

# entertainment

## Wertmuller muddles

By Michelina Trigianni

The snag in Lina Wertmuller's new film is that we must tolerate the tidbits fed to its American audience and accept from an inventive director a mediocre film which has been chiselled acceptable for the U.S. market.

*The End of the World in our Usual Bed in a Night Full of Rain* opened twelve days ago at the Hollywood Theatre. It stars Wertmuller's favourite leading man, Giancarlo Giannini (*The Seduction of Mimi*, *Swept Away*, *Seven Beauties*), and American actress Candice Bergen (*Carnal Knowledge*, *The Wind and the Lion*).

The plot is elementary. A man and a woman — he an Italian journalist, she the daughter of a rich American — meet, fall in love, he pursues, she succumbs and marriage follows. We are presented with flashbacks, projections, incidents and the scenery of a ten-year relationship.

They meet in a tiny town in Calabria in 1968 — the height of the student demonstrations in Europe. Why they are both in this particular village is never clearly revealed. Giannini probably lives there. Bergen's presence remains a mystery. Quite possibly, Wertmuller could not come up with a feasible explanation of the encounter. What is important to American audiences is that Bergen, as the liberated American woman, disrupts a local holiday and is then saved from a mad crowd by her Latin-lover.

He whisks her away to a haunting, medieval church and this

Romanesque setting houses dialogue indicative of the rest to follow in the movie:

"You Italians are all crazy," she says.

"What do you think when you hear the word love," he retorts.

"I think you're a schmuck," she answers.

Communism, Catholicism and the Viet Nam war are also debated while he attempts a speedy seduction in a confessional.

Of course, he fails with an American woman and we realize at this point that theirs will be a serious relationship. He follows her to San Francisco, seeks her out in a black Volkswagen and finally triumphs in its red interior during an evening downpour.

It is hard to swallow Wertmuller's accompanying morsel of Americana — a friend of Giannini's chanting *Singing in the Rain* with an Italian accent.

Of course, the director may be poking fun at American society but she does not carry it through the length of the film. This results in a general ambiguity. The scenery, the characters, the theme — all fluctuate between the old and this new Wertmuller.

Whereas flashbacks reinforced the unifying theme of survival in *Seven Beauties*, and the validity of the political dialogue in *Swept Away* is exemplified by the island sojourn, in *A Night Full of Rain*, Wertmuller throws all into the arena, adds a pinch of American salt, shakes well and emerges with a muddled version of her earlier films.

It is just what we expected with the signing of a three-picture contract to Warner Brothers.



Estrogen and Testosterone (Ingrid Birker and Alan Sinclair) look irked as Lucky (Sarah McCallum) studies them. Proffo (Peter Rosa) looks on, clearly in command in this scene from *Waiting For Parot*, the next Cabaret, written and directed by Alan Fox. *Parot* plays in Mac Hall Thursday and Friday at 9 and 10:30 and is licensed with Free admission.

## Passport

by Brad Meslin



This is the third installment of *Passport*, the tales of travel and adventure from Excalibur's only roving reporter, Brad Meslin.

When we last left Brad, he was in Afghanistan, encountering illegal intoxicants and bumpy bus-rides among other things.

We catch up with him now many months and many thousands of miles later in Sri Lanka [formerly Ceylon]. The column we received was dated January 24, and Meslin told us that it was the sixth in his series, although it was only the third we had seen.

Somewhere between Afghanistan and Toronto, three of Brad's columns are collecting dust, and we may never see them. If we do, we'll print them, and Brad can fill us in on what happened between the Middle East and the Far East, and a few travel tips for those who might want to try a similar journey.

Meanwhile, back in Sri Lanka...

A black dorsal fin drifted slowly past me, perhaps 30 yards away, while directly beneath my stomach, a clam opened its three-foot jaws as an approaching wave pushed me safely out of reach. Through my mask, I could see spiny black sea urchins ledged comfortably among the coral, waiting for lunch to swim by.

I felt like I was watching Jacques Cousteau diving in some exotic part of the world, but for a change, all the colours and textures and sounds were real. This was Ceylon, and I was diving in the Indian Ocean. Having just come from five months in India, Ceylon (or Sri Lanka, as it's now called) seems like a tropical paradise. Eight different kinds of bananas grow by the side of the road, tall coconut palms dominate every view, street vendors sell fresh-peeled pineapples for 3c, and the sea is never more than a few miles away. In Sri Lanka, it's hard to spend a dollar a day, even if you surf, skin dive, and eat like a king.

Being about six degrees from the equator, in the middle of the tropics, things are taken for granted which would certainly surprise most Canadians.

Ever look out your bedroom window and see a 12-foot tall elephant dragging a coconut palm down the road? How about having a 40-lb. chimpanzee jump on your back and grab a banana from your hand? No? Well, when's the last time you saw a 13-year-old boy playing a flute with two king cobras rising out of a wicker basket in accompaniment?

I know this may sound like a glorified travelogue, but it's really true, and for anyone looking for a place that's definitely out of the ordinary and still largely un-

## Playing Cousteau in Ceylon

discovered, this is it.

For me, it's a great place to relax, especially after spending the last two months motorcycling through India. Although one sees much more of a country like India on a bike than by public transportation, it can at times be very gruelling. While our Enfield 350cc bikes took the strain of 4000 miles of Indian roads (and drivers) beautifully, our bodies complained often. So, since the introduction to this column says something to the effect that it should offer suggestions to potential travellers, I suggest to anyone who may consider this idea that they be in very good physical condition. If you're not, you soon will be!

