

Preview

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Bay of Pigs, On-Screen

By Tom Shales

And now, the Bay of Pigs invasion, starring the original cast—or part of the original cast, anyway. "Giron," a semidocumentary film made by and with Cubans, attempts to recreate three days in 1961 when the island nation successfully resisted attack by air and sea.

The film will be shown nightly at 8 o'clock tonight through Sunday at the Museum of Temporary Art, which occupies two abandoned storefronts at 1204 and 1206 G St. NW. It might be considered a preface to next week's ABC telecast of "The Missiles of October," a drama about the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

"Giron" was produced by the Cuban Film Institute and is hardly an impartial report. But rhetoric and invective are not as dominant as one might expect; the film is less angry agitprop than passionate portrait of a people suddenly and briefly at war.

There is anti-American sentiment, of course, most of it within English-language narration at the beginning and end (the rest of the film is subtitled). The Bay of Pigs is labeled "the most expensive operation of the CIA in history" and the Cuban victory hailed as

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"imperialism's first defeat in Latin America."

Asking people how they behaved during battle is a risky business, as well, if truth is the goal. When a pilot recalls taking off in his plane and crying out, "Let's sing the national anthem, comrades!" you get the feeling this is a cry that never got cried.

But more often the reminiscence, which is combined with newsreel footage and simulated battle scenes, is ingenuous or self-effacing. Sometimes, it is also moving.

"My husband was killed on that corner," says an old woman revisiting a rural battlefield.

And an elderly farmer remembers his two main concerns when the shooting started: hiding himself behind a mango tree and worrying about the welfare of his pig.

Visually, Manuel Herrera's black-and-white film has many problems. Newsreels blown up to wide-screen proportions become unbearably grainy, and attempts to fake combat footage by wildly shaking a hand-held camera result in a miserable blur. Projection at the Museum of Temporary Art is abysmal.

Tri-Continental Corporation, which is distributing the film from New York only to college student groups and film societies, has also handled such theatrical Cuban films as the widely praised "Memories of Underdevelopment" and "Lucia."

The Museum of Temporary Art is itself temporary, now occupying a rent-free building scheduled for eventual demolition by the Redevelopment Land Agency. "They've told us we can have it for two years, but we figure we've got at least three to five," says one of the young artists who helped set it up.

Temporary art? Currently it's an exhibit of ephemeral works inspired by the cartoon character Little Lulu. According to a "statement of position" issued by the tiny gallery, "the world will be too barren for inhabitation in as little as 100 years" and, therefore, "all art must now be made AS TEMPORARY AS POSSIBLE." Emphasis theirs.