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Too late blues, Cassavetes, John, 1961

Film

The Films of John Cassavetes



Director/filmmaker John Cassavetes

If anyone earned the right to be called the father of American independent filmmaking, it was John Cassavetes (who died in February at age fifty-nine). Before Woody Allen, David Lynch, Jim Jarmusch, or Spike Lee, Cassavetes served as the conscience and provocateur of American cinema. His work does not fit neatly into any school or category. The eleven films he made are personal, passionate, challenging — extravaganzas of acting and emotion. Since

they were rarely screened during his lifetime (usually playing only in major cities for a few weeks or less), this retrospective offers a unique opportunity to view the work of our greatest cinematic maverick.

The Films of John Cassavetes was organized by Walker Art Center and the Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, California, in cooperation with the Sundance Institute, Faces Distribution Corporation, Columbia Pictures,

Castle Hill Films, Paramount Pictures, Universal Pictures, the Cannon Group, and Films Incorporated. Special programming assistance was provided by Ray Carney, Larry Kerdish, Rob Nilsson, Al Rubin, Tony Safford, and the Cassavetes family.

All the films in this retrospective are screened in the Walker Auditorium.



Lelia Goldoni in *Shadows*, 6 and 7 September

Shadows

7 pm
with
The Killing of a Chinese Bookie

8:45 pm
Wednesday and Thursday,
6 and 7 September

Made for \$40,000 with an amateur cast and crew, *Shadows* won five awards at the Venice Film Festival. The film is a touching, bittersweet, coming-of-age comedy deeply indebted to the work of Roberto Rossellini and other Italian Neorealists in its use of nonprofessional actors and "found" dramatic moments. Cassavetes' direction wears its heart on its sleeve as endearingly as do the young characters in the film. With Lelia Goldoni, Hugh Muro, Anthony Ray. 1959, U.S., 87 minutes.

Bookie is a wry self-portrait of the artist as struggling repertory theater manager. Ben Gazzara plays Cosmo Vitelli, a nightclub owner and the director of its sleazy stage shows, who, against all odds, fights for his artistic and commercial independence. In debt and pressured by the mob (which wants to foreclose on his property), Cosmo — like his creator — is doggedly dedicated to the proposition that the show must go on. With Seymour Cassel, Tim Carey. 1976, U.S., 135 minutes.



Seymour Cassel and Lynn Collins in *Faces*, 13 September

Faces

7 and 9:30 pm Wednesday, 13 September
\$5 (\$4)

Nominated for three Academy Awards, *Faces* marked a turning point both for its young director and for American cinema: it was the first truly independent American feature film to reach a national audience. A searing examination of a marriage on the rocks, *Faces* provides one of the most intense and demanding, yet ultimately exhilarating, emotional experiences in all of cinema. The film is the initial installment in what has come to be called Cassavetes' "marriage trilogy" (*Faces*, *Minnie and Moskowitz*, and *A Woman under the Influence*). With Gena Rowlands, John Marley, Lynn Collins, Seymour Cassel, Val Avery. 1968, U.S., 129 minutes.

One of Cassavetes' two doomed flirtations with the Hollywood system, *Too Late Blues* has some fascinating moments that mark it unmistakably as belonging in his territory. But this story of a jazz musician who sells out his artistic ideals in order to pay the rent was perhaps too close to the personal situation of the filmmaker, who was then trying to make it in a big time studio. With Bobby Darin, Stella Stevens. 1961, U.S., 103 minutes.

Cassavetes repudiated *A Child Is Waiting*, his second and final excursion into studio-style production, when, near its completion and following a heated argument with its producer, Stanley Kramer, he was thrown off the set and fired. The film, which focuses on mentally retarded children, was recut without his supervision. The young people in the film, upon whom Cassavetes lavishes his cinematic love, become the real stars, upstaging the leads, Judy Garland and Burt Lancaster. 1963, U.S., 102 minutes.

Too Late Blues

7 pm
with
A Child Is Waiting

9 pm
Thursday, 14 September

Cassavetes gives his best acting performance outside his own work in this neglected Elaine May black comedy. He and Falk play two small-time hoodlums fleeing from a mob murderer. They stumble their way through an urban American dreamscape, in the process forcing us to recognize truths about ourselves and our culture that we, like they, would perhaps sooner ignore. With Ned Beatty, Rose Attick. 1976, U.S., 119 minutes.

Mikey and Nicky

Written and directed by Elaine May
8 pm Friday, 15 September

Cassavetes utilized a slew of family and friends — including his mother, his wife Gena Rowlands' mother and brother, and actor Seymour Cassel's mother and wife — in this weird and wacky homage to the Preston Sturges and Howard Hawks screwball comedies he watched in his youth. "Comedy is more interesting to me than serious drama," he once said, "because there is more life, more possibility in it." With Gena Rowlands, Seymour Cassel, Val Avery, John Cassavetes. 1971, U.S., 115 minutes.

Minnie and Moskowitz

7 and 9:15 pm Wednesday, 20 September

Subtitled "A Comedy about Life, Death, and Freedom," *Husbands* explores the question of where our responsibilities to others end and our responsibilities to ourselves begin. Following the death of a mutual friend, Archie (Peter Falk), Harry (Ben Gazzara), and Gus (Cassavetes) embark on a lost weekend in which they try to come to grips with the passing of their youth and the facts of adult life. They struggle to understand the inevitable losses and disappointments of growing up, as well as the joys and imaginative possibilities that are available to us at no matter what age. 1970, U.S., 140 minutes.

Husbands

7 and 9:30 pm Thursday, 21 September
\$5 (\$4)

The controversial sensation of the 1974 New York Film Festival, *A Woman under the Influence* won Oscar nominations for Best Director and Best Actress. Peter Falk and Gena Rowlands play a married couple as intensely in love as they are unable to express their love in terms that the other can understand. A profound and exultant journey through the tangled "influences" of married life in today's world, this is the final film in Cassavetes' marriage trilogy. With Katharine Cassavetes, Lady Rowlands. 1975, U.S., 146 minutes.

A Woman under the Influence

7 and 9:45 pm Wednesday, 27 September

Gena Rowlands turns in a virtuosic, Oscar-nominated performance as the title character in this tale of a gun moll on the run from the mob. An offbeat comedy cast in the mold of an action film, *Gloria* manages to pose a very Cassavetes-esque question: whether a personality on the run from life can slow down enough to carry any emotional baggage. With Buck Henry, Julie Carmen. 1980, U.S., 110 minutes.

Gloria

7 pm
with
Love Streams

9 pm
Thursday, 28 September

Begun when Cassavetes was already quite ill, this film is his fond farewell to his art. It is not accidental that *Love Streams* is an idiosyncratic version of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, with a bizarrely withdrawn Prospero figure at its center, played by the filmmaker himself. Richly self-reflective, *Love Streams* allows Cassavetes to revisit scenes, characters, and events from his previous works and to meditate on the meaning of a life lived in art. With Gena Rowlands, Seymour Cassel. 1984, U.S., 141 minutes.

Opening Night

7 and 9:45 pm Friday, 29 September
\$5 (\$4)

Focusing on an actress at a point of crisis in her career, *Opening Night* mirrors Cassavetes' own doubts about his future as a filmmaker. Perhaps the most demanding and difficult of all his works, this rarely screened film is not for everyone — not even for all of those who admire his other films. With John Cassavetes, Gena Rowlands, Ben Gazzara, Joan Blondell, Paul Stewart. 1978, U.S., 144 minutes.



From left, Ben Gazzara, and Cassavetes in *Husbands*, 21 September



Gena Rowlands in *Gloria*, 28 September