

Lights, Camera, Action!

A western for fun, action, history

By LLOYD CHESLEY

"Of all the outlaws of the Old West, Butch Cassidy was the most likable." This is the way that Butch Cassidy, last of the old-time desperadoes, leader of the Wild Bunch, and founder of Hole-In-The-Wall, is introduced in *The Pictorial History of the Wild West*. And for all its inherent ridiculousness, that statement is probably true.

Butch Cassidy and The Sundance Kid (both are assumed names) lead a large band of robbers in that most uncomfortable era for bad-guys, the turn of the century. His Wild Bunch was not The Wild Bunch of the recent film of that name, but both faced the same problem: the rapid spread of civilization that was putting them out of business and making their extinction more than imminent. Butch and the Kid are the stars of the group, as they are the stars of the film (a minimum of time is spent on the others), and they were great friends with one common bond: laziness. Why, they even quit rustling because the work was too hard. Both are good-natured, funny, fully heterosexual, rugged individualists who happen to steal. They share a beautiful belle named Etta Place (no fooling) and a love of luxury. They don't kill.

Actually, as the opening title of the film says, "most of what follows is true" and that is one of the film's great sources of interest. The mood of the times is presented well, that strange time between jeans and slouch hats and high-collared shirts and derbies. There are the open plains and a New York City just learning the meaning of the word speed.

Finding things too tough in the States what with a "super posse" after them and their gang all broken up and dead and stuff, Butch and the Kid take Etta and head for, of all places, Bolivia (this, too, is true) where they hire out to a mining company as payroll guards after finding that further robberies there are difficult because of the language barrier and that the posse is still on their trail, determined to kill them. Nevertheless it is in Bolivia that they make their last stand.

You can watch westerns for the fun, for the action, or for the history. Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid have all three. The story is filled with the great standbys of action, humor and love, all nicely blended and seasoned to the right degree of each. George Roy Hill directs from a highly literate script by William Goldman, showing a style that is none too original, but competent and not too obtrusive (it seems that in order to show their hand, directors today are overstating their camera so much that it becomes pretentious and offensive; perhaps instead of trying to develop THE style of the sixties, they should try to concentrate on their own personal styles).



Butch Cassidy (left) (Paul Newman) and the Sundance Kid (Robert Redford) shoot it out in Bolivia.

Yes Virginia, Edith Head still lives and she designed some realistic and colourful outfits to help the mood of the film. There is more realism shown in the sets and the common folk who roam through the film (like the town where no one is brave enough, or dumb enough, to join a posse to follow the Bunch) and in the value of human lives, higher in this film than in many recent films, and in the violence which doubles as an aid to some really exciting action sequences.

Speaking of realism, there has been a lot of talk about the Burt Bacharach music, which seemed more suitable to a film about campus lovers than Pampas badmen. Well, at one time it must have seemed like a nice idea to someone, but it just doesn't work. It is one thing to have Dustin Hoffman putt off to UCLA with Simon and Garfunkel strumming away behind him, but this type of thing is just too out of place behind a horseback chase, or even a playful love scene with Etta and Butch. It tries to be relevant, but it is only obtrusive and self-consciously cute. If you will excuse a pun, it is the one bad note in a good movie.

But in this film it is the stars that carry the work. Katherine Ross (ex-The Graduate) is Etta, and handles the role intelligently and sensitively. But it is Butch and the

Kid, Paul Newman and Robert Redford (ex-The Chase, Barefoot in the Park) who are the whole show. Newman, determined to throw off 10 years of type casting, plays Butch as friendly but kinda dumb with guts for danger but not for killing. Instead it is Redford, that rarest of entities, a handsome guy that can act and act well, that plays the Kid, a tough guy in the most Bogart sense, ready for anything, the existentialistic hero that is the highest glory of American herodom. Playing off one another, they develop a complete, rather touching relationship that makes the nicest of the bad-guys something like brothers.

Etta Place told the boys that she was totally willing to love them, but that she would not watch them die — that was one scene she wanted to miss.

And that is the position that the film places us in too. We are glad to share in their adventures, but we don't want to watch them at the end. So, when they are finally pinned down by the Bolivian army, or at least half of it, we are mercifully spared the fatal attack. Instead their image turns to a browned tintype and we are left with a picture of two dashing, funny guys, the last Don Quixotes of the West, born too late and gaining some measure of immortality for it.

