

Books

A reel ordeal for Roger Ebert

By MICHAEL GILTZ

Roger Ebert loves movies so much, even thyroid cancer couldn't keep the Chicago Sun-Times film critic from his work.

Faced with surgery Feb. 22 for his cancer, Ebert stockpiled reviews for the newspaper and taped advance episodes of the TV show he co-hosts, "Ebert & Roeper at the Movies."

He stuck to his plans to promote "The Great Movies," a new book that takes a fresh look at classics like "Casablanca" and "Star Wars."

And almost nothing would keep him from covering tonight's Oscars, an event he's attended and reported on for much of his 35-year career.

Why the frantic pace?

"The reason I did that [stockpiled movie reviews] — because the

Despite cancer, movie-review guru maintains a frantic pace

paper would let me take off — is all the e-mails I would get from people who somehow feel you're going to review everything," explained the 59-year-old Ebert.

"There can't be a major movie that's missing, and oddly enough, every movie is major to somebody."

Ebert's surgery was successful — he had a similar procedure in 1987 — but he was walking around a little more gingerly earlier this month while in town to promote his book.

Besides attending every festival in sight and reviewing every movie possible, in 1997 Ebert started a new column titled "The Great Movies," about the classics, for the Sun-

Times. Those columns are collected in his book of the same name.

Ebert's enthusiasm and deceptively straightforward prose are ideal for examining films like "Chinatown," "Manhattan" and "Wings of Desire" in a new light. When he tosses off casually insightful lines like "Growing older was a smart career move for Bette Davis," you remember why he's the only film critic to ever win the Pulitzer Prize.

"I like going to the movies," said Ebert, who admits that when he and his wife, Chaz Hammelsmith Ebert, moved into their new home in Chicago, the first space they furnished was the basement media room.

They may have been sleeping on just a mattress



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in their bedroom, but if they wanted to watch a DVD of Ebert's favorite film, "Citizen Kane," they were good to go.

"I would go to the movies if I weren't a movie critic," said Ebert, who was born in nearby Urbana.

Ebert can hold forth on any and all film topics with ease and authority. He doesn't care that "A Beautiful Mind" didn't

The author keeps reviewing and has a new compilation, "The Great Movies" (left).



N.Y. Post: David Ramirez

deal with the hard facts of John Nash's life, but he did care that "Iris" seemed to be about everything but what made Iris Murdoch special: her writing.

He knows DVDs can be a great way to see movies but fears people only go to video stores to seek out recent flicks like "Corky Romano" instead of exploring the classics.

Despite his appetite for films, Ebert readily admits

he has holes in his resume — movies that for some reason or another he has yet to watch.

"Until recently, I hadn't seen 'High Noon,'" Ebert said. "I interviewed President Clinton, and he said it was his favorite film. So I considered 'High Noon' for this book. I went to look at it for the first time, and I didn't think it was a great movie. It just didn't do it for me."