

# Chasing diplomas

James Bridges' film *The Paper Chase*, currently playing at the Garneau, is having a difficult time attracting audiences of any size. Upon viewing the film it becomes rather obvious why this is the case. Admirable in some respects, the film nevertheless remains a rather tedious foray into the halls of academe.

The plot of the film centres around a youthful aspirant tackling the ivy tower of (holy, holy, holy) Harvard Law School. Student Hart is obsessed by the vision of his contract law professor, the legendary Sydney Kingsfield. Kingsfield is a redeeming force in the atmosphere of Harvard; an intellectual visionary who illuminates the darkness of the legalistic grind in search of a diploma. Kingsfield is the medium through which the majesty of the legal mind, if not the law, is transferred to the coming generation. Hart strives to assimilate Kingsfield's vision and casts him in the role of unwitting mentor-cum-devil's advocate.

The ruthless nature of the pursuit is relieved by Hart's attachment to a young woman who, it is later revealed, is Kingsfield's daughter. That's really all there is to the plot. The big question is will he make it or won't he? Law school is supposed to be some kind of soul searching pilgrimage and women are incidental: a distraction which must be dealt with the

same care one would handle nitroglycerine. "Study like hell the first two years and then you can screw around all you like in third year."

The greatest drawback that the movie has is that if you happen to be a student it makes you feel guilty about watching a movie when you should be emulating the hero, out there cracking the books like mad, making up course outlines and measuring up to the towering demands of some mythical great academic mind.

There's very little excitement in the movie, just a slovenly tenderness that interferes with the paper chase. In the closing sequence the movie dismally fails in an attempt to rise to metaphorical heights when Hart sails his unviewed marks into the blue as a paper airplane and Kingsfield's daughter clutches her final divorce papers. The image being, I suppose, significant to the degree which pieces of paper grant freedom and incarceration.

Bridges' script is not exactly deadly dull but neither is it very exciting or original, falling down before the ideals of academe as it does, without taking full measure of their impotence. He might just as well have trapped his characters in an elevator and had them discuss their philosophies of life for all the insight that they had to offer as characters.

The direction of this movie

is similarly banal. Like its material the direction is slogging and unrelieved by any sort of animation or sensitive pacing. Only towards the very end does the film truly begin to capture a sense of realistic rhythm. Bridges does manage to capture the rhythm and sense of panic that grips the dormitory in the last frantic days before the exams begin.

Timothy Bottoms as Hart, the fledgling Law student, is perhaps the perfect embodiment as the youth seeking absolution in his search for truth. For all his activity as a healthy young sexual athlete and scholar he is somehow neutered in the process. His real romance is with Kingsfield's mind. It has to be. Kingsfield has neither heart nor soul, but he proves to be a powerful attraction for Hart. Bottoms spends the entire movie trying to come to grips with this dilemma. Unfortunately this gives his relationship with Lindsay Wagner, Kingsfield's daughter, the overtones of an exploitive affair. The whole affair never rings quite true. Somehow its all very facetious. Hart is supposed to be quite torn up but Bottoms seems to be playing around and nothing more. He takes his own problems seriously but never Wagner's problems. They remain simple annoyances. She is only a physical embodiment of Kingsfield's mind.

Wagner never manages to

overcome this essential predicament and appears in the movie only to be paraded throughout for an interesting effect that never quite comes to fruition. Like her role she is little more than a pleasant distraction. Still, every now and then one gets the impression she could have had more impact if the circumstances had been otherwise.

The most eloquent impression is made by John Houseman as Kingsfield. He is a personality of granite, richly detailed, and lacking in qualities of warmth and vulnerability. He is the quintessential embodiment of the Harvard Law School, an unusual accomplishment but an unpleasant one. His performance is the sole exception in a film

otherwise untouched by genuine depth. The effect he produces is such that he makes one believe that beneath such an exterior there has to be a wealth of character. By not giving it all away Houseman makes Kingsfield a fascinating character study. His is the most fascinating character that the movie has to offer.

*The Paper Chase* has all the characteristics of a fine novel but few of the qualities of a good film. Its strongest effect is to induce guilt, at least if you're a student. One feels guilty for having frittered away precious hours in the pursuit of pleasure that should have been invested in one's own paper chase. The only question of importance is which chase is really important.

