

Religious and chilling

El Topo rises above psychedelic reputation

By DION McGRATH

The one important fact that reviewers don't seem to mention about El Topo is that it's a good movie.

Throughout North America, the underground columnists have looked at the film as a psychedelic experience and praised it on totally meaningless grounds. Meanwhile, the straight reviewers have looked at the film as a psychedelic experience and condemned it on equally meaningless grounds, usually adding some comment about how disgusting the violence is (These are the same people who loved Straw Dogs and A Clockwork Orange).

But El Topo is not the exclusive property of acid freaks and blood buffs; it is a real-live, genuine movie and its virtues are the virtues of a good movie.

Fantastic and frequently chilling images abound. An armless man carries a legless man on his shoulders. A holy man is forced to make love to the dwarfed woman who cares for him, before a laughing crowd of jaded on-lookers.

Religious symbolism, eastern and western, is woven throughout the fabric of the narrative. When El Topo (Alejandro Jodorowsky, who also wrote and directed the film, and composed the soundtrack) dies, stigmata appear on his hands and he is reborn as a holy man.

But El Topo is also a western drawing on all the classic elements of the western, from the fabric fetishism of the black-clad gunfighter to some of the most beautiful vistas this side of John Ford. The basic device of the

film is the equation it draws between the perfection of the gunfighter's technique and the path to spiritual enlightenment.

This equation not only generates resonances that extend the meaning of many of the film's incidents; it defines our attitude to the narrative, easing us into the heroes-and-villains division between the characters and clarifying

Jodorowsky's moral and in the latter part of the film, political viewpoint.

El Topo is anything but flawless: one scene, for example, in which a group of wealthy and grotesquely ugly white women sexually assault a black man and then accuse him of rape, never escapes the cliché of its conception, no matter how sincere the intention behind it.

But on the whole, the flaws are few and scattered, and the film is sparked by a fertile imagination and realized with a technical expertise that puts the 200 Motels school of acid-movie to shame.

El Topo will be screened tonight at 7:30 in Curtis LH-L. For further details, see Sight and Sound section on page 11.

New York jazz quartet smoulders under surface calm in Burton

By MICHAEL BARRIS

The New York Jazz Quartet brought charm and a deceptive subtlety to Burton Auditorium, Monday night, to conclude the York Performing Arts series of jazz concerts.

A strength which lay just beneath the surface of the music gave one a feeling of pleasurable relaxation.

The personnel were Ron Carter, a bassist who has played with Miles Davis, Herbie Hancock, Tony Williams, and Jim Hall, among others, and has been, for the past decade, rated by international jazz critics as among the three best bassists; Frank Wess, a flautist, tenor and alto saxophonist, who acquired a major jazz reputation as one of the first modern jazz flautists while playing with Count Basie in the 1950s; Roland Hanna, former member of the Thad Jones-Mel Lewis Orchestra; and Ben Riley, Jr., former accompanist of bop exponent Thelonious Monk.

Hanna seemed intent on pounding the piano into pieces, as he lunged at chords and pawed at single melody lines often breaking them into sequences of dissonant chords and scales. Carter showed effortless technique and keen rhythm. Deceptively simple licks veined Wess's dark and gusty flute and saxophone playing.

Carter's flowing bass line is itself capable of carrying soloists as he demonstrated in his own Little Waltz, and in Sonny Rollins's Oleo. But he accompanied himself masterfully as well; in a solo version of Willow Weep for Me, he played duets with himself, establishing with the lower range of the string bass, patterns that were played simultaneously against a line of melody set up by the fingers of his left hand.

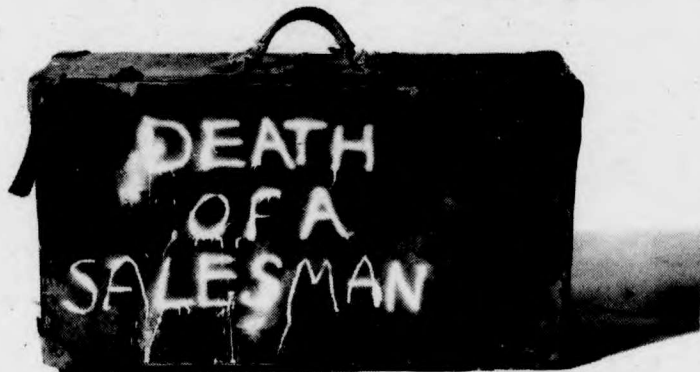
Critic Pete Welding has said, "Carter has complete command of his instrument." And his rich, round tone has been described by pianist Jaki Byard as "brilliant."

Rare films for buffs

Film historian William K. Everson brings a selection of rare films from the silent and early sound era to Osgoode Hall's Moot Court this weekend.

The films, from his private collection, will be screened free Friday evening and all day Saturday and Sunday. They include a live-action silent 1924 Peter Pan, Raoul Walsh's The Big Trail (John Wayne's first film), Hitchcock's 1930 Murder, and Lewis Milestone's 1931 The Front Page. Everson is the author of such books as The American Movie, The Bad Guys and (with George Fenin) The Western, and will briefly introduce each film.

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