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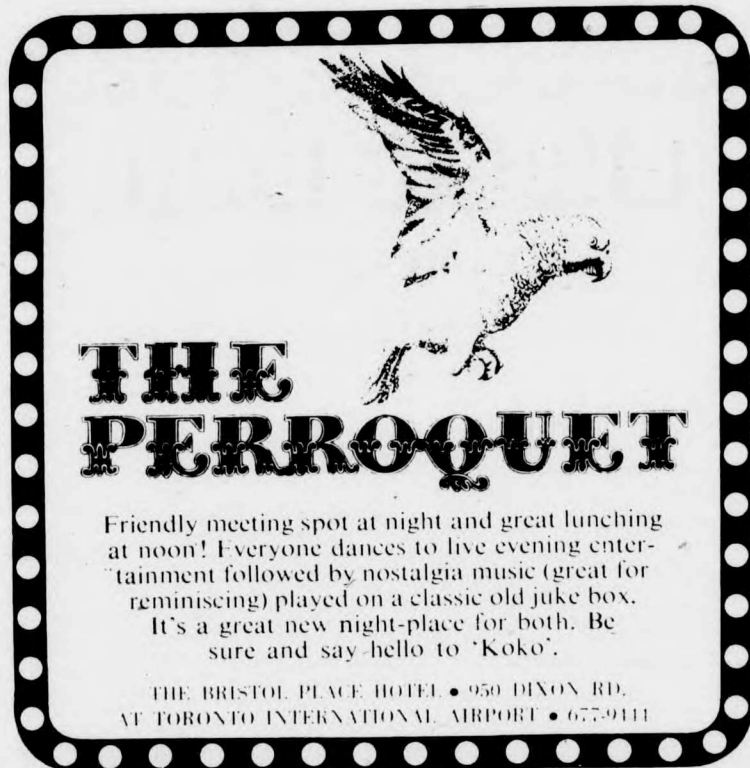
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Up Blazing Saddles

Mel Brooks derides again

By DION McGRATH

The western must be still alive; otherwise it couldn't bleed so profusely.

Mel Brooks' latest film, *Blazing Saddles*, is an affectionate — well, more or less affectionate — take-off on every cliché and convention in the history of the genre, with sidelong swipes at performances as wide ranging as Dean Martin in *Rio Bravo*, Alfonso Bedoya in *Treasure of Sierra*

Top animator at film board reviews work

"If there is such a thing as pure movie, be sure that McLaren has been one of its greatest exponents."

This opinion by the late John Grierson was in reference to film animator and artist Norman McLaren, and McLaren fans will have a choice to watch a retrospective of his films, introduced by the man himself, tonight at 7:30 p.m. in Curtis LH-L, courtesy of the film department.

McLaren, originally from Scotland, has associated for over 30 years with Canada's National Film Board, as well as working and teaching in India and China. His experiments in animated film and synthetic sound opened the doors for Canadian film in many countries, especially from the late 1940s, when the cine-clubs of France, Belgium, Italy and Scandinavia became familiar with his work. His innovations in film form and animation have been widely copied in current methods of animation, film graphic design and television commercial techniques.

Though wholly and individualists, McLaren worked not in isolation, but with a small team of collaborators, musicians and designers. Wit, speed, fantasy and invention are the hallmarks of his films.

"Movement is the guts of the film," McLaren has remarked, and to this end he has used camera-less animation, synthetic sound hand-drawn on the film negative, and explorations into the field of human and abstract movement on the screen.

Madre, and (really out of left field) Boris Karloff in *Tower of London*.

The story, such as it is, deals with the West's first black sheriff (Cleavon Little), but exists only as a line on which to hang outrageous gags.

BAD TASTE

As always, Brooks gives new meaning to the words "bad taste": a group of cowboys sit around the campfire eating beans and farting non-stop and the townspeople greet their new sheriff with terms of endearment like "Up yours, Nigger!"

But the temptation to quote gags must be resisted. The best ones have already been quoted by every reviewer in North America and, in any case, quotes give no idea of the pacing, which is the real source of the film's effect. If a joke doesn't work, there's another one along before you've had time not to laugh.

Brooks appears in three roles: as an old-timer who speaks "authentic frontier gibberish", as an Indian chief who speaks Yiddish, and as Governor William G. Le Petomane. Mention should also be made of Gene Wilder as a gunfighter-turned-alcoholic, Madeline Kahn as a vitriolically funny parody of Marlene Dietrich, and Alex Karras as the neandertough Mongo

("Don't go shooting Mongo; you'll only make him mad"), who knocks out horses with a single blow.

A number of reviewers have complained that the invention flags at the film's end, but I don't think this is the case; the problem is more complex, and inherent in the nature of the film.

OLD COMEDIES

If we examine the great comedies of, for example, Chaplin or Keaton, we find that they operate on a dramatic, as well as on a farcical, level; we really care about whether the clown-hero gets the girl.

But the contemporary cool school of comedy is based on non-involvement. And the fact that we never believe in the story or the characters, let alone care about them, makes it impossible for the film to rise to a climactic emotional peak.

Paradoxically, because the audience response is innocent of any complexity, it also becomes impossible for the film to rise to a climactic comic peak; it can only peter out. This, I think, is the source of the dissatisfaction many viewers feel with the ending.

Which is not to deny that *Blazing Saddles* is a very good comedy. Merely to explain why it's not a great one.

No streak, just a strip

By SHELLEY RABINOVITCH

Nine naked men traipse on stage at the Global Village theatre. No, it's not a steak: it's *Tubstrip*, a new comedy by A. J. Kronengold, centering on the antics of nine homosexuals in a New York City steam bath.

Although the initial reaction is one of surprise and shock as the leads jump out of a deep bathtub-pool stark naked, the actual script is of such high calibre that one actually remembers the performers by their faces, rather than by some other part of their anatomy.

In the tradition of Neil Simon's situation comedies, the strangest complications arise. The aging movie-producer-drag-queen finally realizes that he has a punishment complex, just as he spies his analyst in full

leather sadist harness, running around a corner in search of his masochistic slave who is 'servicing' someone else in the men's showers.

Perhaps the highlight of the play comes when the masochist (Richie) is handcuffed to the pool table in the centre of the stage, with an obscenity written on his back in Reddi-Whip and a tulip (plastic) stuck up his rear end. When the proprietor asks where the keys are to unlock the cuffs, Richie snorts and lifts his hands up.

"Stupid, you don't need keys for these. I mean, what if there were a fire or something?" And so it goes.

A biting, sometimes tender play, *Tubstrip* finishes its run at the Global Village Theatre, 17 St. Nicholas St., on Sunday, March 24. Tickets are \$5, \$6 and \$7 on weeknights, and \$1 more on the weekend.

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