

The theme of *Hair*, contrary to popular belief, is only remotely associated with the youth sub-culture. The real theme, the thing which gives *Hair* its dramatic impact, is isolation: Man's isolation in the tribe (his society). Man's isolation in time. And the ultimate isolation of his death.

The most striking moments in the first act of *Hair* are produced, not by the actions of the tribe as a whole, but by the sudden separation of individual characters from the whole tribe. Woof, the adolescent homosexual, and his hopeless infatuation with Claude (the hero), Berger (the Leader) and Mick Jagger (?) is beyond the fringe of the tribe's jurisdiction. The tribe can only half-heartedly cater to his needs (in one of the final scenes, each member of the tribe evades the duty of having to sleep with Woof); it can not solve his problems. Ultimately, Woof is alone.

Similarly, a pregnant girl tries again and again to gain some token of personal affection from the members of the tribe—and again and again is summarily dismissed. She too is ultimately alone.

The inadequacy of the tribe (and by implication, society) to solve the ultimate isolation basic to man's condition is brought home when Berger rips up a shirt which an admirer (Sheila) gives him. Berger rips up the shirt partially because it is 'square', partially because he hates yellow, but mostly just for the amusement of the rest of the tribe. Here, clearly, the feelings of the individual are sacrificed to the caprice of society. The resulting song 'Easy to be Hard', sung by Sheila is perhaps the most powerful in the whole show. Its plea, "I need a friend / I need a friend", strikes at the very heart of the first act. Almost immediately Claude, the hero is isolated from the tribe as he bucks its will by refusing to burn his draft card.

Man's isolation in time is depicted primarily through the device of 'the movie'. The movie, by definition, is a record of past events. In, for example, the first movie scene, the audience is thrown back into an earlier time—the Fifties, perhaps the Mid-sixties. Marilyn Monroe sits on a bench with her amour while the black sound man stands in the background, holding the microphone. The placid dialogue contrasts drastically with the four-lettered flirtations of the tribe.

Later, the movie focuses on a contemporary scene—the mis-induction of a murderous homosexual. Even though the situation is directed at the present institution, the draft, it is nevertheless a part of the movie (the record of past events) and the point is made: By living in the present man becomes a part of the past. Because of time, the present (and man's position in it) can never have more than a momentary validity.

Act two of *Hair* begins with the death of Claude. This is marked by an explosion at the

## HAIR... and isolation



Martin Coles Photo

BERGER (RICHARD SPIEGEL) BACKSTAGE

end of 'Electric Blues', a song in which the music of the present overlaps, and eventually overpowers the music of the past. By Claude's death, the audience is thrown into a kind of time-warp where past, present and future mix freely or, perhaps more accurately, lose their significance. A past event, Abraham Lincoln's birthday, is presented in the form of a negative film clip: Abie=babie is black; his shoe-shine boy is white. This is followed by a future event (in the Year 3500)—the extinction of man—which is run forwards, backwards and forwards again. Thus, even within the boundaries of a single future event, past, present and future are mixed.

The mixing of irrelevance of time in *Hair* serves both to re-enforce the theme of man's isolation in death. For, as Berger points out to Claude, "It's your hallucination"—that is, the events of the second act is really eternity—the eternity created in Claude's mind by his death.

The third stage of *Hair*'s theme—the ultimate isolation of man's death—is vividly depicted as the dying Claude is given a final embrace by each member of the tribe. One by one, his friends are wrenched from him until only two remain. These struggle to be free of him, but he holds on. His arms spread as his friends pull away from him. Finally, his friends break free, leaving Claude (Everyman) totally isolated. There, he stands alone, his arms outstretched, hanging on to the crucifix of his own death.

I hope this brief discussion of the theme of *Hair* demonstrates that the 'musical comedy' is a

little more complex than a mere skin scene and a few obscenities. As well as being good music, good dancing, and good comedy, *Hair* is good drama. If it comes again to Edmonton, see it. *Hair* is well worth the formidable price of admission.

—W. N. Callaghan Jr.

## Nichols' Knowledge

Somehow or other, Mike Nichols has built up a reputation as a great director. He has managed to do this on the basis of one competent adaptation (*WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOLF?*), one totally incompetent adaptation (*CATCH-22*), and one mean, confused, nasty little comedy (*THE GRADUATE*).

Now he has followed these disasters with *CARNAL KNOWLEDGE*, and the critics have responded dutifully. "I've experienced only three or four movies that I was genuinely sorry to see end," Vincent Canby wrote in the *New York Times*. "I was sorry to see *CARNAL KNOWLEDGE* end." And Liz Smith succinctly claimed, "*CARNAL KNOWLEDGE* is one of the best movies ever!" Audiences have also responded: on Sunday night at the Westmount, the crowd inside was applauding and the crowd outside was several blocks long.

