

# Female female impersonators impersonating men

Movie Review: *Victor/Victoria*  
by Glenn Walton

*Victor/Victoria* is the funniest screen comedy in years.

The premise is a natural for the genre: Paris, 1934. Down-and-out singer (Julie Andrews) meets out-of-work night club entertainer Toddy (Robert Preston), who becomes her manager. One day it rains, and Victoria's clothes shrink, so she puts on some duds left in Toddy's closet by a gigolo friend of his. Presto! Inspiration strikes, and before long, Victoria is the toast of Paris - as a female impersonator. That is, onstage she pretends to be a man imitating a woman, offstage she's a woman pretending to be a man.

Enter King (James Garner), a Chicago mobster, who is captivated by Victoria's stage act, but is appalled to discover the (apparently) awful truth about her/him/her. He is immediately suspicious, and seeks to unmask the pretender. They get together eventually, of course, but only after a steadily escalating series of misunderstandings, plot twists, and night club brawls (everything else, for that matter, that Hollywood has ever put into a screwball comedy.)

The happy thing about *Victor/Victoria* is that it all works. Besides being easily superior to standard film comedy these days, the film is the best yet to come out of a long-standing artistic collaborative effort that has existed for two decades.

Sometime in the '60's, Blake



Blake Edwards' *Victor/Victoria*, a comedy about confused sexual identity in 1930's Paris stars Julie Andrews in top form, take your pick.

Edwards, director of the Pink Panther films, met the wholesome star of *Mary Poppins* and *The Sound of Music*, and after her divorce, married her. The union has been of utmost mutual advantage. Edwards, in a long series of elegantly-styled films, has become the best and (almost) only producer of adult comedies.

Besides the Panther series (soon to be continued, with a replacement for the late Peter Sellers), he made a film about male menopause called *10*, using his matured and suddenly

beautiful wife, a musical actor called Dudley Moore, and a magnificently engineered nymphet by the name of Bo Derek. The press, and the ad department of Edwards' studio, went all agog at Derek's physical attributes, and she became the focus of a film which had a serious message about the sort of fantasy lives we all lead.

Edwards followed with *S.O.B.* ("Standard Operation Bullshit"), a bitter satire on the film business, partly the result of the treatment Edwards received on *'10*. However, public comment

was all about Andrews' celebrated topless scene.

Now, in *Victor/Victoria*, Edwards, using many of the actors, actresses, technicians and crew from previous films, is satirizing stereotypes - straight and gay - and the screen's use of them. Edwards' statement is conventional enough: our common humanity is what counts, not sexual preference. Edwards, however, refuses to whitewash his characters as the recent *Making Love* did; instead he draws on quirks and idiosyncracies of his figures to give his film a richness of observation and detail seldom seen in films.

Scene after scene looks almost familiar, but then is satirized, Edwards gently mocking our expectations while extracting the greatest entertainment value out of them. Lesley Ann Warren performs a Big Spender number as King's blond moll, Norma, but it is genuinely tacky, right down to the pubic hair peeking out from her glitzy costume. "I bet the right woman could straighten you out" Norma says to Preston, who touchés back "Yes, I bet the right woman could straighten you out too." When Andrews is threatening to rape Norma, we're not quite sure who is who and what is what, but we've had a whale of a time getting there. Oh yes, there's a Clousseau-type inspector too, who is the object of all manner of catastrophes, man-made and natural,

as well as the most photogenic cockroach ever to wreak havoc among the clientele of a restaurant.

All the actors are admirable, but, then again, Edwards has an unerring instinct for their comic possibilities. James Garner is a pleasant surprise as the uptight macho mobster who learns to live and let live, and Warren gives us the definitive dumb (and dyed) blond, a statuesque irritant to human dignity. Andrews, as usual, is an adept comedienne and a spot-on singer. Her embodiment of Victor, her pert face transformed into a landscape of planes and angles, a most androgenous and startlingly beautiful image. It will be interesting to see what roles Edwards will write for her in the future, now that she's ditched the goody-two-shoes act and become a Mensch.

Most magnificent in the film is Robert Preston, who plays the most endearing gay character on the screen to date. Preston's craggy face and bulldog body defy cosmetic transformation, but his soul is beautiful, his body an instrument of nuance. He sings and dances, acts and camps with a sense of humour and humanity that is at the heart of Edward's films. Oh, and he gets his man; one more charitable and gracious note indicating that the gays have arrived, and films are all that richer for it. The audience applauded at the end - when was the last time you remember that happening in today's cinema?

