

Surprise is Key at Sunday Cinema Club

Local Chapter Begins Second Season

By Mary Damiano

What kind of movie would you rather see? A big Hollywood blockbuster or a smaller foreign or independent film? If you prefer the latter, the Key Sunday Cinema Club may be just what you're looking for.

The Key Sunday Cinema Club caters to the film lover with more exotic tastes, the person with a craving for an international smorgasbord rather than just the same old California cinematic cuisine.

The club, which began its second season November 11 at the Shadowood in Boca Raton, works on a subscription basis, offering film fans a chance to see a movie before it opens and to participate in a discussion with each other and guest experts.

The catch is, audiences are kept in the dark about what movie they are going to see, so no one has any preconceived ideas and everyone can see the film fresh.

The Key Sunday Cinema Club was founded in 1992 by David and Seena Levy, who ran movie theaters in the Washington D.C. area for 30 years. The Levys ran the Key Theatre in Washington D.C., a four-plex which showed foreign and independent films. The idea of starting a film club in Washington was suggested by one of the Levy's distributors.

"I knew that there were some clubs like this in New York City," says David Levy. He liked the idea, made up some flyers and contacted the press.

The premiere of the Sunday Key Cinema Club was in the Fall of 1992 with 140 members. All it took was a story in the *Washington Post* to get the word out, and the club has been sold out ever since.

Though the Levys closed the Key Theatre in 1997, the Washington chapter of the club is still going strong at a different theater, and Levy decided to expand the club to other cities. Chapters in Boston, San Francisco and Atlanta followed, and today the Key Sunday Cinema Club boasts seven chapters.

Levy attends film festivals to find movies to show at the club. "We get what

we think are the best films and the most interesting films," he says. Films shown in the past include *Pollack*, *Gods & Monsters*, *All About My Mother*, *Waking Ned Devine* and *East is East*.

Levy says there was little apprehension on the part of the audience to plunk down money for a movie subscription without knowing what movies they would be seeing and that the element of not knowing added to the club's mystique. "When we promote the club, and when it's written about, there's information about movies we've shown in the past," Levy says. "I think people really like the idea of a sneak preview, it gives them the feeling of an event. They know they're going to see movies several weeks before they open. They also like the discussion element. That's a real big thing."

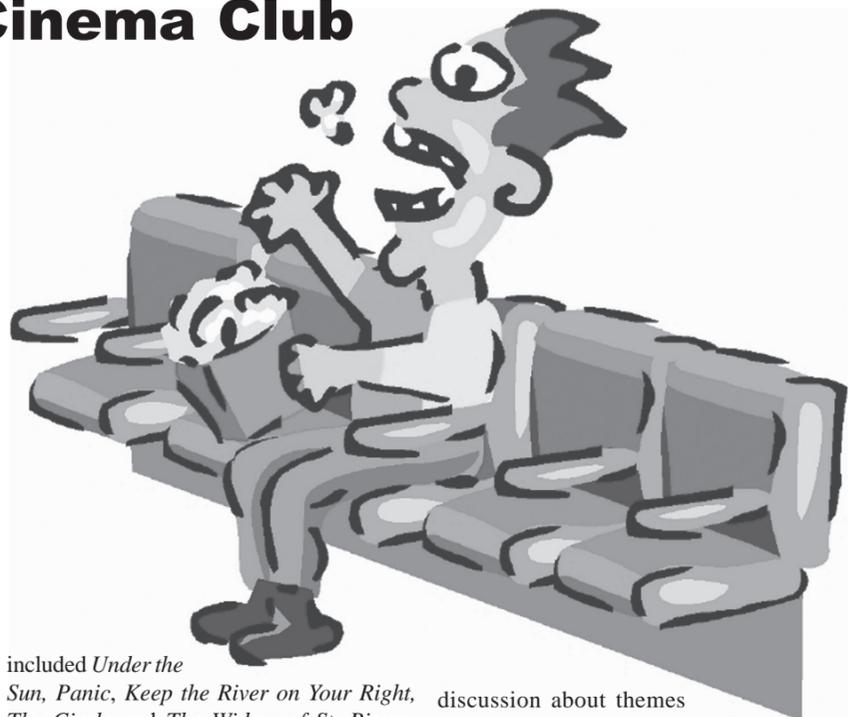
The moderators of the clubs are professors or film experts who know how to talk to an audience, allowing for a lively discussion.

