

Jonathan Livingston Seagull

Birds overrun screen with treacly philosophy

By WARREN CLEMENTS

Whatever else may be said about Jonathan Livingston Seagull, it is certainly an ambitious film.

For over an hour and a half, the audience is regaled with the adventures of a rebellious seagull, a seagull romantic interest, a seagull sidekick, and a seagull lynch mob.

Expecting an audience to sit quietly through a glorified nature film is quite a gamble, and even with a plethora of visual effects — red tints, stunning aerial photography, picturesque locations — the film drags in several spots.

Producer-director Hall Bartlett didn't help the situation by smearing

the film with a droning soundtrack by Neil Diamond. And several climactic scenes, in which the seagulls waddle forward crying "Outcast" and "Kill him, he's the devil", are unintentionally hilarious.

Richard Bach's million-selling story concentrates on Jonathan Livingston Seagull's realization that there is more to life than eating garbage with the other gulls. Bending his wings, he finds that he can fly higher and faster than any other gull, and tries to convert the flock to his methods.

But the flock boots him out. Jonathan practices to become supergull, dies, and passes on to Gull Heaven. There, tutored by a female

teacher and wise elder named Chiang, he learns that "the most difficult feat of all is to fly straight up and know the meaning of kindness and love."

The superficial message is to reach for the best within yourself, and to strive for perfection in what you do. The implied philosophy is that the only responsibility you have to society is to try to convert it to what you consider the True Way.

If Jonathan Seagull were a human, he would probably ring your doorbell on Saturday morning and try to sell you a subscription to his evangelical pamphlets.

Throughout the movie, the flock is portrayed as an unruly, ignorant witch-burning mob, and Jonathan as a supersonic jet in gull's clothing, an uneasy blend of Dale Carnegie and Jesus Christ ("What do they think I am, the son of the Great Gull?").

The style of the film is reminiscent of those little animal shorts that the CBC runs when it has to fill a gap between programmes: Mr. and Mrs. Cat explore the barnyard, with Squeaky the Mouse as comic relief.

In Seagull, the voices are supplied by James Franciscus as Jonathan, Juliet Mills (Nanny and the Professor) as the female in Gull Heaven, Hal Holbrook as the elder, Philip Ahn (from Kung Fu) as Chiang, and Richard Crenna and Dorothy Maguire as the Gull's parents.

Jonathan Livingston Seagull is a visually enjoyable, expertly made bird film, with the dialogue from Bach's book being read onto the soundtrack. But in the end, it is less a movie than an illustrated text.



Jonathan Livingston Seagull discovers that by bending his wing-tips, he can fly his way into a best-selling book and \$1½ million movie.

Seagull captured in Big Sur restaurant

The trick in locating a star for Jonathan Livingston Seagull lay in finding a bird that wasn't incredibly neurotic.

"We learned from an ornithologist that the seagull is the wildest, most emotional of birds," Seagull's producer-director Hall Bartlett told a student press conference last week, "and that it suffers from intense emotional pressures."

"We caught over 6,000 seagulls with the government's permission, and found only 10 that could be trained."

For the training, Bartlett hired Ray Berwick, who guided gulls and other vengeful fowl in Hitchcock's *The Birds*. The cinematographer was Jack Couffer, who had photographed lions for *Born Free*, otters for *Ring of Bright Water*, and huskies for *Nikki, Wild Dog of the North*.

There was only one "Jonathan" used in the film, a born flock leader captured in a seafood restaurant in California when he wandered too close to the window.

The price of stardom was a grueling 10-month production schedule, during which Jonathan was tossed into the ocean, his wings loaded down with water.

"When they get underwater, they can't function," explained Bartlett. "They get waterlogged."

The dunking created a very dramatic scene, since it took quite a while for Jonathan to surface and

climb onto a nearby raft.

"We needed 27 takes to get him off the raft. Then we warmed him in an electric blanket on our fishing boat."

At this point, the interviewers began mumbling angry phrases about cruelty to animals. Bartlett assured us that the SPCA visited the set three times a week, and that no bird was injured or killed during filming.

For a scene in which Fletcher, Jonathan's protege, was crushed against the face of a cliff, the trainer built a parallel opposite the cliff, and launched the bird with his hands from 10 feet away.

The bird bounced painlessly off the wall. Bartlett cut to a shot of an actual dead bird, acquired from the navy, falling in slow motion to the base of the cliff.

Bartlett said he spent \$250,000 on experimental effects, such as puppet birds, animation and radio-controlled birds ("they all crashed"), but decided to make the film totally live action.

And after the last day of shooting, all the birds, Jonathan included, were released off the coast of Big Sur.

Commenting on the savage reviews given his film to date, Bartlett said the savagery demonstrated that the reviewers felt threatened by the film.

"What's easier than doing a satire of Jonathan Livingston Seagull?" he asked. "The *New Yorker* is looking down its nose at the book, but the book is outselling the *New Yorker*."

Sordid celebrations at Birthday Party

By BOB McBRYPDE

The Birthday Party is vintage Pinter: haunting, peculiarly poetic, grotesquely, even tragically humorous. The Menagerie Players capture the ephemeral essence of the play in their current production at the Central Library Theatre.

