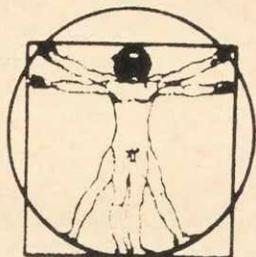


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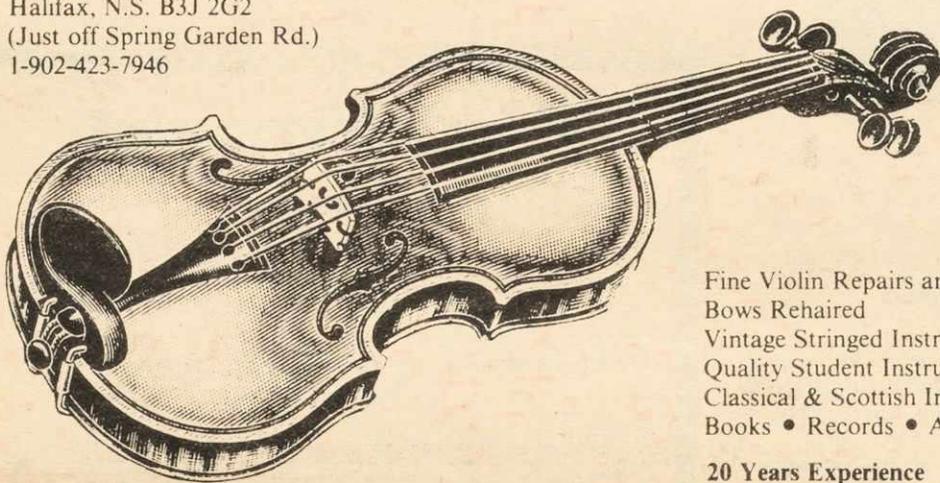
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"The Verdict" good but not Newman

by Bryan Fantie

Okay. I know Paul Newman fans are going to hate me but I do not think that he will win or, for that matter, even deserve an Academy Award for his portrayal of attorney Frank Galvin in 20th Century-Fox's *The Verdict*. Contrary to media hype, this is not the performance of his career.

Yes, it clearly is better than his contribution to *The Silver Chalice* and *Exodus* but Newman was better in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, *The Hustler*, *Hud*, *Cool Hand Luke*, and *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*.

This court-room drama lacks the volcanic fire of *Inherit the Wind*, the clammy-palm tension of *12 Angry Men*, and the rapier-edged cerebral fencing of *Anatomy of a Murder*. It does, however, have solid substance even if it is not actually spectacular. *The Verdict* is a good, hardy, meat-and-potatoes film.

Basically, Newman plays an ambulance-chasing lawyer who is handed a gift case by a buddy. The whole thing seems routine. A prestigious hospital, owned by the Church, is being sued by a young woman whose sister has been reduced to a vegetable while under the care of a world-renowned physician. The case should never be tried. Wishing to avoid adverse publicity the Hospital (Church) offers a substantial, and generous, out-of-court settlement.

Galvin, who has apparently seen too many *Rocky* movies, decides that he can restore his self-esteem by not just taking the money and running. He somehow believes that he can regain control of his life by becoming a crusader. So, without consulting the poor victim's suffering kin, he refuses the settlement and forces the trial.

There are Academy Award-worthy performances here. Unfor-

tunately Newman's is just not one of them. If you are really interested in who may walk away with one of those little gold statuettes come April, keep your eye on Jack Warden who plays Galvin's partner, Mickey Morrissey. It is interesting to note that Jack Warden was also a standout in *12 Angry Men*.

Although her part is brief, Lindsay Crouse dramatically confirms that old adage "there are no such things as small parts, just small actors". As Kaitlin Costello Price, she moved me. She does more in 10 minutes...never mind; see for yourself; her scene alone is almost worth the price of admission.

James Mason is his usual capable self. I was a little disappointed that in a film supposedly trying to establish itself as a powerful drama with a minimum of comic relief, Ed Concannon (Mason's role) appeared as some sort of grotesquely distorted Kingfield (remember *The Paper Chase*?). The huge, well-oiled legal machine preparing to roll over Galvin would have been much more frightening, and much more effective, if the parody (omniscient law prof contrasted to obsequious law student) had not been maintained throughout.

The Verdict is a vicious attack against the legal system and the medical profession but I was never quite sure what they thought of the Church, another prominent participant. I would recommend it to Newman fans and to those who enjoy a good drama.

But, do not be disappointed. This is not a murder trial. That "corpse" that is being dragged around on the T.V. ads is just the drunken Galvin and his state is self-afflicted.

The Verdict continues its run at the Hyland Theatre.



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