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# 'Satan's Brew' is too bitter

By Walter V. Addiego

**"S**ATAN'S BREW" comes as a disappointment from the talented West German director Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Like many of his films, it's a stylistic tour de force, but it finally amounts to little more than a blast of bad temper against his usual targets.

The 1976 film, now at the Four Star through Saturday, is a frenetically paced farce that represents the director's first thorough indulgence in full-fledged tastelessness. "Satan's Brew" seems to take an almost adolescent glee in piling outrage upon outrage.

Fassbinder is typically concerned with interpersonal politics, and his characters are usually playing some subtle (and occasionally unsubtle) power games with each other. These games are seen as the basis for the public political climate of the day.

The director here focuses on a tyrannical writer's frenzied attempts to scrounge money and deal with the women in his life while enduring a dry spell in his work. The story contains many broad and nasty episodes of bourgeois-baiting, which are contemptuous almost to the point of artlessness.

Fassbinder is a sharply intelligent film-maker who at age 33 has produced around 30 films, including "Chinese Roulette," "Fox and His Friends," "Jail Bait" and "The Merchant of Four Seasons." His radical sensibility has been mirrored in a difficult but fascinating style that usually features an impressive visual simplicity, a mocking use of Hollywood-style melodrama, and ambiguous characters and actions frequently hinting at the perverse.

But in "Satan's Brew," Fassbinder has been undone by his own excess of anger. He underlines everything and concludes every sentence with a string of exclamation points.

Fassbinder's blocked writer, Walter Kranz, hits up a rich, sex-obsessed young woman acquaintance for money, and shoots her after she reaches an orgasm while writing him a check. That's just the beginning.

Kranz, played aptly as a caricature by Kurt Raab, leaves his butch, blond wife to languish sexually while he brings home first a prostitute, then a wart-faced female admirer (Fassbinder veteran Margit Carstensen) who is good for a few marks whenever he needs them. The writer's retarded brother plays endlessly with a collection of dead flies.

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## REVIEW highlights

"Satan's Brew," a New Yorker Films release; directed and written by Rainer Werner Fassbinder; photography by Michael Ballhaus; edited by Thea Eymesz and Gabi Eichel; music by Peer Raben. With Kurt Raab, Margit Carstensen, Helen Vita, Volker Spengler, Y Sa Lo and Ingrid Caven. Fassbinder tries his hand at outrageous tastelessness in this frenzied farce about the chaotic life of a writer, and the results are much less interesting than the director is capable of. Top evening admission \$3. Through Saturday at the Four Star, Clement and 23rd Avenue.

★★



Kurt Raab is a bedeviled writer in 'Satan's Brew'

Kranz decides one day that he is the German poet Stefan George, and so decks himself out in a hideous parody of that writer, and surrounds himself with paid admirers. The Kranz household is one of constant bickering, bullying and self-abasement. The writer, usually abusive, finally finds some release in a physical beating, and lo and behold, his block is cleared and he is toasting the completion of a masterwork with his publisher.

The sadistic and masochistic games of "Satan's Brew" are evidence of the director's belief that a sort of fascism prevails in personal relationships, but he has said the same thing more wittily and effectively in earlier films. The film may prove too bitter a pill even for Fassbinder loyalists.

## Ballet out of Spoleto

The San Francisco Ballet has canceled its participation in the Spoleto Festivals, both in Charleston, South Carolina, (May 26 to June 10) and Spoleto, Italy (two weeks beginning June 29).

The decision, which SFB president Richard LeBlond says was made "more in sorrow than in anger," followed the Spoleto management's unexpected reduction of appearances at both festivals to one week. The word from Spoleto/Charleston came too late for the SFB to substitute the necessary additional dates, both in the U.S. and abroad, to make a summer tour financially viable.

So the company will dance at home instead.

Further complications arose when LeBlond attempted to define exact dates of appearances in Spoleto and Charleston. "It's regrettable," he commented, "that our relationship with Spoleto was established at a time when both festivals were undergoing organizational upheaval."