

# Anastasia's Movieoke



Photographs by Elizabeth Lippman for The New York Times

## Oughta Be in Pictures? So Just Drink Up!

Amateur Celebrities Pick a Movie and Join In

By RANDY KENNEDY

All the evidence in the room pointed to imminent karaoke. There was a tiny stage and a television monitor flashing words. There was an energetic hostess trying to whip people into the mood. And the people, about a dozen, were waiting patiently for their third beer to lend them the necessary talent.

But when the first amateur celebrity took the stage, it was not to belt out his own heartfelt version of "Candle in the Wind." Instead he crouched like a lemur and began to croak out a scene from "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers," as a movie screen behind him showed the monologue by the creature Gollum.

"We hates them!" whispered the man on the stage, Oden Roberts, a 27-year-old cinematographer, crawling around as his

friends whooped and clapped. When his performance was over, Mr. Roberts reported that, really, it was not all that different from karaoke.

"You just have to put your body into it more," he said. Or if you are really dedicated, your hair: Mr. Roberts had moused his up into little blood spikes, perhaps better to resemble a Middle Earth creature. "It took me half an hour to get it like this," he said. He had just become a willing test subject in the service of movieoke, karaoke's very young American-born cousin, which is trying to find its footing in a small, cluttered East Village basement club about the size of an aspiring actor's studio apartment.

Anastasia Fite, 24, is an aspiring director and screenwriter who, for now, pays the bills by running the club, the Den of Cin, a basement party-rental room at 44 Avenue A, at Third Street, beneath the Two Boots

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On Wednesday nights amateurs can act in scenes from their favorite films, a concept developed by Anastasia Fite, center.

## Oughta Be in Pictures? So Just Drink Up! Amateur Celebrities Join In.

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video store and pizza parlor. She is known for the weekly movie nights. She is usually the bartender, the operator of the DVD screen control and so far as she knows the investor would sometimes jump in from the movie screen and act out scenes from "Monsters, Inc." to make the children laugh.

This was all second nature to her. It is a self-described movie addict who grew up in Los Angeles, around a performing high school and wound herself on endless viewings of "Dirty Harry," "Saturday Night Live" and for some reason "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers." ("I love that movie," she said.)

At Cornell she made a movie short about a kind of cartoon version of herself, a girl whose way of communicating was speaking movie lines. "I wrote the script using dialogue from all of my favorite movies from all of the ages — 'Badlands' to

"Jenny Holzer" to "Red River" to "All About Eve" to "A Lonely Place," she said.

In her student movie, the girl can connect only with a video-store clerk who understands all of her references. But then, tragically, she begins to forget her lines and cannot communicate with anyone. In a way, Ms. Fite said, movieoke is the opposite of that experience, a means to allow people who "are married to their television sets" and whose personalities are basically a patchwork of pop-culture references to get together, drink and put some of that hard-won knowledge to good use.

On a recent Wednesday night it was clear these attracted by this idea were nervous about actually trying it themselves. A little after 8 p.m. there were few participants in the basement room, which resembles a 1980's suburban dad's rec room, except with the Clash playing in the background. Ms. Fite had assembled a stack of paper DVD's on the bar for patrons to choose from. (Scenes from "The Breakfast Club," "The Matrix" and "Pulp Fiction" became favorites.)

After Mr. Roberts did his Gollum scene, there was a dangerous lull in the room. So Ms. Fite, dressed all in white — she says she dresses that way so her body itself helps serve as a screen for the movie, which she drew from a DVD projector —

leapt onstage into a favorite scene, a Jennifer Beals dance sequence from "Flashdance."

To keep things going, Ms. Fite has also been known to act out a scene from the cult British film "The Wicker Man," in which a naked woman essentially seduces a priest. "She's naked, I'm not," Ms. Fite pointed out. For "Flashdance," she stood up the scene with her remote control, and started mimicking Ms. Beals's moves with so much comic flair that

during a kind of half-spike, Ms. Fite split something herself. "My pants just ripped!" she announced, grabbing a pillow from a nearby couch for cover. "Does anybody have any pants I can borrow?" (She was saved by safety pins.) The moment warmed up the room, however, and over the next hour people rose to do scenes from several movies, including "Old School," "Swingers" and a hilarious scene from the camp horror movie "Evil Dead II." It was a character but she had her own personality, finally

acting it off with a chair saw. Matthew Dujin, 26, a movieoke regular, played the scene to the hit, whispering paper plates and a plastic smile on props. "Does anybody have anything resembling a chair saw?" he asked. Mr. Dujin, a cartoonist and computer programmer, may be Ms. Fite's ideal movieoke subject: handsome and so full of movie lines that he could almost qualify as a film star. He meant that he can do nearly all of "Village People" from memory.

There are still some technical bugs with movieoke that Ms. Fite said she needed to fix. Some participants are unsure whether to watch the video screen to read the dialogue or turn around to watch the actors on the screen, so they sometimes laugh and just look embarrassed as the film projects onto their bodies and people stare.

But movieoke mostly works, as an almost logical extension of time-obsessed karate culture. While it may have actually begun years ago with fans acting out scenes from "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" in theaters, it now seems to have come fully of age. And Ms. Fite is working hard to legitimize her claim to having invented it.

"This is just the beginning, and this movie is just my first step," she said, explaining that she had hired lawyers to try to protect her rights to the concept, and that she was consid-

ering trying to license movie clips for a kind of movieoke kit. "I do anticipate it going globally and big," she said, sounding so confident as a young mogul and already beginning to think like one. When a reporter initially called Ms. Fite, she said, "I was wondering when you guys would call." And the night the reporter visited her club, a camera crew from CNN used a local network affiliate also showed up.)

