

See! Hear!

The development of inexpensive synchronized-sound Super 8 cameras in the mid-'70s closed the gap between home movies and "serious" filmmaking, as fledgling Fellinis took aim at their filmic fantasies and shot. The results have ranged from hopelessly unwatchable to truly transcendent, and the best of these auteurs of the handheld camera have added to the

box, which eventually destroys the nervous system through controllable variations in light, temperature and ear-piercing sound, is aptly illustrated in a climactic bombardment of gruesome, quasi-psychedelic noise and imagery.

The most accessible and enjoyable of the B's films (excluding the unreviewed *Trapdoor* and the soon-come 16mm feature *Vortex*) is *The Offenders*, originally presented as a cliffhanger serial at Max's Kansas City in '79-'80. The

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outside the established "gallery ghetto" of the art world.

Lookalike directors **Scott B** and **Beth B** have profited handsomely from this resurgence of interest. They are the most publicized of four Super 8 filmmakers to be featured in a month-long festival in the James Agee Room of the Blecker Street Cinema beginning October 21. The B's, whose "B Movies" pay homage to the stark, hardboiled cynicism of B-movie giant Samuel Fuller (*Pickup on South Street*, *The Big Red One*), use many of the

THE OFFENDERS



The Offenders follows the adventures of Laura (the Bloods' Adele Bertei), a "treacherous little dickens," from her kidnapping by the evil (Lounge) Lizard (John Lurie) to her escape and attempted reconciliation with her woebegone father (Bill Rice). With a soundtrack integrating sustained soap-opera organ chords and great mutant surf-rock, voice-over narration that could have been written by an East Village James M. Cain, and an assortment of visual cliches from gangster and horror pictures, the B's successfully update the "so-bad-it's-good" teenage movie for an '80s sensibility.

But *The Offenders* exhibits much, much more than just classic slabs of juvenile delinquent humor (e.g. the dialogue between Lydia Lunch and Johnny O'Kane: "You're a tough boy," "You're a tough girl," and their hilarious love scene in an abandoned tenement). *The Offenders* has a striking visual style with especially garish color and beautifully staged shots—particularly Laura's assassination of her kidnapper—along with highly effective naturalistic acting. The performances of Bertei and Rice (an Off-Broadway actor with an impressively worried face) elevate the film from one-dimensional caricature and prove that the B's can elicit genuine characterizations from their actors and their idiomatic screenwriting.

BLACK BOX



leading lights of NY rock's No Wave faction in well-made features and shorts that integrate deadpan punk humor, stagey S&M and thought-provoking political content.

Letters To Dad, a 1979 short, is a chillingly effective commentary in which actors and musicians, including Arto Lindsay (DNA) and Pat Place and Laura Kennedy (Bush Tetras), read excerpts from letters written to Jim Jones by his followers to the accompaniment of a low electronic hum. *Black Box* stars the delightfully dreary Lydia Lunch as a sadistic interrogator who tells Bob Mason (a frequent composer of B-film soundtracks) to "shut up and suffer" after placing him in a torture device the B's constructed from details they found in an Amnesty International report. The horrors of the made-in-USA

MENAGE



Betsy Sussler uses rock and roll music and performers incidentally (Lance Loud performing an un-

menage on dialogue from Werner Fassbinder's play *Pre-Paradise Sorry Now* and research on the English killers, who tape-recorded the horrified screams of their child victims. The Fassbinder sequence, with actors Lindzee Smith and Caz Porter, is direct, establishing the characters with deadpan Third Reich cliches and some interesting—and some willfully obscure—camerawork. The second, often baffling longer sequence meshes voice-overs and random, often incongruous situations that "explore three-way power struggles" paralleling the relationship among the murderers and their victims.

Despite Sussler's intention of separating factual filmmaking from storytelling based on real events ("Fact is the art of storytelling," she explains, "Storytelling is based very loosely on an action that happened"), the subject matter of *Menage* and her decision to make no moral statements about the murderers is ultimately just depressing.

OUT OF HAND



Erica Beckman's films are a shining example of just how limitless the Super 8 medium can be. Beckman's latest, *Out Of Hand*, produced on an \$800 budget yet offering beautifully complex animation and superior art direction, is an enigmatic exercise more concerned with visual information and

perception than with traditional narrative. Beckman, a painter who devises elaborate pre-shooting storyboards, uses film as a moving canvas to create characters that are physical and psychological symbols in a landscape of shapes, colors and objects. Her films recall the early cinematic experiments of Dada/Surrealists like Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Jean Cocteau, ablaze with bright primary colors and full of references to most of the major movements in 20th century painting.

Out Of Hand concerns a young man's search for something missing in his old house, set to a soundtrack of chants and snare drums. As he tosses objects, they fly toward the camera in sometimes dense, superimposed animations. The viewer is first lulled by the metronomic pacing and motions, then suddenly roused by rushes of action, all the time being forced to examine relationships between objects and their movements.

While Beckman's films are not purposefully entertaining, they offer an innovative use of the medium, unique among feature filmmakers and experimental formalists alike. Her concerns as a painter may make her work less easily accessible, but the visual and perceptual rewards are well worth the effort.

GHOST SISTERS



Adam Brooks, an NYU film school grad, brings a 35mm feature sensibility to the easier-to-finance Super 8 medium with *Ghost Sisters*. Like Jonathan (*Melvin and Howard*), Demme, who acted as cameraman, Brooks' potential lies in spinning convincingly human tragicomedies, complete with all of the ironies and illusions real life has to offer. *Ghost Sisters* goes beyond Ingmar Bergman's examination of the process of identity transfer in *Persona* to explore the results of the phenomenon.

"Two very different women with very different dreams share the same nightmare," Brooks synthesizes. "One day, by chance, the two women meet and exchange lives, bringing disorientation and, finally, realignment to the ruthless demands of boyfriends, family, plant care and unemployment checks."

Ghost Sisters boasts a professional cast and crew with John Glover, a character "creep" in *Julia* and *The Incredible Shrinking*