

Visually attractive

Subtlety meets shock in *Black Christmas*

By ALAN SHALON

When one film becomes monetarily successful, the trend in the commercial film world is to cash in on a good thing and produce more of the same. The most recently successful of the 'violence genre' would have to be *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Exorcist*, and sometime before that, *Psycho*.

It would seem logical that a film that combined the shock value of *A Clockwork Orange* and *The Exorcist* with Hitchcock's artful subtlety would be big box office. Director Bob Clark seems to have had that in mind when he approached *Black Christmas*. Whether or not he achieves big box office has yet to be seen.

Supposedly the film was shot in Toronto (yes, it is a Canadian film), but for some strange reason the police lieutenant has an American flag on his desk. I suppose the logic in that is that if the film is to make money, it must sell in the U.S. So except for a can of Labatts and the U of T setting, all reference to Canada is avoided.

Cinematically, *Black Christmas* is very good — but that may be all it has going for it.

The plot is very thin. Basically, it is about a mysterious psychotic who terrorizes a sorority house in an evil manner similar in style to *The Exorcist*. The fact that we never see his face is the thrust of the movie's ambiguous ending.

The action begins lightheartedly, giving the impression that it is a bit of a satire, much in the way of *A Clockwork Orange*. Blatantly lacking in *Black Christmas*, however, is that film's depth.

Although the characters are not very well developed, they are not caricatures or stereotypes. We are kept at a safe emotional distance from the victims. Olivia Hussey (of *Romeo and Juliet* fame) is very expressive, avoiding the clichéd fearful expressions and giving a very

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believable and natural performance.

Any real psychological insight into the murderer is avoided. But we do know that he wants help and it can be assumed from his muttered soliloquies that his problems stem from childhood.

Every time he kills someone, he makes an obscene phone call to the girls. This is also a subtle tip to the movie's ending.

Although *Black Christmas* has

similarities to many great pictures, it may never achieve the same recognition, mainly because the ideas and techniques are no longer original. It is strictly a suspense movie — if you're looking for gore, you won't find it in *Black Christmas*.

From a purely cinematic viewpoint, the scenes were handled quite artistically. The camera is used very effectively, as it moves in and out of rooms, following the characters

around, making us feel right in on the action.

The editing was the most outstanding feature of *Black Christmas* — the visual transitions from scene to scene were superb. In one sequence, when the housemother is pulled into the attic, we expect a gruesome death, but instead we only see a distorted face that looms at us. Actually it is someone peering through a window, her face distorted by the glass.

The most obvious Hitchcock technique is used in the sound editing. A scream which is drowned out by the sound in the following scene (such as the whistle of a train) is a frequently used device in the movie, yet never loses its full impact.

Black Christmas is a visually attractive film, which, while it will not "make your skin crawl," is still a worthwhile film to see.

Seduction of Mimi weds farce and comment

By BOB McBRYDE

Sexual farce and political commentary make strange bedfellows. In *The Seduction of Mimi*, opening soon at Cinecity, the two disparate modes, if not compatible during the preliminaries, come together in a rousing climax. Both partners contribute equally to a successful marriage.

Mimi is a 1972 film made by Lina Wertmuller, a Fellini protégée whose work won her the best-director award at Cannes in 1972. It concerns a Sicilian labourer, Mimi, whose life is infinitely complicated by the interrelated lures of the Mafia, the Communists, and the flesh. His Pyrrhic victory at the film's conclusion leaves one with a taste of bitterness and whimsy which underlies the furious farce of the plot.

The title character, played by Giancarlo Grannini, is forced from his hometown by the Mafioso whom

he refuses to endorse in the rigged local elections. Leaving behind his frigid wife, Mimi makes a new life as a metal worker in Turin, where he not only becomes a somewhat half-baked Communist, but also falls madly in love with a beautiful Trotskyite virgin, portrayed by Marilena Melato. Forced to return to Sicily by the ubiquitous mob, he finds that his estranged wife is pregnant by another man. Mimi throws off his recently acquired civilized principles and plots revenge — whereupon the fun begins in earnest.

He seduces his wife's lover's enormous mate, whose grotesque bulk is vividly revealed to both Mimi and the audience in scenes of visual assault. Through this act of instinctive vin-

dictiveness, the director implies that Mimi himself is seduced by the ancient code of "honour" which has left his culture prone to the ravages of sexism, industrial exploitation and concomitant anxiety. Thus, although Mimi conquers his rival, he loses his mistress and his son, who depart at the film's conclusion.

In *Mimi*, Wertmuller has created a character in whose actions she is able to dissect the malaise of Italian society, without allowing this operation to become painfully ponderous.

Mimi is involved in too many slapstick incidents, including operatic courtships, gangland in-

vasions, general procreativity, and divorce Italian style, to become bogged down in political details. But if the film's more serious undertones are sometimes lost in the chuckles, they become clearer in retrospect. The political implications of Mimi's actions are subtly evoked, and the film is much richer for its director's reticence.

Wertmuller has shown herself as a director with a sharp eye for scenes of mime and high camp, shot in wonderfully clear colours. Her characters are perfectly cast, and their performances characterized by gusto and bounce — as is the entire film.

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