As with all great ideas, there is already competition. California software company has made what it calls "Movie Karaoke," a CD-ROM that includes scenes from "Anastasia" and other movies and allows computer users to dub their voices over scenes.

But Ms. Fite is undeterred. "I want to direct movies so regularly I can make a little change out of this and do it," she said. "That's where this all comes from." Even if it does not work out, she said, at least she is not working as a waitress right now. "I feel like I'm cheating. I've actually managed to never lose to anybody for my entire life. My mom's like 'Get a 9 to 5. Take a math and science class. You're going to have to start making up your own life story.'"

"And I just hope doing what I want to do is a '9 to 5' job. And finally it seems to be O.K."

## "MOVIEOKE" TWO BOOTS DEN OF CIN

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twoboots.com/theden/

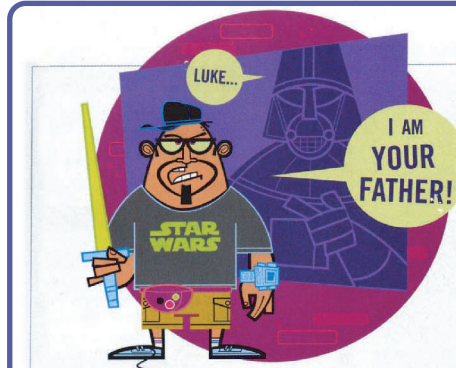
If you've ever stared into the mirror and snarled, "You talkin' to me?," you've now got a new way to channel your inner De Niro: Movieoke, a high-concept cross between karaoke and open-mike night, in which brave film buffs clamber onstage at Two Boots Den of Cin. There, standing before a projection screen and aided by subtitles, amateur actors reenact beloved scenes from such classics as *The Breakfast Club*, *Full Metal Jacket*, and *Showgirls*. The brainchild of Anastasia Fite—whose own performance of the naked hippie seduction song from *The Wicker Man* has already passed into East Village legend—Movieoke attracts almost as many TV-news crews as run-of-the-mill attention whores, so there's a good chance your amateur antics will get broadcast on CNN, or at least Japanese cable. *Action!*

New York Magazine  
Best of New York 2004

The New York Times  
March 10, 2004

Premiere Magazine  
May 4, 2004

The New York Post  
February 25, 2004



## Get Drunk. Pretend You're a Movie Star.

MAKE WAY FOR KARAOKE'S SILLY CINEMATIC STEP-BROTHER, MOVIEOKE.

Wiping the imaginary sweat from her brow, a young woman runs tirelessly in place while "Maniac" pulsates through the speakers. You'd mistake her for Jennifer Beals if she were wearing leg warmers. But this isn't an audition for a *Flashdance 2*; it's Movieoke, a new pastime for film buffs who have a hard time containing their inner actor.

Taking place at the Den of Cin, a basement bar below a pizza parlor and video store in N.Y.C.'s East Village, the Wednesday-night event brings out film lovers who want to walk the runway like Derek Zoolander or do their best Gollum. Participants select a scene and stand in front of an audience while the movie is projected on a big screen. Like karaoke, the lines appear on a monitor.

Anastasia Fite, the Den's manager, created Movieoke this past October. The 24-year-old was inspired by a short film she had made where the main character only says famous movie lines. Right now, the Den is the only place where you can Movieoke, but Fite has received phone calls from as far away as Australia, with folks asking how they can start their own version. "I want it to be like karaoke and sweep the nation," she says.

—Jason Guearasio

## Arts

## Movieoke: You ought to be in front of pictures

By KRISTEN JOHNSON

THANKS to karaoke, you don't need to be Frank Sinatra to belt out "New York, New York" — and now, thanks to Movieoke, you don't have to be Robert De Niro to threaten "You talkin' to me?"

Architects actors finally get to take the stage in Movieoke, the invention of 24-year-old Anastasia Fite, manager of the "Den of Cin" Theater underneath the Two Boots pizza/underbar complex at 44 Ave. A at Third Street. "I have a tendency to talk to people in movie lines," said Fite, a self-described film junkie. "I basically space out in mid-conversation and continue in dialogue from movies."

So she invented Movieoke — held every Wednesday night at 9 — as a way to take her obsession with film and make it a more social, interactive experience. "I wanted to turn it into something to bring all the people like me sitting in front of their VCRs out of their house," she said.

Participants choose a scene from a movie they want to act out and borrow the DVD from the video rental store upstairs.

The scene, with subtitles, is then projected onto a large screen while the performer stands in front, acting alone. Costumes are optional. Props are provided. And screw-ups are inevitable.

"There's so much more to it than karaoke," says Fite. "Because there's so much more to play with. You can choose to do the action as is, or you can deviate from it, on purpose or by mistake."

Last Wednesday, Matt Dujin, a 29-year-old cartoonist and programmer, performed a scene from the cult classic "Evil Dead 2" in which the hero's hand becomes possessed and attacks him.

"I feel like anybody who has just come in will feel more at ease if they see someone doing something completely insane onstage," said Dujin, a Movieoke regular for the last two months.

First-timers Matthew Arth and Kristen Walker chose to perform a scene from "Old School."

"I used to do a lot of professional theater," said Arth happily, "and that's the first time I've been back onstage since then."

His girlfriend, Walker, agreed it was fun, though she admitted, "I wish I'd had a bigger part."



Anastasia Fite, originator of Movieoke, acts out a scene from "Taxi Driver," starring Robert De Niro.