What happened to Kerouac?

By PETER DUNN

So, what did happen to Kerouac?
The title suggests two directions in which this film documentary by Richard Lerner and Lewis MacA-dan would probably take: either it pose the question in the title, allowing the audience to try to answer for itself? Or, will the film itself answer the question? Neither as it turns out. Neither, unfortunately.

But before one can begin to answer the why, one must first answer the who was Jack Kerouac? He grew up in Lowell, Massachusetts during the 1920s and 30s, at a time when the area was so populated by working class French Canadi ans that he learned to speak French before he could speak English. To make a long story short, he hit the road, crossing across the country, wrote a book, hung out with other literary folks in Times Square, wrote more books, found celebrity and notoriety, and eventually drank himself to death in 1969. Kerouac, with his ode to restlessness "On The Road," was comprised by many as the father of the Beat generation.

The film is interspersed with interviews with close friends and relatives, with footage of appearances Kerouac on William Buckley's "Firing Line" and on "The Steve Allen Show," and with poetry sequences narrated by Kerouac over impressionistic views of New York, San Francisco, and Lowell, accompanied by the jazz music of Thelonious Monk.

The scenes that work best are those that include Kerouac, namely the TV clips from "The Steve Allen Show" and from "Firing Line." In the first, shot in 1959, Kerouac is introduced through a short series of what Allen labels "squares" questions - "What does Best mean?" and all that jazz. Kerouac then goes on to read excerpts from "On The Road" while Allen does some impressionistic shots on his piano. The second TV sequence, shot almost ten years later in 1968 - just a year before Kerouac died - features a drunken, red-faced Kerouac but ignoring Buckley's questions and rambling on in a world of his own about hoodlums and Commies jumping onto the Best generation bandwagon.

These scenes are fascinating in two respects. First, in "The Steve Allen Show" clips, Kerouac's charisma shines through with his boyish good looks and his eloquent, heartfelt, run-on-sentence reading of his own work. It is easy to see what the youth of the 1950s found so appealing about this rebellious young writer. The clips from "Firing Line" provide a stark contrast of character - Kerouac is only ten years older or younger, yet seems like an old man. Where on the "Allen Show" he was vivacious and charismatic, on "Firing Line" he is still interesting, but only as an example of a man falls from the heights of stardom to the depths of drunken anonymity.

These fabulous choices of television sequences are perfect in that they frame the beginning and end of Kerouac's fascinating career. As a pair they pose the questions: "So, if these are the beginning and end, what happened in between?" Unfortunately, the rest of the film either fails to further elaborate on the question or fails to sufficiently answer it.

What Happened to Kerouac? is not without its good qualities. The TV sequences are worth the price of admission by themselves and for those who have never read a word of Kerouac's "spontaneous" writing or are too old to remember what the Beat generation was about, the poetry readings provide a brief glimpse into that period. For Kerouac other than the effect he might have had on other Beatniks - the scenes in no way approximated the film's thesis. Except for the old film footage, one could just as easily have read Kerouac's poetry or listened to Monk in the comfort of one's home.

Great performances welcome Irish drama to American stage

Kerouac film brings up more questions than answers

The story reading over old 1940s footage of Times Square, San Francisco, and Lowell gives the viewer a taste of what the Beat generation was about with a realism, expressionistic camera exposing the simpler sides of life and a mellow, assassinating sound track to the tune of Monk. But these vignettes reveal little about Kerouac other than the effect he might have had on other Beatniks - the scenes in no way approximated the film's thesis. Except for the old film footage, one could just as easily have read Kerouac's poetry or listened to Monk in the comfort of one's home.

The least interesting part of "What Happened to Kerouac?" are the interviews with various cronies and family members. While one would expect that these interviews would fill in some of the gaps between the "Allen Show" in 1959 and "Firing Line" in 1968, all that the audience gets is a variety of snippets from Kerouac's life. These clips do not seem to have any linear direction to them. The result is that we often feel we are looking at the pieces of a puzzle that nobody has bothered to start fitting together. Even worse, most of the stories are just - stories - revealing little about Kerouac's character. Rather than asking the interviewees how they felt and interacted with Kerouac, more often than not we hear things that Kerouac did - got drunk, went to a place, made a speech at an event - without any further elaboration. We are essentially handed the facts about the man, not his character.

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Great performances welcome Irish drama to American stage

"Northern Star" is a major new play and is something of a special occasion. Dramashop has proved itself equal to the task with last night's North American premiere of "Northern Star," an Irish play billed as being about the "Irish question."

Actually the play is only about contemporary problems in Northern Ireland, and we see him as a fugitive, spending his temporary problems in Northern Ireland to escape to the United States and freedom, but who in fact has accepted acts of rebellion he is condemned to death, and the papes was Henry Joy McCracken, por temporarily warm and comforting, fiery with unflagging energy. McCracken gets political support from his own home. All seven are, by and large, played for his own benefit and for ours. For him-

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