

2023 Kit Noir Festival  
Gordon Kit's Introductory Remarks

As many of you aware, the Coen Brothers are known for making neo-noir films, such as *Blood Simple* and *Miller's Crossing*. Megan Abbott - one of the speakers you will hear Saturday afternoon in conversation with Sarah Weinman and Rob King, once asked the Coen Brothers about their earliest memory of watching noir films. They replied that when they were growing up, they remember staying up late at night watching noir films on television.

Like the Coen Brothers, my first experience with noir films was watching television late at night, while I was in high school. In the days before VCRs, DVDs, and iPads, television was the primary venue where “old movies”, typically from the 1940's and 50's, were regularly shown. I didn't know the films were “noir” until much later, but I recognized that there was something unique and special about these films that I could relate to, and that made these films clearly different from the typical Westerns, Musicals and WWII dramas that were prevalent in

movie theaters and on TV when I was growing up in the 1960's.

The late Supreme Justice Potter Stewart famously said, with respect to pornography, that while it is hard to define in words: "I know it when I see it!" The same can be said of film noir. It's hard to define, but like Justice Stewart, and many of you, "I know it when I see it".

So what was it that attracted me to film noir? The central character in film noir is typically a loner, an outsider, an anti-hero. I can relate to that. When I arrived at Columbia in the early 1970's, everyone thought I was from California, and when I went to California for graduate school, everyone thought I was from New York – when actually, I was born and raised in Houston, Texas.

As a freshman at Columbia, with long wavy hair down to my shoulders, wearing a sports coat, flowery cowboy shirt, hiking boots, and a McGovern for President Button - you can see why I didn't quite fit in.

Thirty years later, I found myself owning and living in the unique Japanese style house that Sen. McGovern lived in while he was running for President in 1972. At my urging, the house was recently listed on the DC Inventory of Historic Sites and the National Park Service's List of Historic Places.

While at Columbia and due to film noir, I found myself attracted to women with smoky voices (as possessed by many noir femme fatales), and I learned from film noir that repartee was the key with women – except that the female students of the 1970's were definitely not the femme fatales of the 1940's – perhaps the children of the femme fatales.....if femme fatales ever settled down and had children. As a result, my efforts at repartee were greeted by the women on campus with bemusement, if not outright hostility – I often got yelled at for holding doors open for them – self-reliance trumped manners. It was the time of the women's movement – when ambition and careers took center stage.

But the women of the 1970's were not the first to take center stage. They were preceded by an earlier generation of highly influential women.

Which brings me to this year's film festival: *Beyond the Femme Fatale: The Women Who Made Noir*. In the next few days we will explore the important and significant roles that that earlier generation of women had in creating film noir, as Novelists, Screenwriters, Directors and Producers – we will screen some of their films and with our speakers we will discuss why their contributions are noteworthy in the making of film noir.

I hope you enjoy the festival - Thank you for coming.