



CELLULOID DREAMS
presents

CRAZY HORSE

a film by Frederick WISEMAN

France - US / 2011 / 134 min. / Color

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SYNOPSIS

Celebrated documentary director Frederick Wiseman spent ten weeks with his camera exploring one of the most mythic places dedicated to women, THE CRAZY HORSE.

This legendary Parisian cabaret club, founded in 1951 by Alain Bernardin has become, over the years the Parisian nightlife 'must' for any visitors, ranking alongside the Eiffel Tower and the Louvre.

Wiseman's impeccable eye allows us to enter into this intriguing international temple of the Parisian club world and to discover what makes the Crazy Horse tick: elegance, perfectionism and a grueling schedule (with 2 shows a night and 3 on Saturdays, 7 days a week).

The film follows the rehearsals and performances for a new show « DÉSIRS » staged by Philippe Decouflé, a celebrated French choreographer, as well as the backstage preparations of the dancers (make-up and costume fittings) and also the various issues involved in the planning of the show and the administration of the club. The show DÉSIRS is an artistic, modern, humorous and colorful spectacle that is the pinnacle of 'nude chic'.

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

In April 2009 I obtained unrestricted permission to film the workings of the celebrated cabaret “Le Crazy Horse” on Avenue George V in Paris. This project seemed a good addition to the almost 40 films I have made about institutions.

I made the film for several reasons. I thought the idea amusing, and to explore the difference between cabaret and ballet. At a more abstract level, I was very interested in people’s fantasies. I don’t know whether they are conflicting or not, but there is a whole array of fantasies on display in this cabaret environment – the fantasies of the owners, the shareholders who want to make money by exhibiting the bodies of beautiful nude women; the fantasies of the audiences who flock to see the show; and the fantasies of the dancers who consent to perform near-nude dance numbers and roles. All these questions interest me. There’s also the fact that the Crazy Horse isn’t vulgar in the sense that old-time burlesque was vulgar. It *hints* at vulgarity, and that, too, is a subject in its own right.

DANCE

CRAZY HORSE is my third film devoted to dance, after *Ballet* and *La Danse*. I have a special interest in this quest for the perfect movement, the process of seemingly endless rehearsal with the sole aim of achieving a kind of perfection that we know is transitory and which will take up only a moment of the show. I find this work particularly moving and also highly cinematographic especially in the rehearsals where the choreographers and dancers strive together to get the movement right. In fact, I have often tried in my other films, *Basic Training* is one example, to emphasize this choreography of movement and bodies. At the Crazy Horse we are not far from a military parade when the dancers, full-fledged living puppets, move in unison, line up straight, and literally march around the stage like toy soldiers. And that “war effort” is entirely focused on eliciting wonder, on the spectacular, on eroticism. There’s something here that is simultaneously fascinating and fun.

THE BODY

There is a great diversity in the idea of the body expressed in my films: the body denied in *Essene*, the suffering body in *Hospital* and *Near Death*, the violent body in *Basic Training*, *Manœuvre* and *Domestic Violence*, the mutilated body in *Primate*, the idealized body in *Model*, the aestheticized body in *La Danse*, and the scarred body in *Boxing Gym*. With *Crazy Horse*, the eroticized body lies at the core of the film, because the institution’s every effort is directed towards the sole objective of providing audiences with a “revue” of nude bodies twice a day (and three times on Saturday) in a show which, number after number, builds up to a catalogue of sophisticated, “typically French” eroticism.

FRANCE

Crazy Horse is the third in a series on French institutions joining *La Comédie Française* and *Le Ballet de l’Opéra de Paris*. Unlike the other two, this is a film about a private institution, but which has also achieved iconic status in France. Parisians, Japanese, Americans and provincials alike come along to spend an evening there, have themselves photographed (there is an official photographer who goes from table to table to immortalize the experience) so that, once back

home, they can say to themselves: I was there and it is exactly like it is in the postcards. I find it very interesting to explore the emblematic venues of a country without preconceptions, to examine their depth, and study how they work. This is particularly interesting in France where class structure and hierarchy are more rigid than America.

LE CRAZY HORSE

At present, the troupe of the Crazy Horse comprises seventeen permanent dancers. Twelve perform each evening, in a revue made up of 14 scenes in two acts.

The stage is tiny, and a labyrinthine backstage area leads to the make-up and dressing rooms, the most secret part of the cabaret, where it was possible to film only with the permission of the dancers.