Seeing the country by motorcycle brought us face to face with the "real" India, the India of mud huts, of teams of oxen pulling rice-filled carts down dusty highways; of busy outdoor markets filled with thousands of talkative peasants, and also of huge modern skyscrapers of educated and articulate businessmen, teachers, labourers, students, and shopkeepers, and of mile after mile of fertile, unpopulated land.

It seemed to me that India today has everything *except* what we visualize it to be through the media. India is not a poor country, nor are its people starving. While its average standard of living is undeniably lower than Canada's, it is growing and modernizing much faster than we are prepared to give it credit for.

I get the feeling that India, as the largest representative of the "Third World" is, intentionally or by chance, leading the west to believe that its degree of progress and number of assets are considerably less than we would like to think. Or perhaps it is the leaders of western governments who, knowing the truth, are not prepared to tell their electorates that the time is fast approaching when the so-called "developing nations" will demand their fair share of the world's wealth. I guess no politician wants to become the scapegoat when the shit hits the fan.

For me it was a fascinating country — I could have easily spent a couple of years there and still not seen half of it properly. But there's so much more to do before the money runs out. For the time being, learning to surf (impossible), skin-diving for the rare 300-lb. tortoise that inhabit these waters (improbable) and stuffing myself on huge shark steaks for 20c each (incredible), is requiring all my energy!

## Serpent's Egg is befuddling Ingmar and Dino a poor team



By Colin Smith

Ingmar Bergman's first American film, *The Serpent's Egg* (produced by Dino Di Laurentiis), is bound to befuddle a few heads.

Bergman aficionados will find it hard to take, what with its atypical directorial touches and uneasy welding of Bergman - De Laurentiis trademarks. Fans of traditional drama will find it a straight-laced reworking of *Cabaret* with odd, incongruous fringes. To just about anyone, it will be a major source of irritation.

*The Serpent's Egg*, simply, is a problem. Bergman has concocted a horrific little drama about the coming of age of Nazism in 1920's Berlin that, in its best moments, strikes out with visceral power and that, in its worst passages, betrays the strain of a director uncertain about his material.

The plot, for 122 minutes of film, is pretty slim. Abel Rosenberg (David Carradine), an American Jew in the circus, is in Berlin between engagements. In the opening scene he discovers his brother Max (his partner) dead of violent suicide in their dingy hotel room. He gets a thorough going-over by a police inspector (Gert Froebe) who suspects him of a rash of other unusual deaths in the immediate neighbourhood. He develops a ragged dependence on his brother's widow Manuella (Liv Ullmann) and begins living with her. Skulking around in the background is a creepy doctor (Heinz Bennet); an acquaintance of both, he is tied up in some ominous experiments at a local clinic where Manuella eventually begins working. The straggling storyline finally reaches a decently

grotesque peak with the revelations of clinical atrocities.

There is much in the treatment of this that can be objected to. The script is full of melodramatic touches that cheapen the film, notably the denouement. The cabaret sequences border on superfluous, and there is a warehouse scene that's as repulsive as it is extraneous. There is an unnecessary commentary. Overall there is a lack of integration.

On top of that there are a couple of devices that will prevent any audience from cuddling up to it. The protagonist, Abel, is a sulky, stupid young man who spends the entire film throwing fits, frequenting cathouses and getting drunk every night with whatever money he can get his hands on. The fact that he's dramatically correct makes him no easier to manage. This is compounded by Bergman's use of restless camera movement, quick zooms, and cutting on motions that

define well the transience of the time, the feeling of things whipping out of control. This frenetic styling also exhausts the cast's efforts at making impressions and puts barriers between the screen and the audience. A distant picture, *The Serpent's Egg* has to be tunnelled into to be appreciated at all.

There are some elements more easily worth noting. Froebe and Bennet contribute fine shadings to slim roles, and Ullmann holds her own, occasionally rising above the tawdry melodramatics of her character. Caradine, to give the man his due, is not completely unwatchable as Abel, but neither is he at ease with his role. Sven Nykvist's camerawork is richly atmospheric, and the images of violence (the disembowelling of a horse lying in the streets; a man having his face bashed into pulp on a tabletop) underscore the horrors of the age brought to nasty fruition in the ending sequence.

## Breakthrough's out

By Rhonda Salsberg

*Breakthrough's* financial situation often resembles the Perils of Pauline — at the last minute, someone saves them from ruin.

This time, it's the York Women's Centre. On the basis of a \$300 grant to be given to them by the Women's Centre, *Breakthrough* printed their current issue, which may very well be their last.

*Breakthrough* is planning for a summer issue, and any issues after that are an uncertainty. Even the summer issue may not be produced, since *Breakthrough* has no funds at the moment. College councils, cut in their own budgets, have cut back their funding to *Breakthrough*, and some have ceased funding altogether.

The current issue of *Breakthrough* has a statement by Women Against Violence Against Women, and an article on the Toronto Rape Crisis Centre, as well as photographs, poetry, and book reviews. It is available from Harbinger, Information York, the CYSF office, and *Excalibur*, as well as many other places on campus.

Anyone who picks up the February issue should hold on to it. Unfortunately, it may become a collector's item.