



Nothing tacky about *Tender Mercies*

Review by R. F. Macdonald

The latest episode in the Australian humiliation of Hollywood will be at Wormwood's Cinema December 2nd for a week. It's Bruce Beresford's *Tender Mercies* starring Robert Duvall as a down-and-out country legend rehabilitated and redeemed by a widowed motel owner. The film is deceptively flat and simple; below the surface lies great faith in the positive qualities in human nature.

No American could have made this movie. While watching it, two antecedents come to mind: Robert Altman's *Nashville* and Terence Malick's *Badlands*. *Tender Mercies* has none of the satiric ambivalence of the former and none of the mythic violence of the latter. Instead it has the distinct characters and the primordial landscapes that create belief. We become witnesses to a great transformation rather than participants in a gush-a-thon.

An American with any cultural pretensions wouldn't touch this with a ten foot pole. The subject of Country Music is always treated with contempt and ridicule by most of the media moguls

and college-educated middle and upper classes. Hence *Tender Mercies* becomes even more powerful as an agent of spiritual renewal, almost like a cinematic Good Samaritan.

North American society is almost too full of self-loathing to accept this film. I sat expecting the serene atmosphere to be interrupted by violence or horror. Instead I was treated to a spectacle of healing, something quite frightening for a society so secularized and materialistic. It's no wonder *Tender Mercies* has met with a confused reception. Spurned by much of the legitimate "circuit," it has found refuge in the art houses and alternative cinemas where its artistic values have been enthusiastically received.

Robert Duvall is utterly captivating as Max Sledge, a country music legend who is a sort of cross between Johnny Cash and George Jones. His understated performance creates an air of positive mystery; we don't know who he is at the beginning and furthermore we don't know what he's capable of. The positive development seems almost unbe-

lievable. We expect him to slaughter, steal, and run amok. When he doesn't, our disappointment is assuaged by the implacable landscapes and the unpretentiousness of the characters.

There is no tacky artificiality in *Tender Mercies*. This in no *Rocky*, playing on your sympathies and manipulating your emotions through identification. You don't sympathize with Max Sledge; he's had everything and he's been a real creep. What grips you in this movie is the transformation of someone inhuman into someone human. With so much film and art today concerned with the dissolution of human values and the triumph of alienation, it's good to see something that reaffirms the possibilities of becoming human. It may seem alien or unfashionable, but the issues this film deals with are as relevant as nuclear war. Redemption just isn't as dramatic, obvious or materialistic.

Tender Mercies is an uplifting and entrancing film that makes a perfect beginning to the holiday season.

The Graduate still a classic since 1969

by Geoff Martin

Mike Nichols' 1969 film *The Graduate*, starring Dustin Hoffman has become a cult classic since its release 14 years ago.

It's the story of a recently graduated young man (Dustin Hoffman) who gets involved with his father's partner's wife, Mrs. Robinson, and her daughter at

the same time. The film explores the relationship between young people and the social conventions which they often allow to prevent them from living full lives.

The film's soundtrack features Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel. Most importantly, the film is an outstanding example of cinema-

tography and scripting in which the director skillfully weaves together all aspects of the film.

The film is a fund-raising project of the Dal-Kings' Model United delegation, and will be showing in the McInnes Room on Tuesday December 6 at 8 p.m.

D.J.'s CAFÉ

is a superb spot for early morning muffins, hearty lunches and tempting afternoon desserts.

Spring Garden Rd., Halifax
(next to Mills Bros.)

Now open 'till 11 p.m.

CABBAGETOWN LOUNGE
DOWNSTAIRS

Two room layout with
dancing & special
video programming

Students
with
ID no
cover

PEPE'S
UPSTAIRS

Fine Italian Cuisine

Featuring Live Jazz

Jazz line 425-3331



1545 Grafton St.

423-0483

10% discount with student I.D.