## Whatever happened to rock'n'roll?

by Michael Brennan

Halifax may have a lot of nice trees and such, but it sure doesn't have many rock and roll bands. Of course, there are numerous groups playing the pub and bar circuit, plus those lucky enough to get a booking at the Misty Moon or Palace as a back-up band. But a good 99 per cent of them are dull, meaningless copy bands who care little about the gut passion of rock and roll and have no serious artistic intentions.

It seems Halifax produces nothing but slick, uninspired blues- and folk-based musicians, many of whom are quite competent, but most of whom are devoid of creativity, spontaneity and originality. As harsh a judgement as that may seem, I believe in general that it's true and for most of the arts, Halifax is really quite dead.

What culture does exist in Nova Scotia or the Maritimes, of which Halifax is the economic center, has come almost solely from the rural areas like Cape Breton. Sydney, for example, has produced many more relevant and original bands than Halifax ever will. I don't like *Sam Moon*'s music, but I respect him, and *Matt Minglewood* (some of whose music I like) I respect even more. Both these men - in particular, Minglewood - have worked hard to develop a style and music of their own, as well as to gain recognition.

Rock and roll isn't completely dead in Halifax but it does lead a low-profile, underground life. Nevertheless, there are a few groups worthwhile mentioning and deserving some attention. Seeing a young band rocking away with passion and purpose in a small local club can be an inspiring experience.

Rock and Roll is really the most important art form today. *Elvis*, the *Beatles* and the *Sex Pistols* will each go down in history and no doubt be remembered long after many of today's so-called "legitimate" artists are forgotten. The best rock has always been born out of garages; out of individuals to whom rock and roll means almost everything. Many of the other important arts have been institutionalized into schools where art is learned, intellectualized and very often killed off.

The art becomes a craft, an artifice which no longer has any direct connection with the life or reality which bore it. Rock and roll, however, is always discovered on one's own.

How many supposedly learned people have tried or cared to analyze rock and roll? In the first place, many think it too low a form, and in the second place, anyone who's ever intellectualized rock sounds silly. Take a *Ramones* quote for example: "I met her at the Burger King/We fell in love by the soda machine." That

really sounds dumb and stupidly adolescent. But when Joey Ramone sings it, it's nothing short of fantastic.

It's the *Ramones*' sort of raw energy that is so lacking in Halifax.

But as I said, there are a few exceptions. The Art College has had a few dances this year and practically every band was solid, energetic and honest. *No Frills* and the *Morons* (I believe that was their name) stand out. Both are drum-bass-and guitar trios who play a blend of ska, rock

and power pop that is great for dancing.

There are two traditional bands playing the bar circuit who also deserve some attention - *The Heartbeats* and the *Water St. Blues Band*. *Water St.*, headed by Joe Murphy, are a blues band as true as one could be. The *Heartbeats* play archetypal rock in the vein of early rockers. Again, they lack a strong individual force, but their playing makes up for anything lost. Though they've now broken up, *Nobody's Heroes*

were a great group, certainly the most exciting to emerge in this area in a long while. They were pure rock and roll passion. Two group members are trying to form a new band, so look out for that.

If, during the spring and summer, you discover a great young band, tell someone about them. No matter how undisciplined or thrown together they may seem, they need some sincere support. The passion of amateur bands is the heart of what rock and roll is all about.

## Could have more rooms

by Michael DeLory

Have you ever been really upset when a reviewer spoils a movie you may have wanted to see by telling virtually the whole plot before you realize what you've read? Well, not this time.

*Deathtrap* is a classic thriller, with a plot so twisted you have to follow every minute carefully in order to keep track of what's happening. Even if I told you how it ended, you wouldn't know what I was talking about until the last few minutes and even then maybe not.

The acting in *Deathtrap* is superb. While in most thrillers the characters are two-dimensional, Michael Caine, as

the failed playwright, makes you believe that he would kill for another hit. The other characters are just as convincing, and their actions flow with the kind of people they are.

The one serious drawback with *Deathtrap* is that most of it occurs in one room. *Deathtrap* was originally a play, hence the single set, but the movie's background was barely extended beyond the back verandah and the bedroom upstairs. Shifting a few scenes to other parts of the house would have made a difference. By the end of the movie I was getting extremely tired of Sidney Bruhl's study.

There is one other hangover from the stage. Whenever Dyan Cannon screams, she seems to be projecting not only her voice, but also her expressions, to the back row. Someone should have told her that subtlety is the main thing in movie acting.

*Deathtrap* is an excellent movie which will hold your attention from start to finish. You may have to sit down for a while afterward to let yourself catch up with the happenings in the last few minutes, but it will be worth it. Not only the ending, but everything after the first fifteen minutes will surprise you.