



Call it a retrospective, call it a guide but recognise that it's mostly blatant filler. Uncle Stevie passes comment of things that have been going into his Veezer

BATMAN - sickeningly over-hyped, it's no great surprise to learn that the blockbuster of 1989 doesn't live up to all the expectations. Basically, we have a tug of war between traditional comic-book zaniness and a darker schizophrenic aspect of the super-hero that has recently become fashionable thanks mostly to Alan Moore. As a consequence the film seems to be a little confused about what it actually wants to concentrate on. The end result is a disjointed production that includes segments that are unbearably tedious. Despite the trumpeting of *ad hoc* personality analysis for Bruce Wayne, Batman's alter-ego, the character seems to be in the picture far less frequently than Nicholson's Joker and indeed this is the character the film should be named after. Michael Keaton is so dead-pan in the lead role that one can only imagine his inner-workings and, as a psychological treatise, *Batman* falls flat on its face. The Prince soundtrack is actually right out of place, something that becomes particularly evident in the drab parade scene near the end of the movie which is so artificial one wonders why it goes on for so damn long. Noted for its gloomy portrayal of Gotham City the *Batman* sets are in fact not a scratch on those seen in *Blade Runner*, a film made eight years ago. (***)

CYBORG - just when you thought you'd seen the last of those dreadfully inferior *Road Warrior* impersonators stinking up the racks here come this putrid glob of gratuitously violent tosh. The hero (Wolf-Nipple'd Eric Van Dammen) is not actually the cyborg - rather he is a frighteningly laconic mercenary that is trying to track down aforementioned Chimera who is being kept hostage by a group of grunting homicidal pirates from hell. And so it's kill, kill, kill, kill, maim, maim, kill for about ninety minutes and wouldn't you know it there's a token pair of mammoth breasts to lift the little boys out of the doldrums during the sensitive campfire scene. Worth renting if only for the twenty minute segment where the dialogue consists entirely of stuff like "Kaaargh! Kaaargh . . . ? Kaaargh!"

WORKING GIRL - a confusing mixture of gender stereotyping and the ruthless consumption of inferiors in the corporate world, *Working Girl* is nevertheless an entertaining video. Tess McGill (Melanie Griffith) is the aspiring secretary that realizes she has to start taking her own initiative in order to rise above the manipulative power-mongers for whom she plays the dogsbody. Director Mike Nichols essentially tells us that injustice and exploitation are not restricted to any one particular category - there are bad guys (horrible sexist two-timing boyfriends) and equally bad girls (super-flakey femme fatale merger and acquisitions boss played by Sigge Weaver). But Nichols slips up several times insisting on showing us what Tess looks like in skimpy underwear more often than necessary and dealing far too lightly with the boyfriend. Basically it's the down-trodden kid-makes-big-formula and is only a slightly more upbeat version of "The Secret of My Success". (***)

MAJOR LEAGUE - one of the recent spate of baseball films inspired by the vapid *Bull Durham*, *Major League* is extremely lightweight entertainment. Once more it's a formula piece of rag-tag bums n' losers become winners when they all pull together as a team. The biggest strength of such a film would obviously be the collection of eccentrics, low-lives and proto-geriatrics that make up such a shambles, but even here the characterization has been watered down to the point where Charlie Sheen plays the semi-punker who subsequently becomes known as "wild thing". If you must have a baseball blow-out, rent "Field of Dreams" and "The Natural" before seeing *Major League* as these are classics in their own right. (**)

RAINMAN - formula! Formula! Cleaned up at the Oscars but by combining a hollywood buck with a Daily Rag acclaimed method actor in a cool buddy-weird buddy, road movie with great dollops of emotional schmaltz. Where can you go wrong? The fact is however that *Rainman* is a very easy film to watch even though the cliches fall out of the screen like stolen cutlery. Tom Cruise swings from convincing to total-ham in his performance as the flash sports-car dealer with a heart of slime and Dustin Hoffman is well . . . Dustin Hoffman (playing an autistic savant). (***)

