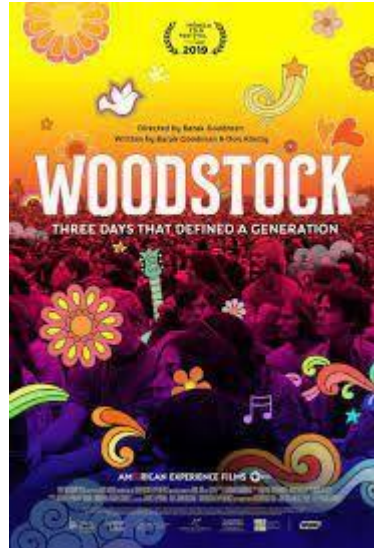


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Russell Bruce's memory kept alive with festival of his favorite films

By Dave Lavender For The Herald-Dispatch
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HUNTINGTON — When Russell “Russ” Bruce died in September 2020, his family knew there was a perfect way to keep his memory alive: Open the theater doors, turn off the lights and roll his favorite films to share with others.

Bruce, who died at the age of 78 in Berrien Springs, Michigan, on Sept. 5, 2020, was a lifelong traveler and film and music buff who collected more than 7,000 movies, 10,000 record albums and hundreds of books about film and music.

From Thursday, Feb. 17, through Sunday, Feb. 20,

the Marshall Artists Series will present the inaugural Russell Bruce Film Festival featuring seven of his favorites — a wild bunch of classic films including “Rebel Without A Cause,” “Woodstock,” “Easy Rider,” “Walt Disney’s Alice in Wonderland,” “A Clockwork Orange,” “American Beauty” and “The Exterminating Angel.”

A true cinephile, Bruce’s love of movies began in 1946 when his mother would drop the young lad off several times a week at the local movie house, where he often watched the feature twice. Building upon his youthful obsession, Bruce, a lifelong photographer and traveler, lived his life accordingly, cinematically. His collection of movies was meticulously documented on spreadsheets by title, director, actor, country, year, genre, etc., and physically housed on specially built shelves with brass plates to describe groupings.

While appreciative of many categories of film, he particularly liked silent, black and white and foreign movies.

“Russ’ choice of movies reflects his beliefs about embracing the beauty and the sorrow of humanity, about embracing the diversity of life, and about hating the way different groups were mistreated in our society,” said his widow, Sandra Bruce. “That is what made Russ a joy to be around. He was truly a loving, caring, exciting person.”

Sandra said her husband’s knowledge of art and music was a perfect complement to his interest in movies and made his criticism sharp. It was not unusual for him to like the acting or like the script, but find the camera work atrocious or the music just wrong. But then there were films that had it all.

Sundance trained, family approved

For years, the Bruces attended the famed Sundance Film Festival and got to know producers, directors and film critics. Russ became especially fond of the late Chicago-based critic Roger Ebert.

“One winter at the Sundance Film Festival, I shared my popcorn and ongoing critique of the movie with the guy sitting on my right, only to have Russ later inquire if I enjoyed chatting with Steven Spielberg for two hours,” Sandra recalled. “On a trip to Moscow a few years ago with a Russian friend, we were able to tour a Russian film studio and sets, which generally were off limits to tourists and particularly Americans.”

To distill down the reservoir of possibilities for the film festival, Sandra circled up their family and friends to each make a selection they knew Russ loved.

“The process of making this choice was truly a tribute to Russ. He had a wide array of loving and close friends and family — all of whom knew him in different but substantive ways,” she said. “From our various relationships with Russ, we all came to learn about the different movies he loved. It was truly a collaborative exercise as we all got the chance to think about our connection to Russ, to recall conversations with him and to reflect on our loving connections to Russ through what we knew as his favorite movies. By making these choices, I believe we all learned something new about Russ; thus, while it was an emotionally hard discussion, it also added significantly to our remembrances of him.”

A new day for films at the Keith-Albee

Film screenings have always played a role in the Marshall Artists Series. Its first event in 1936 was a lecture and film, “Conquering the Antarctic,” from world-famous explorer Adm. Richard Byrd.

In modern times, the fall and spring International Film Festivals have been used as a part of the university’s curriculum by professors, as well as Marshall Artists Series educational outreach programs around the state. Through the educational outreach program, teachers are provided with study guides that help students meet the state curriculum requirements. Marshall Artists Series’ hope is to expand this type of programming for more educational opportunities.

From the recent Martin Luther King Jr. Day educational film “We Are The Dream: The Kids of the Oakland MLK Oratorical Fest” to the Banff Mountain Film Fest, all films being shown benefit from a new, state-of-the-art projector and cinema surround-sound system that turn the majestic Keith-Albee into a grand movie palace.

Made possible by an anonymous donation, the new system was installed in August 2020. Armed with the new system, the Artists Series has expanded its cinematic offerings with the new Russell Bruce Film Festival, an MLK Day film event and a new Lifestyle Film Festival (set for early March) that were added to this season, which already included the Fall International Film Festival and Banff Mountain Film Festival.

While the timing is impeccable, the Bruces’ generosity comes with a bit of serendipity as the couple became smitten with the Keith-Albee and the Marshall Artists Series when they visited in 2012. The couple traveled from Chicago to Huntington in January 2012 to catch one of the handful of dates the late music legend Glen Campbell was playing on his farewell tour.

“The Bruces were in awe of the programs offered through the MAS in a market the size of Huntington,” said Executive Director Penny Watkins in a release. “We were touched when the Bruce family decided to share Russ’ love of film with our patrons this season. Russ’ love of art, people and all having access to education will be celebrated as we take our first journey ‘down the rabbit hole’ with some of his favorites.”

Sandra said she knows her husband would be a bit embarrassed but proud to know he is being honored in this way with screenings of some of his favorite films at one of the nation's historic "grand movie palaces" on a screen nearly as big as a drive-in movie theater.

"I think Russ would have been initially embarrassed by all the attention being paid to him," Sandra said. "He would have also felt overwhelmed by the attention. He was one of those publicly 'stoic guys' who, deep down, was quite emotional. Ultimately he would be deeply moved and honored. It would be something he would have long remembered and reveled in. If there was a poster, he would have had it beautifully framed and it would have hung proudly among his movie collection."

If You Go

WHAT: The Marshall Artists Series' inaugural Russell Bruce Film Festival

WHERE: The Keith-Albee Performing Arts Center, 925 4th Ave., Huntington

HOW MUCH: Film passes for all seven films are \$45 and are available by calling the Marshall Artists Series box office at 304-696-6656. Individual film tickets are \$10 and can be purchased for walk-up entry 60 minutes before each screening and students can access transportation to the festival by visiting the RouteShout app to ride the Green Machine bus.

SPONSORS: The Russell Bruce Film Festival is sponsored by ZMM Architects, Community Trust Bank, Reger Funeral Home, Marsha Slater State Farm Insurance, iHeart Radio, WSAZ and The Herald-Dispatch.



Russell Bruce

