



Lights, Camera, Action!

By DAN MERKUR

Rebellion

Rebellion is one of those films that make you wonder if the Japanese make any bad films (excluding Godzilla). It is simply of the first water.

Toshiro Mifune plays the head of a feudal family, the foremost swordsman in his clan, who retires in favor of his eldest son. Two years later the overlord wants the son to surrender his wife to be his (the overlord's) mistress.

As is usual with Japanese period films, everything is slowly paced and low key, the actors internalizing their problems, showing restraint: until the climax when everything manifests in furious and frenzied swordplay. Mifune, of course, is extremely capable at both.

Takeshi Kato plays Mifune's eldest son, with intensity and restrained power that really do seem to make him Mifune's son. Tatsuya Makadai plays the clan's second-best swordsman, and captures well how it is to be exceptional, but still only second-best.

Masaki Kobayashi, the director, has that rare eye that photographs mountains, forests, clouds, sunrises et al in incredible beauty; and then takes the camera indoors and still manages to retain an extremely high level of visual aesthetics. His use of exquisite black and white photography and the wide "scope" screen is startling. Hollywood hasn't been that good since Gregg Toland and Lee Garmes quit filming decades ago.

Classically constructed, all the parts seeming to fit, even to the end occurring on the 2nd anniversary of the opening incidents; full of the masterful philosophic qualities of a Samurai film (investigations of obedience, morality, feudal politics); visually stunning and brilliantly acted, Rebellion is one of the finest Japanese films to date.

It is now at the Baronet, and probably won't be playing long. Be sure to see it.

Tora! Tora! Tora!

A case might be made for Darryl Zanuck (head of 20th Century-Fox) finding success with the war genre: The Road to Glory; Submarine Patrol; Winged Victory; The Purple Heart, Twelve O'Clock High, The Longest Day. . .

Mid America may yet prove Tora! Tora! Tora! a success.

Critically, however, director Richard Fletcher (The Vikings; Dr. Dolittle) has only proved once again that he should have become an animator like his father, whose characters (Popeye, Betty Boop and the assorted grotesques) at least had the distinction of popularity, if not artistic success.

Tora! Tora! Tora! is about the dullest, driest, most patently absurd film since Airport (though even Airport is a better film). Even the special effects aren't worth three hours of your time (let alone \$3 at the University, with its four track stereoscopic bombings. Whoopee!)

Performance: Second Thoughts

Is Performance the ideally eclectic film, the logical successor to Bedazzled, The Ipress File and others, and consequently the ultimate film; or is it instead so perfect that it is boring, and therefore fails?

At face value, Performance deals with a gangster (James Fox) on the run, who, through a series of mishaps, rents a basement flat from a retired 1950s rock star (Mick Jagger) who lives with his two chicks in self-exile, amid relics, stereo, assorted drugs and strange costumes. The counter-pointing of hard-boiled vices and the vices of the decadent constitutes the film's theme.

It is, however, the visual and auidial style that make the film what it is. Dominant are plush reds, purples and blacks. Fabrics are deep and soft, though worn. The sound track is full of hard, harsh, sudden sounds; the music has a very heavy beat, a pounding rhythm. The



Toshiro Mifune and Takeshi Kato in Masaki Kobayash's brilliant film, Rebellion, now at the Baronet.

screen is usually dark and the sound track murky — an assault on the eyes and ears.

The cutting is incredibly swift. The visual style that made The Ipress File hard to understand five years ago, which is now easy to follow (our film vocabulary has expanded) is advanced in Performance to a yet accelerated pace (a track in on the back of Jagger's head dissolves to a subjective shot, as if from his eyes). Beginnings and ends with no linking middles are shown. One can spend a good deal of time trying to understand the vocabulary of the film style.

Moreover, an important part of the plot happens underneath the titles; and since that part of the plot is frenetically paced and the cutting is just short of jump cuts, it too is very hard to follow.

Personally, I was bored by the film immediately that I slipped into high gear to handle the style. The film, at that point, seemed only a Mick Jagger vehicle (which, in fact, is the reason Warner Brothers made it with some very good,

very heavy sounds, the record of the sound track is nice, heavy, but a little bit on the bubble-gum, high school dance, popular side of rock), and a tidy little moral message: vice is vice regardless of whether it is straight or kinky.

What I did get out of the film were the glimpses of insight the script and Jagger gave to the rock star who retired at his peak, a strange and slightly tragic figure.

I am almost tempted to rate Performance on the Cultural Rip-Off Scale, since it is, after all, a Mick Jagger vehicle. Yet it is also a very exciting, most interesting artistic exercise, though a failure, and it points the way (a better script, more meaningful statement) for better films employing an eclectic style of film construction.

As a failure, I am warming to Performance. As a film everyone raves over, I feel compelled to condemn it. It is, in a sense, a milestone of film craft. It is also a very distant, cold, unmoving cynical story. But then so was Citizen Kane.

