

The New York Times

Where Hollywood's Stars Are Interred, but Live Forever on Screen

By REBECCA CATHCART

LOS ANGELES — A few hundred people poured through the gates of Hollywood Forever Cemetery last Saturday, carrying picnics, blankets and folding chairs. They moved along a path toward the sound of a Jimi Hendrix song coming from the foot of a high marble mausoleum.

Three women broke from the crowd and stepped onto the grass in search of a shortcut. A tall figure moved out of the shadows.

"Stay off the graves," boomed the baritone voice of LaNordo Conn, a 6-foot-4 cemetery security guard who does television and radio voice-overs.

The women gasped and scuttled back to the road.

It was the start of a new season of Cinespia, a film series here showing midcentury movies amid the graves of the Hollywood elite.

Since 2002, the series has grown from a gathering of a few hundred people to a Los Angeles institution that drew capacity crowds of 3,000 to the cemetery last August, said John Wyatt, founder and director of the series. Mr. Wyatt projects the films onto a wall of the mausoleum where Rudolph Valentino is interred.

As summer blockbusters flood multiplexes this month and next,



J. EMILIO FLORES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

The Cinespia film series draws thousands to Hollywood Forever Cemetery in Los Angeles.

a parallel season of outdoor film festivals also begins. Obscure, cult and classic films are shown outside to film clubs and ad hoc gatherings around the world. Of the many outdoor screenings this summer, Cinespia's has one of

the more compelling settings. But all these sites are chosen to celebrate good weather and feed nostalgia for the drive-ins of decades past, where movies had an added magic under the stars.

In New York, the Rooftop

Films series shows short and feature-length films atop buildings all over the city. The HBO Bryant Park Summer Film Festival has free screenings of classics like "The Apartment" and "The Man Who Came to Dinner" on Mon-

day nights, starting June 16. Also this month, community gardens and parks in the East Village will host free screenings of French films as part of the Films on the Green series, which moves to Harlem in July.

Outdoor film series arrive for summer, some with a twist.

In San Francisco, people gather on the sloping hills of Dolores Park from June through October to watch films set in that city. The Chicago Outdoor Film Festival holds free screenings overlooking Lake Michigan through August. And in Colorado, Boulder Outdoor Cinema demonstrates a catholic approach to films, from "Airplane" to "Cinema Paradiso," on the back lot of the Boulder Museum of Contemporary Art.

Devotees of outdoor film series can look for local screenings or learn how to start their own at outdoorcinema.net, the Web site for the Outdoor Cinema Network.

In Hollywood last Saturday, Jesse Coccoli, a comedian from
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Pittsburgh, and Chris Klosterman, a photographer from Long Beach, Calif., shared a blanket on the grass, settling in to watch "Ace in the Hole," Billy Wilder's scathing, and prescient, portrayal of American media culture. "It's nice to be outside," said Ms. Coccoli, 23, who reminisced about the drive-ins of her Pennsylvania childhood. The cemetery, she said, offered a twist on the outdoor theme.

"There is a particular energy here," she said, arms wrapped around her knees. "It's not completely spooky, but different."

Not many theaters, after all, are located next to a working crematory.

"You're in Hollywood," added Mr. Klosterman, 28. "These films are part of the history of this place and the people buried here."

Near the couple sat the tombs of Douglas Fairbanks, senior and junior; Cecil B. DeMille, the legendary director; and Marion Davies, starlet and William Randolph Hearst's longtime mistress.

"It has never been macabre," said Mr. Wyatt, 34, who started Cinespia as an Italian film club before moving it to the cemetery and expanding the playlist. "It has always felt historical."

"The people who worked on these films are interred here," he added. "If there was an afterlife, I'm sure they'd be sitting there with the audience, watching with



"The walk out is a little spooky," one festivalgoer said of the cemetery after the movies end.

them."

Mr. Wyatt, a lanky man with dark eyes and curly hair, spent most of the evening on his feet, walking the perimeter of the field, checking in with his crew of 25 and gauging the crowd's reaction to the film.

In the late 1990s this cemetery was all but forgotten. The graves of silent film stars and Los Angeles tycoons like the Otis and Chandler families languished under overgrown grass and shrubs. A previous owner who went into bankruptcy sold off unused portions along Santa Monica Boulevard to auto malls, said Jay Boileau, executive vice president of the cemetery.

A skeletal staff of three had worked to keep burial records in order, but had to clear the grounds daily of trash and hammocks set up by vagrants. A bank trustee threatened to padlock the

front gate.

In 1998 Tyler Cassity, a friend of Mr. Boileau's from St. Louis, bought the 62-acre property for \$375,000 and began making renovations. Mr. Cassity's family runs Forever Enterprises, which operates another cemetery in Northern California and several in Missouri.

As Cinespia gained popularity, donations paid at the gate before each screening helped to finance repairs. A stained-glass artisan in residence fixed the ceilings of several mausoleums with the money raised, Mr. Boileau said.

Mr. Wyatt selects films that either are connected to the cemetery through cast and crew, are considered cult classics or are unknown to most people, save cinephiles.

"I call him a film D.J.," Mr. Boileau said. "But all films, no mov-

ies."

On the mausoleum's marble wall last Saturday, a parched New Mexico landscape glowed in black and white, and Kirk Douglas sweated and scowled as a manipulative newspaper reporter. Klieg lights from downtown swirled across a cloud cover above the screen.

"I'm a Billy Wilder fan, and even I haven't seen this one," said Allis Markham, 25, who shared strawberries and wine with three friends. David Iserson, 30, sat next to her. They agreed that the setting was not creepy until after the movie was over.

"The walk out is a little spooky," said Mr. Iserson, who writes screenplays. "It's pitch-black and you are walking out among graves."

Ms. Markham added, "It feels like a bunch of people fleeing a cemetery at night — which it is."

ONLINE: FOREVER MORE

A schedule, and more coverage and information about the Hollywood Forever Cemetery:

nytimes.com/movies



PHOTOGRAPHS BY J. EMILIO FLORES FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

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