

# 'HEAVY PETTING' SCORES

## HEAVY PETTING

★★★

Skouras presents a film produced and directed by Obie Benz, co-directed and edited by Josh Waletzky, photographed by Sandi Sissel. Unrated. Running time: 80 minutes. At Cinema 2, Quad.

By JAMI BERNARD

COMEDIAN Sandra Bernhard allowed a boy to give her "a shot in my butt" while playing "doctor" in return for a popsicle. Performance artist Ann Magnuson recalls that the word "penis" used to make her howl with laughter. The late Abbie Hoffman remembers "the Great Circle Jerk of '51."

Anecdotes about sexual initiation are always good for a laugh, especially when they come mostly from famous people, and when they are put together, documentary-style, in a film as breezily entertaining as "Heavy Petting."

Twenty-three knowns and unknowns give talking-head interviews about such wide-ranging topics as learning to masturbate (Josh Mostel: "By college I got the hang of it") to feeling sexually inadequate (Magnuson: "I had no breasts; all the cheerleaders had breasts, except Sharon Tromley").

These interviews are scattered among footage of laughable '50s educational films, adolescent behavior instructionals and clips from such cinematic intoxicants as Marlon Brando in "The Wild One," Marilyn Monroe in "Bus Stop" and James Dean in "Rebel Without a Cause."

Rock music is used effectively also to demonstrate the age-old adult paranoia about teen-age hormones on the rampage. When a square, old interviewer asks Elvis Presley why he can't just sing without



**SEX TALK:** Fifties clip of Elvis Presley theorizing on hip action in "Heavy Petting."

all that hip action, Elvis looks confused and faintly annoyed: "You take the wiggle out of it, it's finished."

With the ol' devil jungle beat so firmly tied in with libido (you know: sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll), there is an ample use of Golden Oldies soundtrack laid tongue-in-cheek style over the arcane footage, providing a sort of lewd commentary on what those pure-of-heart '50s lads and lassies were doing at their weenie roasts.

The resulting movie is a reminder of how painful and wonderful first experiences can be. Hoffman's never-ending search for "bare tit," musician David Byrne's novel use for the Davy Crockett hat,

mysterious teen pregnancies and the tyrannies of peer pressure all make for a prurient good time.

William Burroughs looks on in barely concealed disdain as Allen Ginsberg admits he has never felt lovable. Burroughs claims he has never been a love junkie, needing no love from anybody. "Maybe my cat," he adds.

A while ago, there was a "Funny," a similar sort of "documentary" in which a mix of the famous and the ordinary told the funniest joke they had ever heard. That movie didn't work.

"Heavy Petting" does work, however. Even the most blatantly humorous anecdote of sexual awakening carries with

it an element of personal pain and embarrassment. And, as you'd expect, the wide range of wacky experiences reinforces what we already know — that with society's never-ending war on the libido, it's a wonder any of us grow up to establish and maintain healthy relationships.

There are plenty of cheap shots to be taken with a subject like this, and Obie Benz, who produced and directed, takes enough of them. Imbecilic educational films are always good for a laugh in any context. But Benz does manage to weave the many elements together in a judicious and enlightening way without sacrificing the spirit of fun that is at the heart of "Heavy Petting."