Godard: Two or Three Things

By JIM PURDY

Two or Three Things I Know About Her was made in 1966 and it is peculiar that so popular a director as Jean-Luc Godard could not receive more efficient distribution in Toronto. It is one of Godard's major films, made immediately after two important and highly reputed works, Pierrot le fou and Masculine Feminine, and immediately before La Chinoise and Weekend, two films which seem to round off a series of five brilliant essays into life in modern society (among many, many other interconnected things).

Two or Three Things is probably his most ambitious foray into the workings of consumer society. He himself best summarizes it: "A film like this, it's a bit as if I wanted to write a sociological essay in the form of a novel, and all I had to do it with was notes of music."

Sociologically, Godard is describing the one-dimensional

consumer society and giving "eighteen lessons on modern industrial civilization". Again he is preoccupied with the landscape of commercial advertising which (as other pop artists have ambivalently demonstrated) is the highest form of art in consumer culture. In his films, advertising is ever present in billboards and posters, which keep the economy moving, by playing with the fantasies of the populace, who are made to believe that they can buy their dreams-come-true.

In reality, they find it impossible just to keep up with the standard of living, that is, the standard rate of consumption. "It is always the same. Either it is no money to pay the rent or no telly. Or else we keep the telly, but no car. Or a washing-machine, but no holiday. Therefore in no way a normal life."

Normal life is made more impossible in the modern city of high rise complexes, bulldozers, cranes and the machinery of technology

which, like the advertising, is ever present and constantly altering and manipulating the environment and its inhabitants. One of the central images of the film, based on the reality of urban Paris, is the middle-class housewife as part-time prostitute. The most succinct summary of this is the final still life of consumer goods, the synthetic raison d'etre of modern civilization.

Godard's camera wanders freely about Paris, catching its cold, regular face through its buildings and their equally homogenous inhabitants, all consumers and prostitutes. "Objects exist, and if one pays more attention to them than to people, it is precisely because they exist more than these people. Dead objects are still alive, living people are often already dead."

The camera picks out people in dress shops and beauty parlors, where blank-faced characters stop before the camera and deliver

monologues or confessions: "I stop work at seven o'clock. I've got a date at eight with Jean-Claude. We'll go to a restaurant and then to the cinema." Or the circular dialogue between Robert and Juliette which repeats itself in describing their lives: "Sleep. . . get up. . . work. . . eat. . . die". Again, Juliette muses: "To define oneself in a single word: Not yet dead."

The entire film is made up of such vignettes and shots of industrial Paris, gently and rhythmically interwoven in a powerful, moving collage. It is given unity and focus by centering on a day in the life of typical Juliette as she wanders about Paris, is picked up and returns home to family and bed.

Unlike most film-makers who start out with a story or characters in some dramatic situation which is then filmed, Godard begins with some central theme or image, in this case consumer society as prostitution, around which he freely improvises impressions and fragments which all spring from the precise central foundation. He shoots scenes randomly, dealing with various aspects of his central ideas which are then pieced together in fluid, cohesive patterns of overlapping motifs and incomplete fragments, overlaid with commentary and dialogue. His films are not finished, but are rather processes of associations which work themselves out in the viewer's mind.

As described so far, the film

works on many levels, but Godard goes one step further by becoming his own audience involved in asking questions about the film. Over and above the entire structure of the film is not only Godard's whispered comments on consumer society, but his gentle, persistent, existential questions on the film, himself and life. He constantly examines what he is filming, how he is doing so and why: "It is 4:45. Should I speak of Juliette or of these leaves? Since it is impossible, in any case to do both together, let's say that both tremble gently in this beginning of the end of an October afternoon."

Godard, unlike the people in the film, can easily drift into poetic mediation over various objects, such as a lit cigarette end or a fantastic close-up of a cup of coffee, with bubbles swirling, exploding and coming together again in a visual metaphor of molecular theory. The close-up lens allows Godard to examine objects as a poet, always leading him to further questions about existence and the universe. It therefore goes beyond sociology, into a highly personal, existential query into life. Godard's life is inherent with film so that he is defined in his films: "Is that what cinema is? And am I right to continue doing it?"

(Editor's Note: We realize this film closed last week on its first run after only a two week engagement. It should not have. It will likely be back. It ought to be.)

Thog — free festival

A workshop originally began last April and was being sponsored by "Hair". After several months of encounter, voice and dance exercises, improvisational and script acting, as well as writing scripts and music, Thog evolved, an independent theatre company, no longer affiliated with "Hair"

A free festival has been planned by Thog and the Guerilla underground newspaper. If you would like to be thoroughly entertained don't miss the Thog-Guerilla Benefit on Sunday Oct. 18th from 3:00 p.m. to midnight, at Bathurst St. United Church at Bathurst and Lennox. (1 block south of Bloor).



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