease, not increase. The conventional wisdom is that public events take a tremendous amount of organization, planning, permits, et cetera."

However, he continues, "Guerilla Drive-In contests this idea and suggests that since these spaces are empty, they should be used. Our hope is to create a positive experience that harms no one and inspires others to begin their own commerce-free events in order to transform the abandoned, empty night-time spaces into venues for interactive communal experience."

Whew! And here I thought it was just about movies and cheap popcorn.

Steve explains the films are pro-



By day, an urban greenspace. By night, a subversive cinema.

jected via a laptop, digital projector, a "super quiet" generator and a legal, low-power FM radio transmitter, and screenings can pop up anywhere, any time. All attendees need to do is to bring a blanket or chair, an FM radio, snacks to share and a positive community attitude—of course, donations are always welcome too. (With all funds going towards new or better equipment.)

Past movies have included cult faves like *Pump Up The Volume*, *Army of Darkness*, *Dark City* and a *King Kong* double-bill (both new and old) and have attracted between 20 and 60 people. "One of the fantastic things about VGDI is that it transforms what is essentially a concrete wasteland into something more meaningful," says Steve. "Suddenly, wherever they go, members of our community see possibility in alleys and parking lots, fields and vacant lots."

Of course, the big question is how to find out about it. Since it's guerilla by name, it's not like they're posting the films times on *Monday's* movie pages.

"One of the magical things about Victoria Guerilla Drive-In is that you can't just phone somewhere, or look up the event in the movie listings," notes Steve. "VGDI is something you have to discover in order to become a participant and member of the community. And of course, the most enjoyable way to discover Guerilla Drive-In is to stumble across it and join in. We

often see folks near the outskirts of the crowd wondering what is going on, and we encourage community members to invite these people to participate."

All of which is by way of saying if you're interested, they're not going to spell it out for you; you'll have to do at least a modicum of legwork yourself. (Hint: try Google.) But even though they're positive, community-minded guerillas, have they run into any problems with the powers that be? "The most important responsibility of the organizers is to provide a safe, fun event that does not bring harm to anyone," Steve insists. "The few times that we have been noticed by the authorities they have been non-confrontational, as it is very obvious that the community members are being respectful of the people and businesses in the surrounding area."

So, what's up next? "That would be telling! Part of the fun is the surprise," says Steve. "The movie could be anything from action to drama, comedy, documentary or a political film." (That said, participants on the mailing list are given an e-mail heads-up the morning of the next event.)

Any final thoughts? "Victoria Guerilla Drive-In is open to everyone," Steve concludes. "But you have to find us first! The only way to do that is to make the effort to find it. At the end of the night, we disappear like Kaiser Soze: 'and just like that—puff—he was gone.'" M