

Previews, Quick Exits Mar Movie Experience

**By
Tim Schnabel**

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Intrusive marketing strategies encroach everyday, almost demanding that we distract ourselves from our own thoughts, feelings and experiences. Take, for example, going to the movies. Extensive previews are manifestations of a culture that screams, “Keep moving, don’t stop!” Don’t focus on the moment. This is not a prescription for wellbeing.

Airlines miss scheduled departures with regularity, but local theaters never “depart” on time. Nope, never! The number of previews of coming attractions has increased from one or two selections to a ridiculous four to six! Some theaters actually advertise what will be appearing on local television prior to the movie previews. Insane!

A feature, which is advertised to start say at 1:25 p.m., probably doesn’t start until 1:40 p.m.! If you decide to arrive later than the advertised start time to avoid the previews, you often find less than ideal seating illuminated mostly by...the light reflected from the previews!

From all the high pitched action of so many previews, often projected at a louder volume, I am on occasion mildly disoriented before the feature film even begins. There have been instances when, after being bombarded by endless previews, I momentarily forgot which feature I paid my money to see! Going to the movies used to be fun and even relaxing. I have now placed the activity in the stressful or energy-draining category.

The same dynamic is happening with films on television. Half way through the presentation there are inserts on the screen indicating what will be shown next. Then, as the film is ending and the trailer with the credits and feature music begins, it is quickly downsized to showcase what’s coming next. Of course, when this occurs, the music from the feature is abruptly cut, replaced by louder music accompanying the “what’s coming next” trailer/preview. What is to follow is deemed more important than a gentle ending, closure, pausing, and interaction between friends or family members on what was just seen. The subtle messages are: “Hurry up and get ready,” and “What’s coming is more important than what you might have been planning to do.”

Another indicator that we Americans continue to have difficulty with endings and emotions is the mass exodus in theaters at the end of the feature. No sooner has the sun set or the hero kissed his last kiss and the stampede begins. Is there someone in the parking lot awarding a prize to the first one getting to his or her car? I sometimes wonder if some folks leaving in the mad rush are actually in the drug commercial for those requiring bladder control...”Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go!”

I thought it might be different for The Passion of the Christ, but no. At the feature I attended, which was almost full, people quickly departed in droves rather than sit quietly, reflect and let the music help provide closure to what was just witnessed and experienced. I was one of six people remaining when the lights brightened.

But the movie isn't really over until the credits are completed, the music stops and the theater illuminated. At least that's the way it used to be. The space after the last scene affords us time to begin integrating the experience. Abruptly departing interrupts that process. Just as watching televised movies at home, being belted by loud, fast paced previews as the feature ends, interrupts, intrudes and at times, simply oppresses.

I was in Orlando last month and a movie theatre in the neighborhood I was visiting had a big sign in front informing customers this theater did not show previews and started their features exactly at the scheduled time. Just like I remember happening a long time ago.

I also recall folks at the end of a feature laughing together or drying eyes together when the lights brightened, slowly walking out together, actually looking at each other, and occasionally commenting. It was a form of reconnecting with the world from which we "escaped" in a story or adventure. Let's regress and bring this old idea back to Atlanta's movie theaters. Let's have the movie start on time!

Tim Schnabel is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, trainer and consultant in private practice. He lives in Lilburn. Email: tim.schnabel@Mindspring.com. Telephone: 770.978.4300