

Shinders to Shinders

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"Shinders to Shinders" Draws American Graffiti, Twin Cities-Style



Daniel Polsfuss

It was 20 years ago today: "Shinders" delivers the old news

WHERE WERE YOU IN '82?

BY ROB NELSON

Downtown Minneapolis, summer of 1982. Prince was playing shows at First Avenue, preparing to drop 1999; an Aussie sleeper called *The Road Warrior* was revving up patrons of the Downtown World for two bucks a ticket; and a 27-year-old filmmaker named Daniel Polsfuss was busy on four consecutive Sundays between 2:00 a.m. and sunrise shooting "Shinders to Shinders," a short musical made near the titular bookstore's original site at the intersection of 7th and Hennepin, now the corner of Block E and Whatever.

Funded by a \$3,500 grant from the Minnesota Independent Choreographers' Alliance (MICA), Polsfuss's 15-minute blast of late-night new-wave urbanity was conceived

Like 'Purple Rain', "Shinders" projects one of the whitest and squarest metropolises into a multiethnic funk center.

as a collaboration between the photographer-turned-director and two other opportunity-seeking Twin Cities artists. Following the vision of poet Roy McBride and choreographer Patrick Scully, "Shinders to Shinders" rendered the raciest stretch of Hennepin Avenue as a "Scandinavian nightmare"—the ideal place for Michael Jackson to recruit limberghouls for his upcoming "Thriller" video. Shot on location though it was, this plotless pantomime of footloose "pimps," "pushers," and "prostitutes"—aptly subtitled "A Surreal Portrait of Hennepin Ave."—was no documentary. Rather, like *Purple Rain* two years

later, the short was a projected fantasy of one of the nation's whitest and squarest metropolises as a multiethnic funk center. But where Prince's largely imagined "Uptown" appeared real to fans worldwide, Polsfuss's more modestly fanciful "Shinders" met its own appreciative audience exclusively on home turf, screening six times in mid-September of 1982 on a billboard atop its namesake. Legend has it that the movie even stopped traffic.

Now, 20 years later, "Shinders to Shinders" is being revived on ground level as part of the "First Annual Silly in Your Shorts Film Festival" (7:15 p.m. Thursday at the Riverview Theater), a one-night-only showcase curated by St. Paul-based producer Kate Winters and featuring a half-dozen local comedic works. But is "Shinders" a comedy? No doubt the film's first shot of a startlingly barren Minneapolis skyline will elicit some nervous laughter—as will the equally quaint Eighties fashions (did you have hair like that?), not to mention McBride's Travis Bickle-esque musings (e.g., "Bums, Greeks, porno artists, freaks/It's the sewer/I'm the doer"). Yet what registers most about this priceless local time capsule is the sheer audacity of the artists' plan to research, shoot, and screen a movie on a single city block, using both dance and poetry (such as it is) to remake the real in tune with that brand-new form known as music video—and with someone else's money, too.

"It was a very exciting time," remembers Polsfuss, who, just prior to "Shinders," had been working mainly in still photography and the editing of TV commercials. "There was a vibrant energy back then to try and do new things. And there was a coming together of different art forms within the medium of film. Collaboration was a big thing at that time; people were starting to do performance art. Chuck Statler was based here and directing videos for Devo. It was a period of transition. And it saved us, thank God, from the disco days."

Antiquated though it may seem to some viewers today, the modernity of "Shinders" [See **WHERE WERE YOU** page 31]

scapes and abstracted eyefuls of birth, sex, and death, his 1971 film *The Act of Seeing With One's Own Eyes*—the highlight of the retro—scrambles shaky images of various autopsies, giving the human body an existential kick. Amid an overwhelming array of ingeniously bizarre world cinema, Brakhage alone (give or take the rumor that Brian De Palma secretly attended the festival just for kicks) allows the American movie lover to leave Rotterdam without feeling totally ashamed of his heritage. **E**

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can be found in its innocent awe of the post-Pong video games that lined the second-floor Rifle Sport arcade. ("What if life reflected the new wave of high energy, coin operated, anxious life episodes of PacMan," wrote Polsfuss in a pre-premiere pull-out ad that appeared in the *Twin Cities Reader*.) And then there's its use of synth-driven sex-machine tracks cooked up fresh by the Time's keyboard player Monte Moir in collaboration with bandmate Terry Lewis. (Polsfuss went on to direct a trio of videos for Alexander O'Neal, who worked in the mid-Eighties with Lewis and his Flyte Time Productions partner Jimmy Jam.) And yet for Polsfuss, whose latest project is an hourlong documentary about Twin Cities-based survivors of Japanese internment camps during World War II, the most forward-thinking aspect of "Shinders to Shinders" was the concept of taking the finished product to the streets. "Even to this day," he reports, "I still run into people who say, 'Hey, you made that movie that played on the roof of the old Shinders? I was there that night.'" **E**