The local chapter in Boca Raton has about 140 members, though they've had as many as 170 people in the audience. "The response from our members has been extremely enthusiastic," Levy says. "Every time we would be there and talk to somebody, they would tell us how much they loved it. They liked the intellectual challenge, they liked everything about it."

Mike Budd, the moderator of the Boca chapter, is a Professor of Communication at Florida Atlantic University. He teaches courses on film history, theory, criticism and media studies. Budd became involved with the Key Sunday Cinema Club through a colleague who runs the Washington D.C. chapter. When the club expanded to South Florida, Levy met with Budd and decided he was the right person to moderate the discussions.

"I have a lot of experience with similar kinds of things, international film series on this campus and other universities," Budd says.

The films that played last year at the Key Sunday Cinema Club's inaugural season



included *Under the Sun*, *Panic*, *Keep the River on Your Right*, *The Circle* and *The Widow of St. Pierre*, which Levy says was the audience's favorite.

"My favorite aspect of the club is the audience," Budd says. "I am so impressed with and interested in this really good audience. It's a knowledgeable audience that is open to new kinds of experiences."

"Obviously, a club like this, its center is an audience that is adventurous with movies," Budd says. "They may like some Hollywood movies, but they want something else. The audience is open, its interested, its inquisitive, these are people who are interested in learning new things. It's a very interesting and sophisticated audience."

The second season in Boca began with a screening of *Innocence*, an Australian film about a pair of ex-lovers who find each other again after more than 50 years. Budd, a man who clearly loves movies, wielded a microphone as he moderated the discussion after the film. He threw out a few of his ideas about the film and asked the audience to comment or elaborate.

Budd urges audience members not to simply say whether or not they liked the movie, but to explore their responses to the film. The result was a lively and intelligent

discussion about themes and images by people who understand how direction and editing work together to create a film and know that often the stars of a movie are those behind the scenes. This is the kind of discussion film buffs usually have to have with a copy of *Film Comment* rather than a real flesh and blood audience with the same tastes.

Budd prefers movies that show him something out of the ordinary. "I like films that show me something new," he says. "It could be a new culture, or it could be a new way of looking at the world. That's my preference and I'm getting a lot of that at the club and I think the audience is too. It's really working for us."

The Key Sunday Cinema Club's 2001-2002 Season, in Boca Raton, next meets Sunday, December 9, at 10:30 am. The balance sessions will be held January 6, January 20, February 3, February 17, March 3, March 19, March 24 and April 7. The Cinema Club offers South Florida Residents a 10 session series for \$135 (Credit Cards) or \$130 (Checks). To join or receive further information on the club please call toll-free 1.888.467.0404.