NIGHT BREAKER - missed theatrical release but would have served as an adequate successor to Newman's *Fat Man and Little Boy* as a docu-drama of the neophyte atomic age. Martin Sheen is a neurologist in the present day but as a young PhD (played by son Emilio Estevez) he participated in a series of experiments that purposefully exposed US Airborne troops to radiation from H-bombs exploded in the Nevada desert in the late 1950's. The horror culminates in the troops being dropped off within three miles of one of the experimental detonations with absolutely no cover whatsoever. The film dwells mostly on the steady transition between a patriotic awe of the evil power inherent in the nuclear device to the sickening sense of guilt and shock. Back to the present the successful physician is confronted by the platoon sergeant he knew so well at the testing grounds but now chooses to ignore him. But things begin to snap including one heart-breaking scene where the doctor reveals to his wife that it is he that is sterile (as a result of his exposure) and not her. After a staple diet of thrill-a-minute schlock, *Night Breaker* may seem rather tame but in summary it is a thought-provoking and sad commentary on a paranoid and power-hungry nation at its worst.

JACK KNIFE - Robert De Niro. One of the big four but in what may initially sound ridiculous. Bobby is actually similar to Bill Murray in being able to consistently give effortless pleasurable performances that give the impression of a natural style (with obvious exceptions *Razor's Edge* for Murray and *The Mission* for De Niro). Here he plays a Viet Nam vet that turns up out of nowhere to visit a disgruntled alcoholic (Ed Harris) that we learn little by little has had a much harder

THE STRENGTH AND THE BEAUTY

Lynne Wanyeki experiences the revelation of Four the Moment

Last Saturday night, the women's acapella group Four the Moment, performed at the Playhouse for a CUSO (Canadian University Student Organization) Benefit Concert. Fredericton's Duo Ariamus performed the opening act. The funds raised by the Benefit Concert will be used to implement development projects in southern Africa.

The Halifax-based group Four the Moment first came together for a community benefit concert in 1982, to protest the actions of a White Supremist Group in Toronto. After this first appearance, the group was "besieged with requests" for further appearances. As it happened, a CBC producer was present at their second gig in a club in Halifax, and urged them to consider recording. At that time, Four the Moment was still using some back-up instruments (Delvina Bernard played guitar), but after having heard a tape of the five-woman acapella group Sweet Honey and the Rock, a group from Washington, D.C., they decided to concentrate purely on vocal harmonies.

The musical style of Four the Moment is heavily influenced by gospel, the blues, and traditional folk. One of the band members described their acapella as "being influenced by a strong church force which we have moved from the traditional to a more secular mould." Indeed, Four the Moment is both very aware of and expressive of the history and the issues at present of their community. When asked whether they would consider playing music full-time, the answer was an empathetic "No." They further explained:

"Four the Moment means a great deal to me since I've sung in it since its conception. If we played full-time, I believe our style would change. The music would be our bread and butter. I don't think we would enjoy it or have so much fun with it."

time coming to grips with several gruelling tours of duty. This is one of those films where the viewer is a casual observer watching the development of a story that throws hints and suggestions only when it wants to. Eventually we learn that the two men actually served time together with a third who never made it back. The exercise is one of rehabilitation after nearly twenty years and the mystery is whether De Niro knew of his estranged chum's torment or whether he does actually turn up quite by chance. A real heart rending tale, *Jack Knife* deals with the crippling debilitation of post-traumatic stress disorder and personal loss in such a refreshingly subtle manner that the movie packs a really emotional punch. Excellent performances all round. (****)

"We all work. We're all involved in some way with our community. We draw a lot of inspiration from the community and try to give what it has given us back to it. We're singing about issues that are our lives. I know that music would be different if we made it a full-time affair. We'd lose the credibility and integrity we bring to the songs and would have to compromise our challenge, our attempts to be a consciousness-raising group."

