

the ARTS

Butterflies are free

The late Henri Charriere's autobiographical novel 'Papillon' was a book of many facets.

It was an account of Charriere's existence in the French Penal colonies in Guiana, and while the casual glance would reveal a book dealing with Charriere's obsession with escape, a deeper glance would show that the underlying theme of Charriere's account dealt with the dignity and honour with which the prisoners had borne themselves in the face of brutal treatment and at times inhuman conditions.

Director Franklin J. Schaffner seems to have taken a casual glance at Charriere's penal life in the film 'Papillon', currently playing at the Westmount.

He has picked out a mold for himself, a mold of prisoner escaping inhuman conditions in prison, and used parts of the book to fit his mold, rather than molding his story to fit the book.

Now, in many cases this would be quite justified, but in a film like this, one must show all aspects of the lifestyle described.

There is no mention of the fact that if one had money, one could survive in relative comfort in the penal colony, with enough food, a soft job, and small luxuries like alcohol and tobacco.

I had the impression that Schaffner never really explained Charriere's obsession with escape.

He tried to show that prison life was not all roses, but he

didn't delve far enough.

Charriere wanted to escape because he wanted freedom, absolute freedom, he would not be content to use money and pressure to have a soft life.

Working with these initial handicaps, Schaffner has still managed to put together quite a creditable package.

Steve McQueen has finally brought it all together in a memorable performance which is the best of his career.

In playing the role of Henri Charriere, nicknamed Papillon because of his desire to be free, McQueen reaches deep and uses every device in the most important and most neglected book of acting: basics.

He is Papillon in every gesture, every motion, every speech. He generates magnificent screen presence. He lets you know that he is on the screen, and you had better notice.

If you are among those who shared my opinion that McQueen would never graduate from the type of standard role he played in films like 'The Getaway' and 'Bullitt', you will be surprised by his performance.

And what better accompaniment to so inspired an effort than a superlative performance from a man whose superlative performances are becoming a welcome habit?

Dustin Hoffman, in his role as the frail Louis Dega, the swindler who became a millionaire before being sentenced to French Guiana, establishes himself as perhaps the finest American actor since

You can't count on anything these days. There used to be a time when - even if your best friend was too busy to talk, or your dog refused to go for a walk with you - if all else failed you could always hop a bus and go downtown to see a movie.

Bogart.

Nobody ever played a role quite like Bogart did. I don't think anybody will ever play a role the way Hoffman does.

The man is absolutely amazing: toward the end Dega has started to go insane, he can no longer cope with the mental strains. The degeneracy of a mentally sound man into one on the verge of paranoia is a fascinating experience in cinema art when put in the hands of Hoffman.

Of course, mere motions do not make an actor's performance. The major assist comes from the screenplay.

And when the master of eloquent sensitivity and suffering, Dalton Trumbo, goes to work, the performers look very good indeed.

Able assisted by Lorenzo Semple. Trumbo has put together a screenplay with the right touches of sensitivity, irony, a dash of black humor, and a sprinkling of suffering.

Schaffner helps with crisp, workmanlike direction.

A host of professionally played cameo roles, with Robert Kaenenbergs' competent cinematography, round out the package of pluses.

The rather schmaltzy music score and Schaffner's reluctance to use connecting sequences between incidents stand out on the minus list.

When you add it all up, it seems a shame that Schaffner lacks the insight to make a magnificent motion picture out of magnificent material.

It is perhaps just as well Henri Charriere did not survive to see the film version of his life. He was kindly spared this final injustice.

However, despite the inept interpretation, the two outstanding performances of McQueen and Hoffman make the film worth seeing.

Satya Das

Chamber music

This "inconstancy of the times" seems to have struck the Edmonton Chamber Players whose performance at Wednesday evening's Chamber Music Society concert, revealed some instances of fine individual playing which were rendered indistinct by the ECP's inability to reach any more than a mediocre level of ensemble playing. What makes this so curious is that the evening's three string players (Lawrence Fisher, violin; Michael Bowie, viola; Claude Kenneson, cello) make up three-quarters of the U of A String Quartet, a group of musicians who have been proving to SUB Art Gallery audiences in Friday noon hour concerts that above all else they have a remarkably well developed ability to play together as one integral whole. It was this sense of unity which evaded the ECP Wednesday night. Since two of the other three members of the ECP (which included oboist Dayna Fisher, harpsichordist Brian Harris, and pianist Robert Stangeland) were keyboard players, part of the problem might have been in the age-old problem which string players have in playing with well-tempered instruments.

The concert opened with Georg Philippe Telemann's *Trio Sonata in B Flat*, a piece written for oboe, violin and cello with harpsichord continuo. The music, filled with the baroque ornamentation, was handled well by the musicians technically, but the phrasing amongst the string players seemed to be choppy and lacking in focus. Ms. Fisher's oboe playing in the opening movement marked *Vivace*, was well-executed and she displayed a good sense of balancing the penetrating timbre of her instrument with the string sound. However, in the last movement, an *Allegro*, she lacked some of the registral control that had made the opening two movements so pleasant and her movement through some of the very rapid passages, although accurate pitch-wise, were inconsistent in tonal quality. Brian Harris' harpsichord continuo resolution was at most rather bland and far too percussive. He failed to achieve any level of textural interest throughout the piece.