It is almost impossible to take Nichols' films simply, at their face value. It would be nice just to dismiss *CARNAL KNOWLEDGE* in a few words as a poor and insignificant film, but the adulation surrounding it forces me to make more extreme statements. *CARNAL KNOWLEDGE* is not only a bad film, it is a despicably bad film.

The basic fault is probably Nichols' inability to sympathise with his characters. He presents them only in order to attack them; he asks his audiences only to despise them. He displays his own cleverness by giving his audiences all the cheap laughs

going, but they are always at the expense of his characters' feelings.

The first section of the film, set in college in the 40's, has some nice moments of light humour, but Nichols soon blows them by the pretentiousness of his style, and his desire to show the audience how clever he is. The long central section concentration on Jack Nicholson and Ann Margret is very boring and totally empty. The final vignette shows that the make-up man can build a paunch for Art Garfunkel as well as plastic breasts for Ann Margret, and Nichols abandons another potentially interesting female character in order to make another glib gesture of disgust at sexual impotence.

What I object to in this film is not just its cynicism, or its pretentious and (to my mind) unjustifiable claim that this is an accurate picture of human relationships: it is the fact that these ideas are used mainly for a display of slick cleverness. There is no sadness in this film, no anguish that this situation should be so. Compared, say, with a film like Cassavettes' *HUSBANDS*, which continually raged against the condition it presented, Nichols' film displays a callousness, a willingness to score cheap laughs against its defenceless characters and to appeal to the basest instincts in its audience, which are not only aesthetically dishonest but ethically despicable.

I've experienced only three or four movies that I was genuinely sorry to see begin. I was sorry to see *CARNAL KNOWLEDGE* begin.

—Stephen Scobie

## HESTON & THE FAMILY

Any one reading this will know by now that *THE OMEGA MAN* (Plaza One) is a science-fiction film, with Charlton Heston in the title role. One local critic has called it the best science fiction film since 2001. Well, that honour still belongs to *THX 1138*, but it is a good, intelligent science-fiction thriller, one you won't regret seeing.

The opening shots of the film are among the best things in it: Charlton Heston driving through a totally silent, totally empty, totally dead Los Angeles, suddenly reacting, with incredible violence, to a moving shadow at a window. This long opening sequence pretty well sets his character for the film: he is a tough survivor of the biological holocaust that destroyed almost all human life on the planet. When he goes into an empty theatre and runs *WOODSTOCK*, speaking the lines along with the film, we begin to understand the depths of his loneliness.

*THE OMEGA MAN* is based on a novel by Richard Matheson, who wrote some interesting books during the 50's, and, although it has been updated by the adapters

somewhat, it reveals the age of its ideas. For although it is an intelligently told holocaust-survival story, the basic themes are old hat science fiction. The 'family', a fanatic, pseudo-medieval, anti-scientific group of plague-inflicted survivors, are trying to wipe out all traces of the old world, and Heston is one of these traces, the only one he thinks for a long while. As he can't see in the dark (naturally) and the 'family' can't see in the light (unnaturally—due to the plague), their conflict can be milked for plenty of excitement, and is.

Heston is a good actor (in case anybody doesn't know this yet.), and he carries the rather heavy load the picture puts on him well, especially in the first half, where he is completely alone, with only himself to talk to. Strangely, in fact, the film begins to go soft precisely at the point where he finds friends: Where the monologue was dry and wittily deperate, the dialogues often become mushy and turgid. Furthermore, the major 'philosophical' confrontations between Matthias' the leader of

the 'family' and Heston, the reasonable scientific man (Matthias: "Definition of a scientist: one who knew nothing until there was nothing left to know.") presents one with an uncomfortable sense of *deja vu*: it's just not one of the better versions of this particular discussion.

But I don't want to denigrate a good film, just to put it in its place. *THX 1138* was especially brilliant because, while it was a fairly ordinary visual concepts. Morris Sagal, a director previously unknown to me, has no such special vision: he is competent but not original. He brings nothing new to the genre, merely handles it with some precision and understanding. The result is an often exciting thriller, but not masterpiece. I have no doubt it will make a lot of money at the box office, and at least it's not a travesty of science fiction. In fact, it's a good introduction to some major themes in the genre to any who are unfamiliar with science fiction, but it is a somewhat dated version of what's going down in the field today.

—Doug Harbour