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Daily Southtown

Metal' drives home picture of strife in Peru



"Metal and Melancholy" is filmmaker Heddy Honigmann's documentary about the taxi drivers of Lima, Peru.

REECE PENDLETON
 correspondent

REVIEW

METAL AND MELANCHOLY

★★★½

Directed by Heddy Honigmann.
 Playing exclusively at Facets
 Multimedia, 1517 W. Fullerton
 St. (312) 281-9075. Unrated.

Sometimes the state of a society can be seen best not through newspapers, television or even its political life, but through the stories its people tell one another. This is the simple but powerful premise underlying "Metal and Melancholy," Dutch (but Peruvian-born) filmmaker Heddy Honigmann's bracing documentary about the taxi drivers of Lima, Peru.

This isn't your run-of-the-mill cabbie culture. Peru's depressed economy has caused a collapse of the middle class, sending men and women from all walks of life scrambling to find ways to make extra money. For many, a partial solution to the economic woes is found by turning to gypsy cab driving. The taxi drivers interviewed in the film include housewives, bankers, police officers, government workers and an actor who hilariously insists on recreating a melodramatic moment from a film he appeared in

er's side door that falls off when one opens it, and a gaping hole in the floor. "After all," the cabbie says, beaming with pride, "Who would want to steal this heap?"

The required elements for cab driving include a window sticker with the word "taxi" on it — available for \$1 from one of Lima's thousands of destitute children who seem to populate every street corner — as well as a car in poor condition to make it less appealing to the growing number of car thieves. In one comical scene, a cabbie demonstrates the various "security" features of his car, including a driv-

The dark side of Peruvian society also is shown here, perhaps most chillingly when a female cab driver takes Honigmann to Lima's communal grave, located behind a large cemetery, where the corpses of unidentified people, mostly orphaned children, are dumped in a giant pile with the hope that a relative might recognize them. After a conversation with the same cab driver in which she relates that she no longer fears death because of a near-death experience, a visibly stunned Honigmann stares at the heap of bodies and says, "I don't believe you."

The film's title comes from a Spanish poet's line, recalled by one of the cab drivers, describing the Peruvian soul, steeled by the country's horrors and hardships and yet always hopeful and open to life's beauty. It's a perfect metaphor for a country, which, like so much of Latin America, has seen more than its share of injustice and suffering, and it is lovingly captured from the passenger's seat in this memorable documentary.