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Packed crowd hears David Lynch Filmmaker shares zeal for Transcendental Meditation

By Jenn McKee, News Arts Writer

If you arrived on time to see filmmaker David Lynch talk about Transcendental Meditation last night at the Power Center, you were already too late. The venue was packed to capacity.

Harried Power Center employees with walkie-talkies loudly stated, again and again, that there were no available seats anywhere in the building, but dozens of people nonetheless lingered at both ground floor entrances, hoping a spot would miraculously open up. (Despite early reports that equipment had not been set up to provide video feed of the talk, those who stayed did eventually get to hear and see most of Lynch's presentation by way of television monitors in the lobby.)

The evening's program began with opening remarks from Ed Sarath, a University of Michigan jazz professor and the director and founder of U-M's Program in Creativity and Consciousness Studies (which sponsored Lynch's appearance, along with U-M Integrative Medicine, the Center for Urban Innovation, and the Program in Film and Video Studies).

Next, Teresa Adams, administrative assistant for PCCS, provided an introduction for Lynch, listing his achievements in film as well as his broad range of artistic interests (sculpting, painting, photography, etc.). Adams then announced that Lynch would take questions immediately, so audience members moved to line up behind two microphones.

As they made their way, Lynch - dressed in a suit, with his thick, gray hair neatly swept back - stepped to the podium and explained that he had started out his career as a painter; the idea of a moving painting was what started him in the direction of animation and, ultimately, film.

The first person at the microphone wanted to give Lynch his resume. Lynch said, "Are you a transcendental meditator?" to which the questioner quipped, "I will be, if you take a look at this."

Throughout the evening, Lynch nearly always steered his answers back to the topic of TM - a form of meditation that aims to bring the body into a deep state of rest while the mind becomes calm yet alert - but he also offered occasional nuggets of humorous advice, such as: "Always write your ideas down, because if you don't and you forget them, you'll feel like committing suicide."

One audience member asked about the role of music in Lynch's films. "Every element in a film is important," said Lynch. "The trick is to get each element to blend with the whole."

Another attendee wanted to know when the second season of "Twin Peaks" would be released, but Lynch couldn't provide an answer.

In response to a question about whether or not he would take on science fiction again (Lynch directed "Dune"), Lynch said, "A lot of films deal with consciousness and different dimensions and all kinds of stuff. But I like real things - not to fiddle around with fiction, but to find the truth of a thing."

Soon, Lynch introduced Dr. John Hagelin, a physicist (featured in the documentary, "What the Bleep Do We Know?") who discussed how he believed TM had the capacity to cause positive worldwide political, social, and intellectual shifts. "We could see a more fundamental unity of man - though it's not happening very fast with this current administration," Hagelin said, drawing applause.

Hagelin spoke about the many advantages of TM for young people, particularly in regard to learning. To follow up, Fred Travis, of the Maharishi University of Management, made a presentation that included watching the brain activity of an audience volunteer. (The demonstration showed how the brain activity of an active mind differed from that of a mind at rest.)

Lynch then returned to the podium to take a few final questions. One attendee expressed a religion-based skepticism of TM. "I was raised Christian," replied Lynch. "I love Jesus, and people from all religions practice Transcendental Meditation. ... I believe all the great religions are rivers running to one ocean. ... There's no conflict."

Lynch later expressed his own initial resistance to the idea of meditation. "I thought meditation was a waste of time," said Lynch. "I didn't know what in the heck they were doing. But then I saw the faces of yogis sitting in a forest, meditating, and they didn't look homeless. They knew something I didn't know. They had a dignity."

The filmmaker also explained his reasons for recently founding the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace, which primarily supports young people who want to pursue TM. "Real peace is not just the absence of war - real peace is the absence of negativity," he said. "Even if it doesn't work, it ought to be tried."

Lynch said he was currently raising money for his foundation, and that if attendees filled out a card after the program, the group would try to help them get started on the path of TM through scholarships.

After Hagelin returned to the podium for some last remarks, the program ended, but many attendees moved toward the stage rather than toward the exits. A handful of them got photos with Lynch, and a few got his autograph on DVD covers. Some stood against the stage, reaching up to shake Lynch's hand, while many stood in the first rows filling out information cards.

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