Pinter-people are lost, hollow puppets going through the existential motions. Their environment is bleak and sordid, reflecting, as it seems, the characters' inner ravages.

Silences are prolonged and pregnant with unspeakable longings. Life, in the playwright's view, is agonizingly boring — monotonous, repetitive, yet capable of flaring into gratuitous violence. Each day arrives like a recurring nightmare.

The Birthday Party takes place in a shabby boarding house in the south of England. Petey and Meg, the landlords, and Stanley, their unemployed boarder, grind through their days in bursts of sporadic activity which they recognize as routine. But

the day of the play, Stanley's birthday, becomes a day of judgment. Stanley must atone for his "sins": sins of lethargy, of bad manners, of not fitting in.

His judges, Goldberg and McCann, arrive on the scene, ostensibly as boarders, but actually as Stanley's inquisitors.

The Menagerie Players have captured the Pinter world and conveyed its deadness and sterility. David Beard's Petey shuffles to and fro in a mechanical stupor, and Vivienne Gibs is a splendid Meg, a misshapen carcass with life-sustaining dreams.

All players infuse the action, and inaction, with the aura of death in life.

The set is appropriately drab and unappealing, and director John Wood has cast, and blocked, the performers superbly.

The Central Library Theatre is located at 20 St. George Street, and reservations are advised (489-1314) for an 8:30 curtain.

The tickets are \$3 general, \$2.50 for students.

Cultures collide as Huang brings Orient to Burton

By NINA WILKINS

If the Performing Arts performance given last Tuesday by dancers Al Huang and Suzanne Pierce in Burton auditorium was any indication, perhaps East and West were never destined to meet after all.

The title of the presentation, *Theatre Dance: East and West*, had augured some sort of synthesis between the two world views. And when Al Huang danced alone at the beginning, some of that synthesis was realized.

But the moment his lovely but quite inapt wife appeared onstage, the mood of quiet concentration and power created in the first two numbers was shattered — like a glass figurine in the hands of a clumsy child.

Things started off with a bang. The housewarming instrumental piece, *Dragon Dance*, set the mood with mysterious, quiet, rising motifs, an excellent technique for transporting a western audience into the perceptual world of the Orient.

But he shattered the mood of quiet in *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain*, when he very casually began to verbalize about T'ai chi; words were not particularly welcome at that point, since it all made perfect sense a moment later with a simple translation of the principles into nonsense syllables, shouts and motion.

NO DELICACY

Ssu Fan, danced by Miss Pierce, was based on a classical Chinese play about a young woman who spends her life in solitude and unfulfilment in the palace of the emperor.

The programme said "the coldness is unbearable, way up there, in the pavilion of jasper and jade"; what followed had little to do with the delicacy and ice suggested by that quote.

Miss Pierce's abilities were heavily taxed by the piece. The solitude she portrayed was too neurotically

western, and she lacked the discipline demanded by the concept, almost losing control of her dancing at times.

What's It All About, Anyway, the question posed in *Bull's Eye*, a piece involving the participation of a York theatre class, was answered when the whole audience was invited to dance

onstage in the best tradition of Hair.

Few people responded — understandable in light of the fact that apart from Mr. Huang, the gaiety was forced and imposed, not at all the logical outcome of the evening's performance.

Sight and Sound

Light show in jazz and electronics

In the second programme of Performing Arts' jazz and electronics series, Burton auditorium will host *Light* on Wednesday, November 21. The group will present an evening of improvisational music. Current members include John Hassell on electric trumpet, Kathy Moses on electric flute, and David Rosenboom on keyboards, synthesizer, violin and kalimba. Show starts at 8:30 p.m. Tickets are \$3.50 for students, \$5.50 staff and faculty, and \$7 general. The Burton box office opens at 11 a.m., Monday through Friday.

Lillian Gish to speak at Griffith film

Miss Lillian Gish, legendary heroine of U.S. films in the days of the great film pioneer D.W. Griffith, visits the York campus on Wednesday night, November 21, to introduce the Griffith World War I film *Hearts of The World*, starring Lillian and Dorothy Gish. The film is a rarity, and a tinted print is being loaned for the occasion from New York. Lillian Gish visited York three years ago and showed her compilation film of early Griffith subjects, and the 1925 romance *La Boheme*, directed by King Vidor. The *Hearts* programme in *Curtis I* is a presentation of the department of film. Admission is free at 8 p.m. A live piano accompaniment will be played by Charles Hoffman.

Bethune escorts Godfather to Curtis

The *Godfather* pays a visit this weekend to *Curtis LH-L*, with Marlon Brando, James Caan, Al Pacino and a host of crooks. Spend Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights watching mass murder, gang warfare, strangulation and a horse of a different colour. Bethune makes you an offer you can't refuse — \$1.25 general, \$1 for Bethune. Francis Ford Coppola's fantastic journey through the underworld begins at 8:30 p.m., in 35mm.

Prescription for Sellers from Winters

In one of Peter Sellers' weaker moments, he agreed to play Dr. Albert T. Hopfnagel, administrator of a bumbling hospital in *Where Does It Hurt?* Winters brings this turkey to *Curtis LH-I* at 8 p.m. Friday and Saturday nights, and the "prescription for laughter" (according to the promo guide) is \$1.25 general, \$1 for Winters students.