



CINE - FILE

CHICAGO GUIDE TO INDEPENDENT AND UNDERGROUND CINEMA

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:: FRIDAY, AUGUST 24 - THURSDAY, AUGUST 30 ::



CRUCIAL LISTENING

Cine-Cast on Transistor Radio

On episode #6 of the Cine-Cast, Cine-File associate editor Ben Sachs and contributor Scott Pfeiffer talk about the upcoming Black Harvest Film Festival and the ongoing Ingmar Bergman series at the Gene Siskel Film Center (Scott's a particularly devoted Bergman fan); contributor Mike Metzger and Julian Antos, erstwhile Cine-File contributor and executive director of the Chicago Film Society, discuss the film society's new 35mm print of Andrew Bujalski's 2013 film *COMPUTER CHESS*; contributors Metzger, Tien-Tien Jong, and JB Mabe chat about what's sure to be a legendary weekend at Doc Films (August 9-11), during which Hollis Frampton's *ZORN'S LEMMA*, Stan Brakhage's *SCENES FROM UNDERCHILDHOOD*, and Jonas Mekas's *LOST, LOST, LOST* will all grace the big screen on 16mm; and associate editor Kathleen Sachs interviews local filmmaker Casey Puccini, whose second feature-length film *I DON'T CARE* will screen at Chicago Filmmakers on August 25 at 7:30 p.m.

Listen [here](#). As always, special thanks to our producer, Andy Miles, of [Transistor Chicago](#).

CRUCIAL VIEWING

Casey Puccini's *I DON'T CARE* (New American)

Chicago Filmmakers (5720 N. Ridge Ave.) — Saturday, 7:30pm

Casey Puccini is pretty damn good as Casey Puccini in Chicago filmmaker Casey Puccini's new feature, *I DON'T CARE*, a film in which self-indulgence becomes a vehicle for self-interrogation. Though he shares a biography (and filmography) with the actual Puccini, Casey is clearly a fully-realized comic creation—a hapless would-be filmmaker whose charming platitudes and vague pretensions ensnare local actors Sasha Gioppo, Bryn Packard, and Kevin Stangler in a rudderless microbudget indie production. The film unfolds over a series of increasingly uncomfortable shoots, staged in small apartments with less-than-enthusiastic skeleton crews; as the director grows increasingly inarticulate and hostile, the crews dwindle, and a sense of antagonism and paranoia begins to mount. An immediate point of comparison would be William Greaves' *SYMBIOPSYCHOTAXIPLASM TAKE 1* (1968), another meta-movie mise en abyme in which the director casts himself as a buffoon, brazenly collapsing distinctions between truth and fiction, performance and authenticity. Similarly, one of the pleasures of *I DON'T CARE* comes in trying to establish where Puccini's slovenly, uninspired onscreen avatar converges with the sharp-witted creative mind at work behind the camera: can a line be drawn between them? More inventive in his methods for consuming pot than in making films, Puccini's fictional persona is preoccupied with garish, played-out stylistic exercises. (In one of several finely drawn caricatures of tastelessness, the director squanders an afternoon trying to replicate a trick shot from *REQUIEM FOR A DREAM* by aggressively flashing a lamp in his leading lady's face). But as a director, Puccini's overriding interest is clearly in performance—again, as in *SYMBIOPSYCHOTAXIPLASM*, reflexivity affords actors a freedom to play between naturalism and explicit artifice. The rewards of this approach are best measured in Sasha Gioppo's exceptional turn as Puccini's beleaguered muse. The audience's growing exasperation with Casey is directly tied to Sasha's: without her keen ability to balance disillusionment, scorn, humor, and genuine creative investment in the project, the film's explosive payoff would undoubtedly fall flat. Similarly, in crafting a character who grows more obnoxious from scene to scene, the narrative cohesion of *I DON'T CARE* depends on Puccini's own strength as a performer, testing his ability to preserve a goofy charisma even as he reveals himself to be a petty tyrant. I found that challenge compounded by our present moment; it's hard to be charitable towards characters who so thoroughly embody the grotesque mixture of white male entitlement, incompetence, indifference, and malevolence that dominates American landscapes of politics and entertainment alike. We've seen more extreme versions of this figure in recent years—Rick Alverson's *THE COMEDY* (2012) and the Safdie Brothers' *GOOD TIME* (2017) come to mind—but none so conflicted as Casey in *I DON'T CARE*. In its (often hilarious) man-in-the-mirror confrontations and its escalating sense of subjective distress, it's clear that Puccini sees much of himself in this character—but, perhaps even more strongly, he also wants to see the shit kicked out of him. In the recent *Cine-File* podcast, Puccini calls the film “a cautionary tale to myself,” but, like most fictions, it's also a form of wish fulfillment. If that sounds self-indulgent, well, maybe it is—but just because Casey is high on his own supply, that doesn't mean we can't get a contact buzz. *Puccini in person*. (2018, 107 min, DCP Digital) **MM**

Jacques Tourneur's *OUT OF THE PAST* (American Revival)