

BEHIND THE SCENES

Dick O'Day plays host to 'After Dark' series

Offering a free lap dance with purchase of a large popcorn, Landmark Cinema's "Landmark After Dark" cinema series started with modest success recently — partly thanks to the cross-dressing dancers and entertainer Dick O'Day's hosting of 1995's trashy "Showgirls."

O'Day, an Emmy-winning reporter for PBS's local hit TV show "Wild Chicago," cracked jokes and danced, holding contests in an attempt to reach beyond the movie-going experience.

Host O'Day took some time to chat about what's so good about bad movies.

Q What do your particular sensibilities bring to the selection process for "Landmark After Dark"?

A [Marketing manager Jay Bliznick] wanted to show "Valley of the Dolls," which is wonderful, but everyone has seen it. But "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls" ... it's got great lines [like]: "You're a groovy boy, I'd like to strap you on." It's so bad, it's fabulous — which is what all these movies are. I have an appreciation for camp classics, for movies that many not be thought of originally as comedic, but boy are they really funny. I love these movies.

Q What were some movies you wanted to get, but couldn't?

A A couple movies we couldn't get because the prints have disintegrated. What I really want to see is "Mame," the musical [with] Lucille Ball and Beatrice Arthur. It's Lucy singing in her real voice. She's lower than ... I don't know, who is the lowest bass you can think of?



Photo for the Tribune by Eric Unger

O'Day: "I have an appreciation for camp classics, for movies that many not be thought of originally as comedic, but boy are they really funny."

We couldn't get "Beyond the Poseidon Adventure" [in which O'Day has a small part as Henchman #2]. They had that weird thing in the '70s, which was "let's just throw everybody in." Everybody who hasn't worked in 10 years, but had a little bit of name value. It was sort of like "The Love Boat" idea, but put on the big screen. So they got Sally Field for the star, Karl Malden, Michael Caine — all these people that had nothing to do with each other.

We wanted to show "Airport 1975," but the print was booked! [laughs] You can't beat that. That's Charlton Heston and Karen Black, what a duo! Linda Blair needs a kidney. Everybody knows this one because of "Airplane," the take off.

Q This series seems to fill a niche that hasn't been served in Chicago for a while. Was there some sort of mission statement you had when you accepted the job as host?

A Everybody shows "The Rocky Horror Picture Show." We wanted to do something different. "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls" hasn't been screened ... I don't know when the last time was. I think it's the original print [laughs]. It's held together with tape.

It's an entire show ... the point is for everyone to have a great time and be embarrassed a little bit, to get out of their own little box. With the success of the sing-along "Sound of Music" — people want to do this, they want to interact. They are so shy anymore, trust me. Everybody has a video camera, nobody is afraid to speak up. The problem now is to get people to shut ... up.

That's the problem now when you go to movies. People are ignoramuses with the cell phones. So people are ready to get involved. If the series works, which we hope, then we're going to show a lot of horrible stuff you haven't seen forever. I think the '70s is the valley of bad movies.

Q What makes a bad movie good?

A That's kind of like, "How do you describe love"? It's visceral; it's subjective. It's a feeling. It's a co-mingling of that sinking feeling and ecstasy.

— Robert K. Elder

"Landmark After Dark," at Landmark's Century Centre Cinema, 2828 N. Clark St. Tickets: \$9. For tickets and show times, call 773-248-7744. The schedule: "Ladies and Gentlemen, the Fabulous Stains" (Saturday); "Female Trouble" (Sept. 7); "Strait Jacket" (Sept. 14).