

The Capitola: Family Managed For 28 Years

By DALE POLLOCK

Humphrey Bogart mumbled his way through "Treasure of the Sierra Madre," Olivia De Havilland writhed in "The Snake Pit," and Judy Garland danced along with Gene Kelly in "The Pirate."

The year was 1948, and "The Pirate" was the first feature shown at the infant Capitola Theatre. Twenty eight years later, the Capitola is under the same family management, and delighting audiences who love

the movies.

This consistency of patrons and taste is due in no small part to the labors of Audrey Jacobs, owner and manager of the Capitola. Daughter of the theater's founder, Joseph Jacobs, she has held her own in a largely male business, and prospered where others have fallen by the wayside.

When first opened, the Capitola was one of but three movie houses in Santa Cruz, the others being the Del Mar and

the old Santa Cruz Theater. Built on the grounds of the fire-damaged Capitola Hotel, the theater seemed a natural to attract restless summer tourists.

With the advent of the university, and the influx of scores of film buffs, the Capitola can now boast of largely full houses summer and winter. Thanks to the lowest film prices in town, and a steady complement of second run films, the Capitola is doing better than ever before in its history.

At times, it seemed the Capitola would have difficulty simply surviving. Almost immediately after Joseph Jacobs and his brother-in-law, Arthur Meyer, started the Capitola, the television epidemic of the early 1950s hit. Across the country, theaters died like victims of the plague.

What saved the Capitola was a fortuitous accident that landed them all the powerful Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer films of that era. "MGM was looking for a customer, and we were

looking for pictures, so there we were," recalls Jacobs.

It didn't take long for the elder Jacobs to realize he enjoyed his rest more than spending his evenings in a movie theatre, so the burden of managing and booking the films fell to Audrey, one of the few women actively involved in this field. Her unique status wasn't lost on Jacobs: "There were often myself and another woman among 200 men at some exhibitor meetings." But she downplays her accomplishments, stating, "It really hasn't mattered being a woman."

The length of her tenure at the Capitola has given Jacobs a special perspective on how film audiences and the film business have changed. "Initially there were two or three films a week that we'd play. A week seemed dreadfully long for one picture." That has come full circle, with some local movie houses changing their double bills at least that often.

Jacobs does perceive that the

taste of film patrons has shifted. "People are more fragmented than they used to be, and their tastes are more specialized." Now there's the college audience, and the still distinct family filmgoers.

"The family audience hasn't changed a bit since the late 1940s and early '50s." In some ways, the Capitola is still catering to these tastes, as Jacobs tries to avoid an emphasis on excessive violence. "For instance, I wouldn't book 'Dog Day Afternoon.' It was a good film, but too rough in parts."

Despite her exposure to thousands of films, Jacobs "learned very early that I couldn't trust my own judgment" in choosing what to play. She regards the traditional trade screening, in which exhibitors are privately shown an upcoming feature, as an unnatural situation. "They just sit there thinking how much money they should pay. If it's a comedy, they're not laughing, they're worrying."

With her sub-lease of the Cinema Soquel, there has been some concern about the soft-core sexual fare playing there.

"There is a market for that type of film," Jacobs concedes, but she refuses to exercise any control over the shows.

This brings up the general subject of ratings, which Jacobs describes as "a tremendous headache. Trying to keep youngsters out of R-rated pictures is like dangling forbidden fruit before them." Accordingly, the Capitola tries to avoid R pictures whenever possible, and absolutely refuses to book any X-rated product. "I definitely feel the ratings are too liberal," she states.

Jacobs has concentrated on keeping her admission prices down and her concessions within a level that the kids can afford. When it first opened, the Capitola charged only 65 cents for a ticket, and that's been upped to \$1.50, still well below first run theatres in San Francisco, which are tapping wallets for \$4.00 for some films. Some patrons are simply conditioned to paying more. When the Capitola held free children's matinees one summer, a woman called to ask, "How much is the free show?"

The Capitola has also established a reputation as being

community-minded in its willingness to stage benefits for needy artistic groups. "I'm agreeable to helping people out, as long as we don't lose money on the deal." To date, benefits have aided the Kuumbwa Jazz Society, among other groups.

Jacobs sees her operation as a dying breed of family venture. "It's a great tragedy for the mom and pop businesses to be replaced by the chains," claims Jacobs. "An independent theatre can't possibly bid against the huge corporations in New York. And if nobody else tried to keep us from having a picture, well then, it's not worth having," she says.

So the Capitola Theatre endures where many others have failed, showing its immensely popular films that have played at least once somewhere else. "We'll be here until the theater falls apart, or a tidal wave hits us," jokes Jacobs. Aided by her

still-young mother, Racine, Jacobs has become an institution of sorts among the film community, and a very warm, human institution at that.

Her favorite type of films are in the light comedy genre, and Katherine Hepburn remains her most admired actress. But Audrey Jacobs has a confession that she makes very softly, as if some of her Capitola audience might overhear.

"My real hobby is traveling. I just love it, and do it whenever possible. To tell you the truth, I'm not even a real movie fan."

Don't tell that to the Capitola Theatre fans. They'll never believe you.

REFERENCE