"That's exactly it. We'd no longer be singing about our issues - we'd be taking other people's issues and trying to make them our own, and our music would lose out."

Their songs on the album *We're Still Standing* originated from the various creative forces in the group. Some lyrics were drawn from poems by the Nova Scotian poet George Clarke. Other songs were workshopped by the group as a whole. This explains the various styles and arrangements in the different songs.

U I Line, Inkululeko Iyeza and *Dream Variations* have one clear voice in the fore, while the other's harmonies form a quiet, yet strong backdrop to the lead. U I Line deals with poverty, the sense of futility in working simply to pay the bills, and the helplessness in waiting for welfare cheques in the mail. *Dream Variations* expresses the persistent hope of oppressed people. Inkululeko Iyeza (*Freedom is Coming in the Zulu tongue*) is a tribute to Steven Biko, and tells of his 26 days of imprisonment before death.

West Hant's County and *Freedom has Beckoned* have all four voices combining in a wonderful blend of harmony, complementing and playing off one another. *West Hant's County* is a bluesy song from a poem by George Clarke, describing the stark life of black miners in Nova Scotia. *Freedom has Beckoned* is the kind of song that makes you

want to sing along in a kind of defiance, an almost joyful determination not to let the world crush you to cynicism. It's a song of endurance. One of the lines: "I won't stop until the Pentagon has fallen", reflects the group dependence on actual experience for creativity. Apparently, the song was written after a public demonstration and march to protest the visit by officials from the Pentagon to the NATO base in Halifax resulted in the government being forced to halt their legislation regarding the NATO base's expansion.

Rock and a Hard Place and *People Get Ready* have a curious vocal-bass of sorts running throughout the whole songs. This really is effective, especially for the song *Rock and a Hard Place* which had a subtle reggae rhythm to it. *Rock and a Hard Place* speaks of the need to be ever vigilant in the struggle for freedom and the need not to allow ourselves to get so far and then slip backwards again. This had an interesting end - the voices held, resonated and ended abruptly after a downward pitched cut-off.

People Get Ready expresses the hope and belief that one day, struggle will culminate in reward.

The songs which appealed to me the most however were *Lydia Jackson* and *I Love You Woman* for their incredible range and diversity of voice levels. The songs are melancholy, yet not so at the same time. The notes are held, prolonged, which produces a certain intense quality to the music. The lyrics of these two songs are extremely powerful - the first telling of the suffering and abuse of a black female slave at the hands of her master and her subsequent emigration to Sierra Leone; and the second a tribute to the strength of women in the family and the generation to generation relationship of mother and daughter.

Four the Moment. Strong. Beautiful.

PET SEMATARY - another example of faults caused by a general lack of concentration by a film-maker. *Pet Sematary* comes very close to being an excellent thriller. Right from the beginning, the camera swoops in and around its subjects on the look-out for any detail and the rather insistent film score keeps jabbing it (and us) in the sides in anticipation of something horrible to happen. Something REALLY horrible doesn't actually happen 'til the last fifteen minutes or so but the film is never boring and this is to the director's credit because the Stephen King plot (dead things become reanimated when buried in an ancient Indian bone-yard only to start eating neighbours and close relatives) is decidedly goofy. Mistakes include a) assuming that the young doctor can be so grief-strickenly stupid b) horrible laser beam effects emanating from the

burial ground and c) the use of the Ramones to provide the closing title. (***)

NOWHERE TO RUN - it's another the-summer-I-grew-up flick but this sordid little tale of electoral corruption, double-crossing, first-time-bank and murder in a little southern town is worth renting if only for watching David Carradine do a dry antithesis of his legendary grasshopper role. Sure there's stereotypes galore; *The Fat Sheriff*; *The Weasel Sheriff*; *The Century Old Judge* that drips with skunk-vom - but the whole thing unfolds so easily that *Nowhere To Run* escapes with a fair amount of credibility even if the film-makers lead us to believe the most people in a community (thanks A.C.) the size of Renous have never seen each other before in their lives. (***)