



Lights, Camera, Action!

Music Lovers: best of the slow movers

By DAN MERKUR

"The critic is he who can translate into another manner or a new material his impression of beautiful things." — Oscar Wilde

The Picture of Dorian Gray

I strongly urge anyone interested in the business of criticism to read the review of *Don't Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me the Pliers* in the current issue of *Guerilla* (at the York bookstore, among other places). The review is, to my way of thinking, one of the best I have ever seen.

Meanwhile I have this Tchaikovsky movie to review; *The Music Lovers*, which has been panned so badly I'm sure I have to be right in saying it is a very fine film.

The gulf here is with the critics, not the film. As an amateur film maker and a writer of fiction, criticism is, for me, essentially an attempt to learn through intellectualization, what it is that an artist does. So I can dig a story about Tchaikovsky, a frustrated artist compelled to produce in music the feelings of his torment, and seeking through his music to reach some heart that will return some morsel of love. Of course the professional critics in their varying degrees of cynicism dismiss the entire premise as ludicrous.

The film is exquisitely made, with a magnificent surety and knowledge of camera placement and color composition. It is, however, one of those slow-motion-running-through-the-trees kind of stories, which has been done to death, say the critics. The point remains however, that *The Music Lovers* is the best it has ever been done, better (if memory serves) than *Elvira Madigan*. And if it's good, it always escapes generic cliché; it transcends and becomes a "beautiful thing" in its own right.

The actors are polished, letter perfect, and sometimes inspired, particularly Richard Chamberlain as Tchaikovsky, and Glenda Jackson as his wife, slowly driven insane by his homosexual refusal of her love, precisely the cause for his having to seek love through his music. And hence: the greater the artist the almost certain he is to have had a miserable life, at least in subjective terms (with exceptions I'll grant you,) but I am trying to state a general rule.

So for me, the story is thoroughly credible, though no doubt Ken Russell (who last made *Women in Love*) chose this facet of the Russian composer's life because it's lurid and provocative and will sell tickets. But the artistic values, the music of Tchaikovsky with its frenzied fluidity coming over well in the theatre and the narrative and visual style of Russell, who is one of the most competent of the English romanticists are magnificent.

A very nice film, a good evening, oppressive but so is the music if you understand it, and not at all like those horrible radio and television ads.

Husbands, a film by John Cassavetes, starring himself, Peter Falk and Ben Gazzara, is a marvellous bit of middle-class art. It must be remembered that almost never does the truly middle-class appear in any art form in a truly middle-class manner. Sinclair Lewis places them in perspective to a nation; Scott Fitzgerald counterpoints their dealings with the upper class; TV comedies are seldom funny and never realistic. The middle class is notoriously dull as a subject for study, because they are bored people who present a bored outlook and are boring to study.

Consequently I was not at all shocked to find *Husbands* very slow and boring for the first 20 minutes, until it gets properly going, and then it is still very slow, but intentionally and necessarily so, and I think it is one of the



John Cassavetes and Peter Falk in *Husbands*: a marvelous bit of middle-class art.

finest things ever done to study the middle-class male. What is worse, or perhaps better for the film as art, is that *Husbands* concerns three men just over 40 which is probably also about the dulllest age Cassavetes could have picked. But he pulls it off.

The film is a home-made product like Cassavetes' *Faces*; it took three years to make and you can tell the amateur crew work, with boom mikes bouncing into the top of the frame every now and then, and other irregularities that you just don't see in professional film work. However, *Husbands* is bold, courageous, sometimes profound, always touching, engrossing, a little boring sometimes and if nothing else, sincere. It is the height of realism and quite perfect at it. When a man makes a story about his own life, his sincerity always shows and the product is the better for it. As a film director I think Cassavetes has a hell of a lot to learn, but if *Husbands* is a fair sample, it would be well worth the effort to pay attention.

It is important to remember that the classic movie gangsters, like the gangsters themselves, devoutly believe in the American success story. In fact they ambitiously set out to prove it, and the better ones clearly enjoy the fruits of their labors, at least for a little while. In literature and film, they are the archetypal individualists.

Predominating the French film colony are the existentialists and the nihilists who romantically believe

themselves to be existentialists. They have long admired the American school of individualism, no doubt because most of the stories are carried through to the inevitable end of every man's story, death, thereby proving the existentialist philosophy, that every man loses. They tend to ignore the essence of individualism, that if you are good you stay at the top for a long, long time.

