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Magic Lantern "Smut" Bust

SEE STORIES PAGE SIX



I.V. students demonstrate at Magic Lantern bust . . .

MAGIC LANTERN BUSTED

By THOMAS LANIER

Friday, Sept. 8, several sheriff's investigators, District Attorney Minier, his special investigator William Steele, Sgt. Joel Honey and his faithful companion Fisk, and Michael Serio, chief investigator of obscenity from Los Angeles, all went to the movies in Isla Vista. Judge Frank P. Kearney had not seen the films showing at the Magic Lantern Theatre but had heard about them and had recommended them to all the members of the obscenity convention being held at the Biltmore Hotel in Santa Barbara. He gave the D.A. one of City Hall's handy dandy passes (investigators of the obscene don't make much these days) known to common folk as a search and seize warrant. (The program to be viewed was "Eros", a sombre offering from the Portuguese, and a trilogy of American underground films billed under the title of "Erotica of the Underground." Being the patriotic folk that they are the authorities didn't want to see the foreign flick and showed up promptly at 9:10 p.m. Several obscenity conventioners had been in the theatre the night before and had told Serio, Steele, and Co. when to go to catch the American underground films.

SURPRISE RAID

Working with their usual discretion and secrecy, the investigators planned to ooze into the theatre by surprise, nab the film, the manager, and the projectionist, and slip out before anyone noticed. Unfortunately, there had been a leak from the D.A.'s office at 5:30 that afternoon and a small group of about a hundred Isla Vista residents had heard about the surprise "raid" in time to get down to the theatre to welcome their favorite protectors of society.

The scene was set. It was intermission time at the theatre and the lobby was crowded. The cashier was busy selling tickets, checking I.D.'s, and reciting her little speech to customers: "One of the films we are showing tonight is very graphic and we are telling everyone ahead of time in case anyone might be offended." Suddenly the assembled Isla Vista residents parted to make way for William Steele and Michael Serio as they strutted toward the theatre.

Not knowing who they were, the ticket taker stopped Serio and Steele at the door of the theatre and asked them for their tickets.

"We wanna see the manager," grunted Steele.

"Wait here and I'll see if he's available."

Not enjoying standing in public view, Steele insisted that the manager, Jim Babb, find another place where they might talk.

"Ain't there no place we can talk away from that circus out there?"

Babb and the two investigators left the theatre lobby and went to Babb's office in the Red Lion Book Store where Babb's lawyer, Thomas Sammon, was waiting to assist his client.

When Babb had been told of the planned visit from the authorities earlier that evening, he had tried to get in touch with the D.A. several times, thinking that something short of an old fashioned raid might be arranged among civilized peoples. The D.A. was conspicuously absent and unable to be reached all evening.

It was unfortunate that Babb could not reach the D.A. because he could have saved them some embarrassment by telling them of the change in schedule that occurs on weekends at the theatre. The investigators, hot to see the underground films, arrived just as the last of the American shorts was ending and just as "Eros" was about to begin. They were hopping mad.

They were further upset by the "circus" assembled outside, so upset and worried that they had asked the Goleta Fire Department to stand by with hoses for mob control. The Fire Department, having other things to do, told the sheriff's department to handle their own "mob."

Meanwhile, out in the Magic Lantern Parking lot, Sgt. Honey was busy hassling Oracle's photographer, Simon Kelland. Honey confiscated Kelland's identification

and didn't want to give it back until he had made a clear copy of it, and that takes time when you're writing with crayons on lined paper. The crime? The photographer had tried to get a souvenir photo of Honey, and we all know how shy our favorite sergeant is.

FILM SEIZED

The evening ended with the investigators demanding to be taken up into the projection booth to "seize" the film. Mr. Babb escorted the authorities to the booth where they first wanted to question the projectionist, but Babb's lawyer once again reminded the men of his client's constitutional rights and the investigators had to settle for taking the film they had come to see but had missed.

The management was surprised to discover that the authorities were not objecting to the film entitled "Hold Me While I'm Naked" but were objecting to Andrew Noren's sombre study of the death of the senses titled "Change of Heart."

