



FILM PREVIEW: DEAD POET LIVES AGAIN

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Even if grunge nostalgia quite eludes you, **don't miss Peter Sillen's first-rate documentary on Steven Jesse Bernstein, *I Am Secretly an Important Man*** (October 22-28 at Northwest Film Forum).

Who was this guy? **Porn actor and Seattle's Best Poet** (according to *Seattle Weekly's* poll); pot-loathing junkie and nine-year-sober straightedge; revered colleague of William Burroughs and Soundgarden; real gone daddy-O; jailbird, madhouse inmate and -- above all -- a guy who felt writing was his job and did it, come hell, highs or penury. Friends, lovers and artistic collaborators call him "the orator of grunge" and "Huckleberry Finn with a little chili pepper added."

He called himself "a seeing eye dog for the spiritually impaired and [an] emergency storm drain" -- a hard metaphor, considering that at 40 he slit his own throat in Neah Bay, causing his lifeblood to leak through a hole in the floor to a stream below that flowed out to sea.

It's just a beautiful movie, artfully deploying historic footage, moving interviews, poetically shot Seattle scenes, Bernstein performances, and snatches of crucial Bernstein influences (fellow Washingtonian Ed Kienholz, Tom Lehrer). Though Sillen covers Bernstein's bad craziness -- assaulting faces with broken bottles -- he understandably understates it a little.

Bernstein didn't just "kick up a fuss" at a poetry reading and drop his drawers, as one witness recalls. He stuck his finger up his anus, stank up the room, threatened to cut off his penis. The pal says, "He got trapped in that persona." He was all too publicly an important man, and loving the fame of kicking up a fuss surely kicked the hornet's nest of his neurological demons. But the film is filled with his life, and work. **"It was like being in a movie," testifies one childhood friend. A movie like no other.**