It is essential for the gangster, in order for him to remain true to character as a tragic hero, to fully believe that he can win. Otherwise he has no motivation. Consequently, the French just cannot make a convincing gangster film — the French gangster is simply too cynical about his own possibility of any lasting success.

Which is why Borsalino fails, because Belmondo and Delon are so mirthlessly snide, ridiculing their own chances, and then proceeding, out of character, to grasp after *Dame Fortune*. The illusion is shattered, the audience can no longer suspend disbelief in the action, and we are forced to view Borsalino not as a story to be involved with but as the superbly mounted and photographed, badly dubbed, exquisite fashion show that it is, complete with the obligatory, and sometimes quite all right, action.

Borsalino is nice, though, but Alan Ladd and George Raft made better crime flicks, and they never compared with Bogart and Cagney. Howard Hawks, who made *Scarface* (1932), the best gangster film ever, is reportedly making a crime film with Steve McQueen. Let us hope.

Charlebois is first cross-cultural pop star

By BRIAN PEARL

I have a message for all of Robert Charlebois' English fans who didn't show at Massey Hall; vous êtes fous. Charlebois presented a show of outstanding professionalism and talent. This French-Canadian rock star has a freshness and self-confidence on stage that would be utterly

self-indulgent if he wasn't so very talented.

The crowd, about three-quarters of a house, was mostly French-speaking and obviously doted on their national rock hero as a symbol of their culture versus ours. But Charlebois himself is a culture-straddling star, master of that international argot, rock-and-roll. His showmanship appeals to English Canadians as audacity and

daring, instead of the Quebecois appreciation of a folksy style but the music, Charlebois' vocals and the exceptionally good back-up group, extends further than his stage presentation into the world of pop music. Charlebois himself is beginning to understand this because his appearance in Toronto was the first of a number of sorties into the English-speaking wilderness in search of much-

deserved wider fame.

The show itself started sharply with Charlebois' famous hit, *Lindberg!!!*, a melodic folk-rock ballad gently mocking in an understanding way the *Jet Set*. Charlebois seemed determined to please the audience more than anything else and he succeeded in that easily. The real effort came, though, when he and the band

played their newest stuff, particularly a vaguely grotesque but appealing song in English about Mr. Plum, The Dwarf, who cuts off the head of his six-foot son in a fit of jealousy. The moral was a little too obvious to label the song as serious but it does have the pleasing tune, clear-cut lyrics and, most important, the strong instrumental backing of a potential hit single. Since the CRTC demanded that Canadian talent be given a chance on broadcast radio, home-grown talent has been at a premium. Charlebois is a giant talent, worthy of both national and continental attention.

His music is an intense personal expression made up of far more than just a great performance. He writes the songs and their lyrics. The songs mock sometimes, satirizing the depth of the writer's own love while the singer falls all over the stage in a rock orgy of self-pity that makes the blues look like good therapy. Songs like Quebec joyously describe the scene that Charlebois likes best, free, young, and gaining on the world all the time. And sometimes he comes up with a song like (*Un Homme Ordinaire*) his latest hit songs, in which he gently describes himself in simple terms.

Dark Age Britain

A history book for the general reader

By JOHN OUGHTON

Dark Age Britain by Henry Marsh is described as "primarily a study of historical sources" for the era in British history termed the Dark Ages, approximately 400-1000 AD. This era, as the book shows, is of great interest to the general reader as well as to the historian. The first accounts of Britain examined are those given by Julius Caesar in his *Chronicles*: "The Britons stained themselves blue with woad... grew moustaches and shaved their bodies. Group marriage was an accepted institution with 10 or 12 men having wives in common." The Romans departed around 400

AD, leaving behind some influences which still are evident in Britain, especially in place names such as Chester (from castra).

Gildas the Wise supplied the next account which Marsh considers. A stern moralist, Gildas was a monk who described his writing as exhibiting "a vile style." His descriptions of historical personalities are seldom objective; Maglocunus is said to have been "soaked in the wine of the sodomitical grape." Gildas was primarily concerned with the degeneration of Romanized Britons who failed to successfully resist the invading Goths.

Marsh raises an interesting point in his

discussion of the Welsh Annals. The Saxons, who occupied Britain after the Goths, did not invade Wales for six centuries. Thus, it was in Wales that the original Britons survived the longest, and modern Welsh has many elements of the ancient language of the Britons.

Dark Age Britain contains several reproductions of historical manuscripts. It is nicely bound and printed, but only historians are likely to lay out the \$7.50 hardbound price. However, as a well-written blend of myth and fact which is very engrossing for the general reader it is the sort of book which libraries should carry in the reference section.