

Bronson in Death Wish

'Get the baddies' film mindless, predictable

By JULIAN BELTRAME

The line that separates serious social commentaries from sensationalist films is sometimes very thin, especially when the topic is violence in North American cities.

Stanley Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange* of a couple years back was hailed as a masterpiece by many critics, but labelled as little more than well-made pornography by Pauline Kael.

Death Wish, Charles Bronson's

latest vehicle to fortune, seems to have fooled a lot of people into believing it is a type of *Clockwork* in reverse, although it is hard for some of us to understand how the two films could be mentioned in the same breath.

Death Wish begins quite nicely with a touching, albeit too cosy, view of Paul Kersey (Bronson) and his wife (Hope Lange) as a liberal, humane couple enjoying a breather from big city life.

The vacation over, Bronson is back in New York where the daily topic of conversation is the latest mugging statistics. At this point Bronson rejects his friend's contention that all muggers ought to be killed on sight, obviously revealing his liberal ideas.

We are later told that he was a conscientious objector during the Korean War because of a distaste for hand guns brought on by his father's death in a hunting accident when Paul was just a child.

It is hard to picture Bronson being afraid of guns, but at this point we can give him the benefit of the doubt.

All this quickly changes however, when his wife is mortally assaulted by three *Clockwork Orange*-type hoodlums, and his daughter is forced to perform fellatio, the shock of which reduces her to a mere vegetable.

Even an ardent liberal like Bronson can't turn away from reality when it hits him personally, and when the police do nothing to find the murderers, he decides that offence is the best defence.

Up to this point it appears as if director Michael Winner is serious about his topic, although the film fails to delve into Bronson's character deeply enough to justify such a harsh transformation. We have the distinct impression that

Winner wanted to get somewhere quickly, and he didn't want to clutter his lead-in with details.

But whatever good points Winner gets for intentions he quickly squanders because from here on in, *Death Wish* is little more than another Bronson vehicle of violence designed to gain him the popularity in America he has long enjoyed in Europe.

There are no original insights, nor does the plot wander very far from the scenario we could have predicted after seeing the first fifteen minutes of the film. We are never surprised, and therefore never intrigued.

Bronson shoots a dozen or so of New York's meanest punk-hoodlums, but not even the murders are done with originality.

The one sub-plot which may have saved this movie is not allowed to develop beyond a single crude attempt at satire. The police are put on the spot by Bronson's vigilante killings, for they must on the surface appear to be doing their utmost to apprehend him, while underneath they wish him all the luck in the world.

Instead of developing this one interesting aspect of the story, Winner has his one joke and retreats to the safe (in terms of mass public appeal) and dull shootings.

But this is typical of the entire

film. Winner directs this film as if he were being chased by a pack of wolves.

We are given one rape, some ten or twelve different shootings, establishing shots of Bronson as a nice loving family man, Bronson's struggles with his principles and conscience, and a sub plot of the police's role in New York — all of which takes barely ninety minutes.

The one mystery of this film remains. Why were so many good critics fooled?

My only explanation is that perhaps the subject is so real in the U.S. of A. that an American critic or audience cannot look at the picture as it is, without bringing to it his own personal experiences.

In my book, the jury in *Death Wish* is not out—it was hung by Bronson.

PEAK plays

York's graduate program in theatre (PEAK), in conjunction with the Bethune college council, will be presenting a series of Friday noon-hour presentations in Bethune's junior common room beginning tomorrow and continuing through April 4. The productions, representing Chekhov, Shakespeare and others, will be skeletal in style and free of charge. More next week.

Jesse's second solo shines with careful, tight arrangements

By IAN BALFOUR

Often when a member of an established group leaves the fold and goes out on his own, the results are disastrous.

Not so with Jesse Colin Young. Since his departure from the Youngbloods, Young has produced two very fine albums, *Song For Julie* and his latest release, *Light Shine*.

Light Shine is an immensely listenable collection of original songs by Young. Using a considerably larger band now, Jesse Colin Young's sound is much fuller than in previous years when only the somewhat limited musical resources of the Youngbloods were at his disposal.

Young's songwriting has adapted perfectly to the changes. His new songs are characterized by beautiful arranging, a careful blending of the various instruments to mold the lyrical effect which Young considers is the goal of his music.

The entire first side consists of a tripartite composition entitled *California Suite*, a musical odyssey which wanders through several moods and musical styles. It is a work which exudes warmth and feeling both through its tender lyrics and its superb, controlled musicianship.

Young's guitar is smooth and clear, Jim Rothermel's saxophone sweet and soaring. The rest of the band provides more than adequate support and Young never takes advantage of his fame to dominate the group with his guitar playing but rather lets each member contribute to the well-balanced sound.

The second side of the album is clearly weaker.

Barbaros is a rather trite song in Caribbean style with little or nothing of merit to recommend itself. *Cuckoo* is the one cut on the album where the arrangement seems confused and lacking direction and consequently it verges on being tedious. But the side is not without its good features.

Motorcycle Blues is a loose, good time number reminiscent of the

Youngbloods' better days. Both *Susan*, and *The Pretty and The Fair* are gentle ballads of lilting melody typical of Young's most expressive music.

In all, a very worthwhile and pleasant album, an album which will brighten your darker days and may suggest to you that there is still a little hope for the world.



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We've heard of word-of-mouth, but this is ridiculous.

"HAROLD AND MAUDE", a nice little movie comedy that arrived without much fanfare, is starting its third year at the Westgate Theatre in Minneapolis. Third year, not third week.

What accounts for such a phenomenal success is hard to say. "HAROLD AND MAUDE" received good reviews, true, but it started slowly. And began to build. And build. And build. One person told another person and now "HAROLD AND MAUDE" has become a cult movie. One fan in Minneapolis has seen it 138 times. He is a "HAROLD AND MAUDE" freak, as are many people in Minneapolis and Detroit and Atlanta, wherever this funny, tender movie about two people who love life and death equally plays.

Like "Billy Jack" and "Walking Tall", which were also discovered in the Midwest and became two of the biggest cult movies ever, "HAROLD AND MAUDE" is a movie that seems to mean something to all kinds of people, from college kids to over thirties to—anybody.

Now it comes to Toronto, and you can join the rest of the country in the love affair they're carrying on with two very unusual and wonderful people, "HAROLD AND MAUDE".

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