

Midnight 'let your hair down time'

by SCOTT MEYER
Battalion Reporter

What does a college student do after spending a Friday or Saturday night partying, and is too keyed up to just go back to the dorm? Many students go see a midnight movie.

There are three theaters in town which show midnight movies. They are the Campus Theater on Boyett Street, the Plitt Southern Theater on College Ave. and the Manor East III Theater at Villa Maria and Texas Ave.

Each theater has a different idea of what makes a midnight movie. Kurt Schulman at the Campus Theater said that midnight films started there in 1967.

"They were called the midnight frolics back then; it was strictly pornographic crud, but people would come to hear the Aggies. Most of the time they were better than what was on the screen anyway," Schulman said.

The Campus was remodeled from an X-rated movie theater in the fall of '77, and the following spring it started showing "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" as a midnight film. The picture has been showing there ever since, although the theater plans to "swing it with Wizards or something, to try to build up the interest in 'Rocky Horror,'" Schulman said.

Schulman said that picking a midnight movie is something they "just try to guess at." Schulman



said that "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" is probably such a success because it is an audience participation film.

"People can make fools out of themselves, and nobody cares," he said.

The ability to make fools of themselves is very important, Schulman said, because midnight is "let your hair down time, when all the bars are closed, and almost everyone is wasted anyway."

Leslie Diestler at the Plitt Southern Theater agreed that a different type of movie is called for at midnight, because of the different type of audience. X-rated films were very popular with the students, she said, but were discontinued because "our company did not know which way the obscenity laws were going."

Diestler said the theater was under no community pressure to discontinue the films. "We had no complaints with them," she said.

The Alternative Film Society rents the Plitt Southern Theater every other weekend, and shows films from their series. The Alternative Film Society series includes concert films, and movies like "Night of the Living Dead."

Tim Sager, a senior journalism major at Texas A&M University, is the theater's midnight sponsor. He decides what films will be shown on the weekends when the Alternative Film Society is not renting the

theater.

"I try to decide on a film that will do well at A&M; a comedy or a horror picture, or when they allow it an X-rated one," Sager said.

He said he used to try and book two films each night rather than just one. One would be the typical midnight movie, and the other would be a classic film like "Outrageous" or "The Ruling Class."

Sager said that while the classic films were films that he personally liked to see, they did not do very well, and he would lose \$70 to \$100 per show. He said he may try to show a couple this semester, and show them more regularly if they do okay.

The Manor East theater started showing midnight movies around the fall of 1978. Rick Atwood, the manager there, said that the films did not do very well at first, but that now the films were considered successful.

Atwood said he selects movies that did well at the box office during their first run, as well as special ones like "Hair," which are shown in Dolby stereo.

"We tend towards Dolby stereo movies, because we are the only theater in town that is equipped to show them in Dolby, which gives us an edge on the competition," Atwood said.

"The idea behind midnight movies is to supplement the regular movies; to supply quality movies," he said.

National Lampoon top adult humor magazine, especially on college campuses

United Press International

LOS ANGELES — Matty Simmons is not a funny guy. But he knows what makes people laugh. He has parlayed that into a multi-million dollar entertainment empire.

Simmons, a former press agent who helped start the Diners Club, built his comedy empire on the infamous reputation and the financial success of an outrageously irreverent, always topical, and sometimes downright sick magazine — National Lampoon.

The first edition of National Lampoon appeared on newsstands in April 1970. The Vietnam War was raging. Richard Nixon lived in the White House. The wild-eyed Charlie Manson was about to stand trial for the Tate-La Bianca murders.

The country needed a good laugh. National Lampoon helped America laugh at itself.

A decade later, National Lampoon is the top adult humor magazine in the country — especially on college campuses. The staff has just published the National Lampoon Tenth Anniversary Anthology.

National Lampoon alumni have produced, written or starred in at least seven books, nine record albums, four stage shows, two radio programs, two television shows and one of the most profitable movies in cinema history — "National Lampoon's Animal House."

"Saturday Night Live," network television's successful experiment with hard-core satire, was written to a large extent by former Lampoon staffers. Its cast was studded with young comics who had starred in Lampoon stage productions.

"Saturday Night Live" players John Belushi, Chevy Chase and Bill Murray are National Lampoon graduates. They have since starred in major motion pictures, including some produced by Simmons.

Simmons, who now divides his time between New York and his office at Universal Studios in Los Angeles, was already a successful magazine publisher when he handled and co-published with the editors of the Harvard Lampoon a full-scale parody of Life magazine in the late 1960s.

The first product was not very good, Simmons says. Six months later the Harvard Lampoon editors decided to parody Time magazine. This time Simmons was a full partner. The issue returned a profit of nearly \$250,000.

"I discovered," said Simmons, "there was gold in them there hills."

The editors soon graduated from Harvard, bought the rights to the "Lampoon" name and went into business with Simmons.

"For the first six or seven months it was wildly unsuccessful," Simmons said. "Then suddenly things picked up."

"I was sort of the padrone of this whole thing. I was always saying, 'We got to watch it fellas, we can get sued real easily.' Then the issue that really took off was a cover parody of Minnie Mouse. It was my idea and it attracted our first lawsuit."

Simmons said two factors contributed to Lampoon's success. The political climate was ripe. The United States was then probably one

of the few countries in the world without an adult humor magazine.

"When you have a president like Nixon and a vice president like Agnew," he said, "a satire magazine has tools. People liked to laugh at them."

"We were also one of the first magazines to come out against the Vietnam War with a cover calling Nixon a liar. War and Watergate gave the magazine a lot to work with."

"Our worst period was when (Gerald) Ford was president. He was one of the dullest presidents ever and everytime we tried to do something on Ford we fell flat on our face."

National Lampoon has had its share of critics and lawsuits. It has never lost a suit, but its detractors label many of the articles unfair, bigoted and disgusting.

Simmons says there were some guidelines he enforced.

"Everybody had to get it," Simmons said. "I told the staff to pick on everybody."

"There was a natural inclination in those days to zing it to people on the right. Now, as a matter of fact, we have a number of editors who are very conservative, but in those days the editors were liberals. I insisted we had to give it to everybody."

As far as taste was concerned, Simmons said the only guideline was that the piece had to be "redeemably funny" and he made the final decision.

One of the magazine's most famous issues contained a parody of a Volkswagen ad that suggested

that if Sen. Edward Kennedy had been driving one of the watertight German automobiles when the Chappaquidick accident occurred, he would have been elected president.

That piece does not appear in the anthology, says Simmons, because

the magazine eventually agreed to a demand from Volkswagen that it never be reprinted.

Instead, the anthology contains another piece satirizing Kennedy, "The Delegate from Chappaquidick."

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