The most unfortunate performance of the evening was Claude Kenneson's reading of J.S. Bach's *Sonata in D Major*

for *Violincello and Harpsichord*, the second piece on the program. As was said earlier, string players have some difficulty playing with well-tempered instruments. If one has ever played piano, one knows that the same note (pitch) can have two names (sometimes three). That is to say that a pianist or harpsichordist reading a C-sharp on his or her score would play the same note as he or she would if he or she were to have read a D-flat instead. This does not hold true for a string player whose C-sharp (under ordinary playing conditions) is closer to a D-natural than a piano's C-sharp and whose D-flat is closer to a C-natural than the piano's D-flat. There is not a great deal of difference, but there is enough that the string player must make compensations in order that he or she may play in tune with the piano or harpsichord. It might be pure speculation to say that Kenneson failed to make adequate compensation for this difficulty, but there must be some excuse for the severe intonation problems which the Bach *Sonata* experienced at the hands of this cellist and harpsichordist Harris. Besides the pitch problems, the sound which Kenneson evoked from his instrument had an unpleasant, crusty flavor as opposed to the very mellow voice of which both it and his playing of it are capable.

The third piece on the program, Mozart's *Quartet for Oboe and Strings, K 370* heard the return of oboist Dayna Fisher and the three string players. Their work in this piece left one wishing that they had been able to knit the very fine threads of individual playing together. Here, as in the first oboe-string work, Ms. Fisher displayed a good musical sense of melodic line and passed through some very difficult, upper register passages with notable aplomb. Some intonation problems hampered the string players again, but their sense of phrasing in this piece did greater justice to Mozart's intentions. There were moments, particularly in violinist Lawrence Fisher's and violist Michael Bowie's respective solo passages, that proved that they very much belonged on the concert stage.

Johannes Brahms' *Quartet for Piano, Violin, Viola and Cello, Opus 60*, the final number of the program, received the most grateful treatment from the musicians of all the pieces played. The musicians began to work well together and the performance was not stilted by unfocused musicianship. It was also, ironically, the place where the finest of the evening's solo passages, by violist Michael Bowie, occurred. He projected, as well as Brahms' beautiful melody, a strength, warmth, and clarity of tone that is only rarely achieved, heard in that particular passage only for a blessed few measures. Robert Stangeland's piano playing in the piece was accurate, adequate, and yet unnecessarily terse and confined as opposed to the breadth which a Brahms piece required Fisher and Kenneson also turned in much more sensitive performances than they had in the preceding pieces.

The Brahms is well worth hearing; if you missed it, these same people will be playing it again Friday in the SUB Art Gallery at 12:00, providing they can get a piano into the gallery.

Country Wife at Stage 74

The next production at Studio Theatre will be the English Restoration comedy: *The Country Wife*, by William Wycherley. The play will open Wednesday, February 6, and run until Wednesday, February 20, with performances every night except Sundays, and including matinee performances on Saturday, February 9, and Saturday, February 16.

Wycherley's comedy of manners captures the brilliance, the sophistication and gaiety with which Restoration society played the game of life. The story of Horner's resourceful intrigues among the ladies is famous both for its blistering attack on social hypocrisy and

the witty, racy elegance of the telling. Director, John Terfloth, has assembled a cast that includes the members of the Stage 74 company, fresh from their very considerable success in Studio Theatre's Christmas presentation of the musical, *GODSPELL*. The designer is John Madill, a Drama Department Master's candidate. *THE COUNTRY WIFE* will be produced in the thrust theatre of the new Fine Arts Centre at 112 St. & 89 Ave., and the box office will open to the public on Wednesday, January 30th. Tickets will be available from Room 3-146 of the Fine Arts Centre, commencing on that date.

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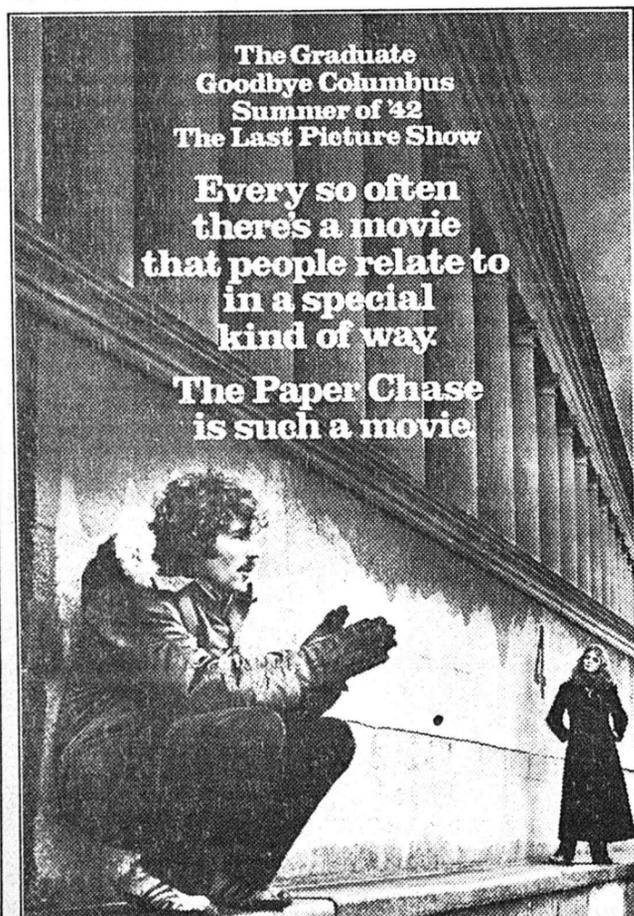
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