

CHINATOWN

(GO TO A CHINESE RESTAURANT INSTEAD)

by Tom Clahane

If the name "Chinatown" doesn't mean anything perhaps the names Faye Dunaway or Jack Nicholson may. Perhaps if all else fails you may recognize the name Roman Polanski, the celebrated producer, who was even mentioned in a song in the rock musical "Hair". These names helped me decide that perhaps it was a worthwhile venture to take in one of the features at Paramount 2 theatre. Unfortunately, the most appetizing fare on the menu for this movie was a few quick shots of Faye Dunaway's upper region in the now obligatory sex scene that falls with or without reason into every crime movie. This will do little to appease the voyeurs among you as the camera work is less than daring.

Chinatown receives ade-

quate acting in all cases but excellent acting is non-existent. There are a few, but very few, nice shots of California coastline, but generally the work behind the camera is pitifully mediocre. For those gore lovers among you there are two fairly bloody scenes, the final of which is made as nauseating as the character of the movie allows.

"Chinatown" is basically a who-done-it type that keeps the viewer guessing incorrectly, not because of the difficulty in peicing the clues together, but rather because the clues are not revealed until the picture is nine tenths through.

Jack Nicholson plays the part of the all-American Private Dick who has left the cops because he is tired of the frustration of trying to maintain law and order in a paid

off police force. Faye Dunaway is at different times a widow, mistress, lover, suspect, mother and gun-man. The plot is long involved, and it is debatable as to whether or not it is worth repeating. As some of you may wish to take in the movie, I will not bother with it in detail.

The movie did however, have one central theme running through that puts it slightly above other movies in this vein. It is at least basically honest in one respect. The policemen involved are portrayed as being run by pay off money and this proves worthwhile to their illicit employer. For once the cops aren't portrayed as super humans or as being as pure as Elliot Ness's Untouchables. The town and the cops are all owned and there is no doubt about this fact. It leaves one with a horrid sense of reality.

sound tracks concluded

consequently you have to go through more shit to reach the good stuff. Unfortunately, this situation makes it harder to get off on the good stuff one does get into, but then that's the world of today: more, more, more and "better". Just watch the cost, the real cost that is.

The rock/pop music land is hassled by other things as well. Today any artist that wants to "make it" and gain acceptance beyond his local area has to plug into the record business/promotional system. Like you can be good with talent, but if your record doesn't get sufficient promotion from the record company you might as well forget it — you ain't goin' nowhere. And the companies themselves decide which of their artists get the most promotion, the BIG PUSH which makes the difference between relative obscurity and mass success. The companies admittedly don't have it made, having sunk a fair amount of bread to underwrite the living and recording expenses of new groups on their roster; this can run up and a lot of these groups never will come close to making it. So the companies reinforce success by promoting their established artists and those who are breaking while the lesser unknowns struggle along with little or no exposure. Often these groups are as talented or more so than the "stars", especially when the big names really aren't all that good. For every Grand Gunk-styled hype there are probably countless other groups with more talent and creativity slogging it out on a local circuit, unsigned/undiscovered. But maybe uncorrupted or unspoiled. Who knows? It's the old problem of promoting mediocrity in a mass culture.

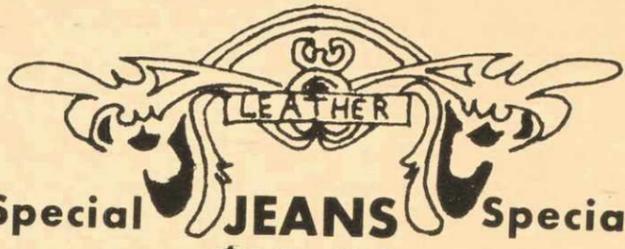
Ultimately, every artist/group faces the challenge of artistic development, of creating music that evolves honestly, that builds on what went down before to make something new and valid. It ain't easy, and gets harder as time goes by. There is pressure from fans/audience to "deliver the goods", which usually means churning out the same familiar music; certainly a band can't turn its back on a loyal audience, but there is a happy medium somewhere here. Too many groups are entombed by the same old sound/material and suffocate artistically as a result. Then there are pressures from a company to Be Successful so the bread keeps rollin' in. Frequently this can result in

a group's purposeful change/bend of its music to make it more "commercial" and conform to company desires. Artistic freedom/creativity vs. Commercial Success. The line between successfully coping with this challenge and selling out is a thin one indeed. The hybridization of rock also creates problems, as you can only go so far in a confined/restricted musical space before you stagnate and start repeating yourself. That's why broadening musical horizons, exchanging ideas is so important. Plus with so many groups/artists around, there is the danger (it's a reality now) of groups sounding too similar. To anyone who isn't into rock, a lot of bands probably sound almost the same. The subtle differences are there, but a lot of riffs are gettin' stepped on. But in the end some of this is inevitable; the important thing is that it doesn't degenerate into blatantly simple imitation.

This leads to the charge of "it's all been done before." Well, that's easy to say, but if you listen a little more to what's goin' down, you'll probably see that there's more to rock today than re-cycling good old Stones riffs. Besides, It's Too Late To Stop Now. Yeah. Rock has its problems and hassles, you could go on about how the lyrics could be improved and made more meaningful, how the rampant sexist attitudes in rock should be dropped, why more balance/creativity is needed, etc., but that over-shoots the mark. It takes time. Rock/r'n r/ pop reflects generally what's happening in society and shouldn't be expected to provide the answers (not all of them anyway), set the standards, or lead us out of the wilderness. That's unrealistic; Dylan's don't grow on trees, and these days the trees are fewer and don't grow so tall. Rock has come a long way from its r'n r roots, and has played an important part in a lot of people's lives. There's no reason why it can't still be a significant force while remaining true to the vibrant/energetic spirit that spawned it. There's still hope. As Ian Hunter of Mott the Hoople sings, "The golden age of rock and roll will never die/As long as children feel the need to laugh and cry." (Next Week: a closer look at the highlights in rock during the summer, plus a general survey of some of the good LP's that came out of the season.)

— mark teehan

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