Walter Plinge

## Nutcracker

When the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's production of NUTCRACKER comes to Edmonton on January 31 and February 1 and 2, Alberta audiences will be seeing RWB's most ambitious undertaking ever. Choreographed by John Neumeier, Artistic Director of the Hamburg State Opera, NUTCRACKER was first produced by the Winnipeg company during last year's Christmas season. It was sold out for all eight performances, and received unanimous acclaim from the critics.

Neumeier's NUTCRACKER is not the traditional "Christmas-tree" version performed by ballet companies all over the world. The situation is, instead, a birthday party. It is Maria's twelfth birthday, and she is given a birthday party by her

parents. Among the guests are her brother Fritz who has invited some of his cadet friends, and her sister, Louise, a ballerina, who brings her ballet-master, Drosselmeier. Gunther, the captain of the cadets presents Maria with a nutcracker, and Drosselmeier gives her a pair of pointe shoes.

After the party, Maria falls asleep and dreams that Drosselmeier leads her into the magical world of the theatre, where she experiences its excitement and splendour. Maria witnesses a rehearsal and then a lavish performance which culminates in a grand pas de deux by her ballerina sister, Louise, partnered by Gunther.

Then, still wearing her pointe shoes and clutching the nutcracker, Maria is awakened by her mother; her dream is

over, and so is the ballet.

The breath-taking sets and costumes for NUTCRACKER designed by Jurgen Rose and the lighting by Gil Wechsler, enhance the classical beauty of this production. And, of course, Tchaikovsky's famous score is familiar to everyone.

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's NUTCRACKER comes to Edmonton's Northern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium for four performances on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, January 31 and February 1 and 2 at 8:30 p.m. with a matinee Saturday, February 2 at 2:00 p.m. Tickets are available at The Bay Box Office, Downtown, Southgate, and Londonderry with reduced prices for senior citizens, students, and children.



Craig Sterling and Ana Maria de Gorris in The Royal Winnipeg Ballet's NUTCRACKER



theatre lives

*Child's Play* by Robert Marasco and directed by Richard Ouzounian. Opens at the Citadel January 5 and runs to February 2, 1974. This production stars John Neville and Vernon Chapman. There will be a student preview January 4 with a question period following the performance. Tickets for this evening performance are \$1.50 for students.

*Have You Any Dirty Washing Mother Dear?* written by Clive Exton and directed by Warren Graves. Next at Walderdale Playhouse, Nightly at 8:30, January 15 thru 26 inclusive. Tickets at the Bay Box Office or phone 424-0121 for reservations. Do it now or you'll be out of luck.

*10 Women, 2 Men, and a Moose* with Mia Anderson. Directed by Walter Massey. An incredible one woman tour-de-force comes to the Jubilee January 26. Tickets are available from the Bay Box Office. Scramble for them. This has to be one of the real theatre events of the year.

dance

The Royal Winnipeg Ballet Company will be at the Jubilee January 31, February 1 and 2 with their production of the NUTCRACKER. Student Prices are in the \$3.00 to \$5.50 range. A classic more talked about than performed. This is your chance to get caught up and find out what all the talk is about.

opera

*La Traviata* with Anna Moffo under the baton of Charles Rosekrans at the Jubilee, January 17, 19 and 21. Tickets at the Bay or phone 422-7200.

easy on the ears

The University of Alberta String Quartet will be performing in SUB at noon on January 18. The program is still unannounced.

cheap thrills

*Trinity is Still my Name* Boss western at Student Cinema, Friday, January 18.

*Two People* with Peter Fonda. Sunday January 20 at Student Cinema. Tickets fifty cents at the SUB box office.

easy on the eyes

The Edmonton Art Gallery is exhibiting some examples of Canadian and European painting and sculpture drawn from the gallery's permanent collection, the E.E. Poole Foundation, The Steen Collection, and the MacAulay Collection to celebrate the winter season. Until January 27.

There is also a display on the Materials and Techniques of painting. The colours of the various types of fluid materials employed in painting are all derived from the same pigment sources. The difference between media is that of the particular liquid solution in which pigments are ground and mixed, that is the vehicle. An informative display. Until February 25.

Latitude 53 is featuring an exhibition of prints by 13 Alberta photographers. January 3 - 16. 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. Tues. to Sat. Thurs. evening 7 - 9 p.m. At 10048 - 101A Avenue.