Thief River Steals Your Heart

Play Spans Five Decades of a Relationship

Michael MacCauley & Joseph Adams in *Thief River*
By Lee Blessing

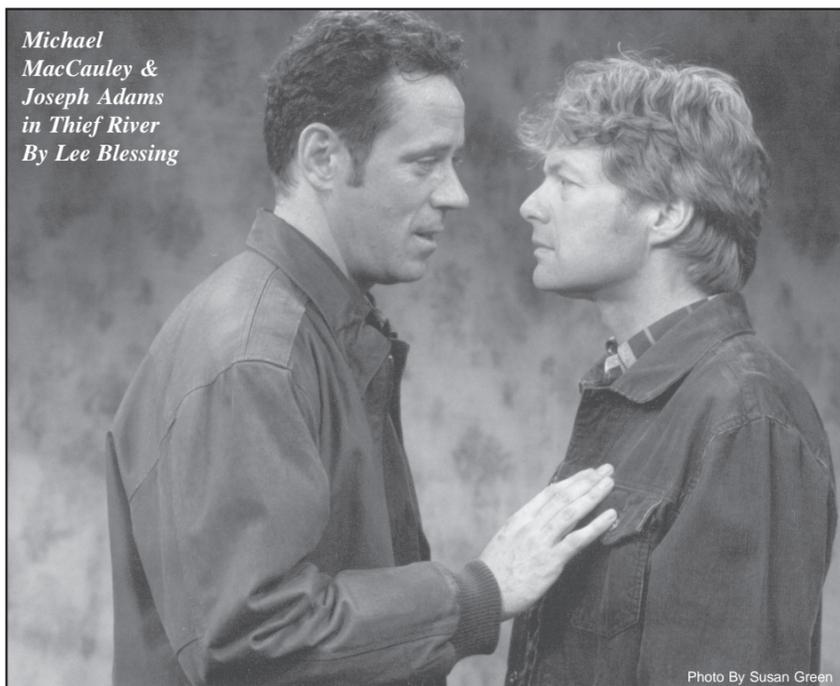


Photo By Susan Green

Review By Mary Damiano

Thief River is a powerful and heartfelt play spanning 53 years in the relationship of two men.

In the play, by Lee Blessing, three sets of actors portray the two characters, Ray and Gil, on prom night in 1948, on the eve of Ray's son's wedding in 1973 and then again

in 2001.

When we first meet the two characters, Ray has just found Gil at an empty farmhouse. Gil, who Ray refers to as 'special,' has just had an ugly run-in with a school bully and Gil has reacted, shall we say, badly. As Ray tries to calm down Gil, their relationship becomes clear. They are

in love with each other, though Ray refuses to admit that their season-long affair was anything more than a phase. At the farmhouse that night, fate deals the boys a blow they must live with for the rest of their lives.

The action picks up in 1973. Gil has returned, foppish young lover in tow, and has inadvertently disrupted Ray's son's wedding rehearsal. Ray and Gil have a reunion in the same farmhouse. Though they have not seen each other in all that time, Ray has written Gil a letter every week for the entire 25 years. In the letters, Ray opens up and admits his true feelings for Gil. Gil has returned to make Ray choose once and for all.

In present time, we see Ray and Gil as two old men at peace with their lives yet still trying to make sense of things.

The play is not sequential in its time shifts, and this is one of the brilliant things about it. Like a well-edited movie, *Thief River* goes back and forth in time to heighten suspense, to weave an intricate tale and keep the audience guessing about different pieces of the puzzle. Ray and Gil, at various ages wander in and out, watching and commenting on their older or younger selves, so the vignettes become a memory that we're privy to.

The play works best in 1973, when we see Ray and Gil as two men at a true crossroads in their lives. Though Gil says he loves his live-in lover Kit, he's ready to give him up if Ray will come away with him. And Ray, the well-respected married family

man who's never left the farm, comes face-to-face with his passion for Gil and his deeply closeted true self. The scenes in this time period are full of longing, illustrating the battle between the exciting unknown and a comfortable lie.

The only real problem with *Thief River* is that sometimes the attitudes portrayed don't fit those of the times. It's hard to believe that in 1973 Ray's old school farmer father-in-law could take the revelation of Gil's orientation so non-chalantly, and boast of his tolerance.

Interestingly, the six actors who play Ray and Gil at different ages also each take on an additional role. This works especially well, because the various supporting characters become an alter ego for Ray and Gil.

The actors do a wonderful job with their double-duty roles. The small stage allows for an intimate production and adds to the suspense. The lighting is appropriately moody, reflecting the character's state of mind.

Through the relationship of Ray and Gil, *Thief River* has an important lesson to teach: Time is a thief, but it's the choices we each make that determines how much it steals from us.

Thief River runs through December 2 at the Florida Stage Theatre, 262 S. Ocean Blvd., Manalapan. Showtimes are Wednesday through Saturday 8pm; Sunday 7pm. Tickets are \$31 and \$35. Group discounts are available. For more info, call 561.585.3433.