

Your entertainment editor suggests...

T.O. films. I've seen them. Here's what to avoid.

by David McCaughna

This Christmas season brought on a veritable avalanche of new films to Toronto theatres. Many more films than it would be humanly possible to sit through. And the majority of these films are obviously of such inferior quality that they don't warrant any attention. In this onslaught are a few that are really good.

But, firstly, brief mention of two worthless efforts:

And the novel, was a pretty funny send-up of a lot of things, but primarily of the pornographic novel. It has been a sort of under-the-counter classic for some time before it was given conventional distribution a few years ago. With a little imagination it could have been a very funny movie. But, alas, it is not. There are only three or four laughs in the whole thing. The satire has been stretched, thinned and lost in translation from the novel to the screen. The whole thing, with its large collection of recognizable faces, and posh settings is too overblown and luxurious to contain any of the spirit of the original.

'Charly', which presumes to be very human, understanding and significant is a sort of science-fiction comedy that descends to absolute absurdity and ridiculousness. It is about a moron who, thanks be to an amazing operation, becomes a super-genius and then returns to moronity. It is based upon a novel called Flowers For Algernon (Algernon being the mouse that presents a challenge to the moron. Cliff Robertson isn't bad as the moron in question.)

John Frankenheimer's film of Bernard Malamud's novel The Fixer has some very good moments but in the long run is too long and melodramatic and seems to lose sight of itself. It concerns a Jew wrongly accused of committing ritual murder in turn-of-the-century Russia and his subsequent fight for justice. Alan Bates as the fixer is very good. If there were ever a film that did not call for colour this one is it; it would probably be far better and certainly much more believable without the lush colour.

'The Lion In Winter' is an enjoyable, vaguely historical film. It is all about family bickering in

the royal household of Henry II. Henry, his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine, and their sons battle over the future of the throne. The screenplay is quite witty and often very modern which makes the film quite unbelievable but always highly entertaining. Against remarkably rough sets Katherine Hepburn and Peter O'Toole as the squabbling twosome give extremely good performances. Much like that other intelligent 'historical drama' type of film, 'Becket', 'The Lion In Winter' is quite artless but never boring.

The Beatles' 'Yellow Submarine' is undoubtedly the most enjoyable film to open in the Christmas period, in fact, it is the happiest and most original film to come around in many months. Beautifully animated, this cartoon is full of art nouveau, pop-op art decor, Beatle songs (vintage and new), and a totally tongue-in-cheek joyous plot. The Beatles save Pepperland from the clutches of the Blue Meanies and promote love, optimism, and happiness in general. It is one of those rare films that I could sit through a dozen times and always be enthralled.

'Faces' is the best of the films to come to us in the past weeks. It is an above-ground type of underground film made on a minute budget but containing much more than huge, multi-million dollar films ever can. John Cassavetes, the actor who wrote and directed 'Faces' says of it: "The whole point of 'Faces' is to show how few people really talk to each other."

We are in familiar surroundings in this film, the upper-middle class, moneyed Los Angeles suburbanites of 'The Graduate'. But where Mike Nichols merely skimmed the surface in his film Cassavetes gets down to the grim horror and shallowness of a couple who are not able to communicate with each other. It is a harrowing film which many people find unbearable. 'Faces' shows evidence of being made on \$40,000 with its rather crude photography and unsophisticated shots but it is closer to mainstream of what cinema should be about than any movie I've seen this year aside from 'Weekend'. Where 'Bonnie and Clyde' was the 'definitive' American film of last year 'Faces' is the one of this year.

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