FREDERICK WISEMAN

Frederick Wiseman has made 37 documentaries and 2 fiction films. Among his documentaries are *Titicut Follies*, *Welfare*, *Public Housing*, *Near Death*, *La Comédie Française ou l'Amour Joué*, and *La Danse—Le Ballet de l'Opéra de Paris*. His documentaries are dramatic, narrative films that seek to portray the joy, sadness, comedy and tragedy of ordinary experience. He has won numerous awards including four Emmys, a MacArthur Prize Fellowship and a Guggenheim Fellowship. His films have played in theatres and been broadcast on television in many countries. He is also a theatre director and has directed “*The Last Letter*,” based on a chapter of Vasily Grossman's novel *Life and Fate*, and Samuel Beckett's “*Happy Days*” at the Comédie Française. He is an Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

FILMOGRAPHY

Documentary Films

TITICUT FOLLIES, Bridgewater, Massachusetts, USA (1967), 84 min, 16mm, B&W
HIGH SCHOOL, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA (1968), 75 min, 16mm, B&W
LAW AND ORDER, Kansas City, Missouri, USA (1969), 81 min, 16mm, B&W
HOSPITAL, New York, New York, USA (1969), 84 min, 16mm, B&W
BASIC TRAINING, Kentucky, USA (1971) 89 min, 16mm, B&W
ESSENE, Three Rivers, Michigan, USA (1972) 86 min, 16mm, B&W
JUVENILE COURT, Memphis, Tennessee, USA (1973) 144 min, 16mm, B&W
PRIMATE, Atlanta, Georgia, USA (1974) 105 min, 16mm, B&W
WELFARE, New York, New York, USA (1975) 167 min, 16mm, B&W
MEAT, Greeley, Colorado, USA (1976) 113 min, 16mm, B&W
CANAL ZONE, Panama Canal Zone (1977) 174 min, 16mm, B&W
SINAI FIELD MISSION, Sinai Peninsula, Egypt (1978) 127 min, 16mm, B&W
MANOEUVRE, West Germany (1979) 115 min, 16mm, B&W
MODEL, New York, New York, USA (1980) 129 min, 16mm, B&W
THE STORE, Dallas, Texas, USA (1983) 118 min, 16mm, color
RACETRACK, Long Island, New York, USA (1985) 114 min, 16mm, B&W
BLIND, Talladega, Alabama, USA (1986) 132 min, 16mm, color
DEAF, Talladega, Alabama, USA (1986) 164 min, 16mm, color
ADJUSTMENT AND WORK, Talladega, Alabama, USA (1986) 120 min, 16mm, color
MULTI-HANDICAPPED, Talladega, Alabama, USA (1986) 126 min, 16mm, color
MISSILE, Vandenberg Air Force Base, California, USA (1987) 115 min, 16mm, color
NEAR DEATH, Boston, Massachusetts, USA (1989) 358 min, 16mm, B&W
CENTRAL PARK, New York, New York, USA (1989) 176 min, 16mm, color
ASPEN, Aspen, Colorado, USA (1991) 146 min, 16mm, color
ZOO, Miami, Florida, USA (1993) 130 min, 16mm, color
HIGH SCHOOL II, New York, USA (1994) 220 min, 16mm, color
BALLET, New York, USA; Athens, Greece; Copenhagen, Denmark (1995), 170 min, 16mm, color
LA COMÉDIE FRANÇAISE OU L'AMOUR JOUÉ, Paris, France (1996) 223 min, 16mm, color
PUBLIC HOUSING, Chicago, Illinois, USA (1997) , 195 min, 16mm, color
BELFAST, MAINE, Belfast, Maine, USA (1999), 248 min, 16mm, color
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, Tampa, Florida, USA (2001), 196 min, 16mm, color
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE 2, Tampa, Florida, USA (2002), 160 min, 16mm, color
THE GARDEN, New York, New York, USA (2004), 196 min, 16mm, color
STATE LEGISLATURE, Boise, Idaho, USA (2006), 217 min, 16mm, color
LA DANSE—LE BALLET DE L'OPÉRA DE PARIS, Paris, France (2009), 158 min, 35mm, color
BOXING GYM, Austin, Texas, USA (2010), 91 min, 16mm, color

Fiction Films

SERAPHITA'S DIARY (1982), 90 min, 16mm, color
LA DERNIÈRE LETTRE (2002), 62 min, 35mm, B&W

CREW

Director - Sound - Editor Frederick Wiseman
Image John Davey
Mix Emmanuel Croset
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