Grinning nonsensically, the two investigators walked out the front exit, waving to the "applauding" crowd, and shamefully trying to hide the bulky film case under a tight suit coat. A Santa Barbara News Press photographer was told to "shove off" when he tried to capture the event on celluloid.

The next morning the News Press covered the story in full on the front page and the theatre started receiving numerous phone calls from sympathetic patrons who were outraged at the arrogance and brazenness of the police in the matter. The fact that the film played nine nights before the police intervened, that the film was seized just in time to be shown at the Biltmore Hotel at a seminar on obscenity, and that not one of the people who saw the film at the theatre complained in any way about the program of underground films, all makes one wonder about the thinking and maneuverings of the police. Who, precisely, are they protecting?

The complaint against the film was made by a judge who had not seen the film and who has since refused to view it.

It seems to be a clear case of victimization of the management of the Magic Lantern Theatre.

BABB ARRESTED

The weekend after the raid was silent and calm, but Monday brought the arrest of Jim Babb on the charge of exhibiting obscene material in a public place. The next day Bill Hess, manager of the Red Lion Book Co. and Vice President of the Board of Directors of Red Lion Enterprises (owner of the theatre) was booked on the same charge. It was on this day that the Santa Barbara News Press suddenly lost front page interest in the case and began editing their reporters' stories and their film critic's review of "Change of Heart." Lowell Hjermstad's review of the film still contained a powerful attack on the D.A.'s office, even after the editing. The closing paragraph was of particular interest:

"In either case, the film is not required viewing for anyone. Any adult is (or was) free to come in or walk out as he pleases. And I, for one, will sleep less peacefully tonight knowing that the D.A. and sheriff's officers have taken that freedom from me." (SPNP

Sept. 13)

On Wednesday, Sept. 20, Bill Hess and Jim Babb went up for arraignment and entered their pleas of not guilty. A trial by jury will be held Nov. 22.

Word has it that the defense, represented by Thomas Sammon, has a very strong case, but the problem now is money to be raised for the legal fees for the defense. The minimum figure is \$1250 and this must come for the personal funds of the defendants (who have no personal funds to speak of.)

Mr. Babb has been the manager of the Magic Lantern Theatre for the past year and has carefully selected each program himself, trying to give Isla Vista and surrounding communities the best that the film industry has to offer. Without Mr. Babb, the Magic Lantern would undoubtedly be just another Santa Barbara theatre, offering you the usual fare that gushes out of Hollywood.

The theatre has been one of the finest assets to Isla Vista, always remembering and prizing its student clientele in every way. Smoking is allowed in the auditorium, discount tickets are available, cigarettes are kept at 30¢ a pack, midnite shows are programmed on the weekends, etc.

If Isla Vista is to continue to grow as the kind of community we all desire, we, the community, must stick together when attacked. The D.A. is right. This is a test case and Isla Vista must pass the test as a young, strong, and not easily defeated community.

Jim Babb Story
by
Flicka

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ARGO
1/69

Another good head has departed from this scene to make it in the Big Celluloid World.

Jim Babb of the Magic Lantern really hung in there for a long time, putting on some good shows and risking all to turn us on with things more esoteric or avant garde or heavy than the townies ever dared to screen.

Then last year the DA busted Jim and you can imagine that the Octopus must have smiled with satisfaction.

Because now a year later the Octopus owns The Lantern like it owns every other theater in Goleta and Santa Barbara. And the Octopus has its own man running The Lantern.

So good-bye Jim Babb, we're sad to see you go. Hope you have a change of heart; whoever did this to us couldn't have been minier.

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In September 1967, Minier seized a film at Isla Vista's Magic Lantern theatre that had run for nine nights, just in time for an obscenity seminar at the Biltmore Hotel. No theatre customer complained about the film. The complaint was issued by a judge who had not seen it.

After later arresting the theatre owner and manager, Minier gave a scene-by-scene description of the film at several Republican club meetings — prior to court settlement — in addition to conducting private showings in his office.

One explanation of the DA's behavior was given by **Gazette-Citizen** columnist Alton Boch. Unable to see how a newspaper and a film endangered the community, he wrote, "One gets the impression that county law enforcement officials are playing gangbusters in Isla Vista only because there isn't any more real threat — or more publicity-potent threat — available at the present time."

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