Clap Bored

| | Direct. | Script. | Photog. | Music |
|--|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| Easy Rider (New Yorker) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| Midnight Cowboy (Hyland) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| A Married Couple (Cinecity) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| The Sterile Cuckoo (Towne Cinema) | *** | *** | *** | *** |
| Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (Hollywood) | *** | ** | *** | ** |
| Oh! What a Lovely War (Hollywood) | *** | ** | *** | ** |
| The Battle of Britain (Carlton) | ** | ** | *** | ** |
| Take the Money and Run (The Cinema) | ** | ** | *** | ** |
| Paint Your Wagon | ** | ** | *** | ** |
| Sullivan's Travels (Cinematheque) | *** | *** | *** | ** |

*** Clap ** Ambivalent * Bored

Allen King: Film history in the making

By DAN MERKUR

Allan King has finally hassled his way through the censor board, and his new movie, *A Married Couple*, opens tonight at Cinecity. Like his earlier work, *Warrendale*, it's a non-fiction narrative film. A documentary it isn't.

Part of King's genius is that he has applied to the "documentary" every art of narrative known to the cinema. The only way you can tell it isn't a standard Hollywood feature is that the camera is hand-held and there is no musical score. In Hollywood the unions wouldn't let you get away with it.

The other major part of King's talent is his ability to pick subjects that are engrossing. Perhaps the frankness of *A Married Couple* is the other major clue to its non-Hollywood origins.

Allan King Associates, in its press release, calls *A Married Couple*, "a 112 minute color film which exposes the ganglia of a modern North American marriage with all its private interplay of emotions, conflicts and tensions." Like, it's as if you were a peeping Tom peeking into the lives of a married couple whose marriage was maybe on the rocks, and they didn't know you were there so you saw everything. Like everything.

The couple, Bill and Antoinette Edwards, play themselves. Their son Bogart plays himself, as does their dog, Merton. There wasn't a bit of dialogue written or planned. The cameraman, Richard Leiterman, just shot film for up to 18 hours a day, while soundman Christian Wangler let his tape recorder go. Later the film was put together by editor Arla Saare. I suppose that beyond actually picking the subject, and choosing camera angles, Allan King assisted in the editing. After all, his is the creative mind credited with the film, and it does definitely bear his stamp of concept and execution in every frame.

As to the film itself, it is color, originally shot in 16mm and blown up to 35mm, which gives it a nice washed effect, without making it look like home movies. Most of the action takes place in the Edwards' Toronto home, but the camera work is sufficiently imaginative so as not to let the scenery get boring.

As for the "acting", Billy and Antoinette were remarkably at ease, and come off as though they were unaware they were being filmed. Quite a step from the shooting through hidden windows trick in *Warrendale!*

The "plot" was the interesting analysis

of a marriage that maybe is going to break down. The story goes the predictable way, with a loving beginning, a few arguments, a party where everybody assumes airs, back to the arguments, a violent argument, and the eventual reconciliation. Jean Renoir wrote in regard to *Warrendale*, "When I think of this film the best performances seem to me obsolete. How can fiction, animated by professional players, compete with this recording of real emotions?" Bette Davis, Joan Crawford and Olivia de Havilland made a number of movies with identical plots to *A Married Couple*. The crucial difference was that theirs were illusions of life. King's is a reality.

Component by component, *A Married Couple* comes apart under close analysis. Which is why I should never have attempted it. As a unit, the film has magnetism, power. Dynamic is the best word for it. If you want to be moved, stimulated, intrigued, amused, bemused and entertained, see *A Married Couple*. It's a better film than anyone can say, because it's part of a class of films that Allan King invented, and the words to properly criticize his films are still in the formulative stage. His work is not documentary. Neither is it cinema verite.

a married couple



French film critic Louis Marcorelles called it "cinema direct." King calls it "actuality drama" or "living drama".

Whatever you call it, it's a new and powerful force that gives the impact of film a new dimension. Not only is the film the semblance of life, it is life itself. I feel very strongly, that the films of Allan King are history in the making, and I think we are very fortunate that Allan King is not only making history, he's making damn good movies.