

## Document Citation

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comparison between the utopia of entertainment and the utopia of social planning, the Radiant Future and the Happy Ending. A blandly scathing satire of the paternal state, replete with kitschy Stalin-era lullabies and excerpts from socialist realist operettas, Gyula Gazdag's 1974 feature was one of the few Hungarian fiction films to be banned outright; like *The Witness*, Peter Bacsó's 1969 farce, it was shelved for nearly a decade.

I don't want to minimize the specifically Hungarian nature of *Singing on the Treadmill*'s insolence—Budapest may be the only city in the world with a municipal operetta theater, and the film is filled with local allusions. Still, every culture has its candy-colored dreams of paradise, and so the film's desecratory spirit is universal. *Singing on the Treadmill*'s poetic love of rubble and camp appreciation for idiotic clichés—most spectacularly the songs from the 1949 “operetta of optimism,” *State Department Store*—suggest an affinity to the epic American underground movies of the early 1960s. Like them, *Singing on the Treadmill* uses derelict landscapes, junkstore props, and deadpan travesty as a means to subvert official culture.

*Singing on the Treadmill* opens Gazdag's MOMA retrospective (conflict-of-interest confession: I wrote the program notes). The series includes the 40-year-old director's documentaries as well as his features. Both modes are equally characterized by their skeptical humor and critical irony. (Of all Hungarian directors, Gazdag was the most profoundly influenced by the Czech new wave.) The first weekend of Gazdag's retro includes *Package Tour*, a documentary about a return trip to Auschwitz which had its local premiere in January at the Public Theater, and *The Whistling Cobblestone* (1971), an impressive, droll, and superbly observed satire about a Communist Youth Organization summer work camp, in which “owing to technical reasons,” there is no work. ■

**GOTHIC.** Directed by Ken Russell. Written by Stephen Volk. Produced by Penny Corke. Released by Vestron Pictures. At the Cinema 1, opening April 10.

**SINGING ON THE TREADMILL.** Directed by Gyula Gazdag. Written by Gazdag and Miklós Györffy. Produced by Mafilm-Hunnia Studio (Budapest). At the Museum of Modern Art, April 10 and 12.

**D**isco-dramaturg that he is, Russell's better films have been his musicals, particularly his often repellent adaptation of *The Boy Friend* which, among its reshuffled clichés, associates high-voltage tap dancing with Eisenstein's “Odessa Steps.” A more elaborate meditation on the politics of showmaking, the Hungarian musical *Singing on the Treadmill* (at the Museum of Modern Art, April 10 and 12) creates an audacious