

Good horrors not impossible to find

by Ken Goldenberg

Some time ago, I was standing in the drugstore where my sister worked and overheard her say, "My brother? Oh, he likes horror movies. You know, *Friday the 13th* and stuff like that."

I almost dropped the copy of *Starlog* I was holding.

I told her later I did not mind her telling people I liked horror films, but I questioned her use of *Friday the 13th* as an example.

This is like saying someone who enjoys humour such as the wit of Stephen Leacock or the chuckle of familiarity of Lynn Johnston's *For Better or For Worse* must also enjoy the crude, and often cruel, slapstick of the Three Stooges.

Sadly, due to their popular and financial success, and subsequent media attention (anything that is popular and makes a lot of money will get media attention, despite any lack of merit, *Porky's* for example), films like *Friday the 13th*, and the *Nightmare on Elm Street* sequels are the first things that come to mind when people talk of horror films.

To be honest, these films are not truly horror films. (We already know who the Monster is. The only surprise will be how he kills his victims.) They are actually grotesque adventure films with bladed weapons replacing bullets and lasers, and we are to admire the cleverness of the hero-

villains who we know will return next time, despite the efforts of the generic, characterless "heroes." Cardboard cannon-fodder in make-up effects showcases starting pop villains.

(Remember when anti-heroes were Clint Eastwood and Steve McQueen fighting a corrupt establishment, not common decency?)

It is not impossible to find a good horror film, however, we just have to turn back the clock a bit.

The Dead Zone

(1983, dir. David Cronenberg)

This one surprised a lot of people, critics and movie-goers alike. Cronenberg and Stephen King are both known to be gory and sometimes go over the top. Here was a subtle movie with a main character we could care about.

King purists may be surprised that King not only approved of changes to his story, but actually thought they were better than what he wrote and wished he had thought of them in the first place.

The shy, sympathetic Johnny Smith (nicely underplayed by Christopher Walken) is the best, most well-balanced character I have ever seen in a horror movie. He has to be because the entire plot of the film revolves around his personal conflict in dealing with new-found powers that he neither understands nor wants, and how he will deal with the knowledge that he may be the

only person who can stop the destruction to come... if only he kills one man.

Thoughtful, and thought-provoking, with a lead character that we can care about, this is a 'small' film that isn't a grand (in terms of scale) movie, just a good, solid one.

Don't Look Now

(1973, dir. Nicholas Roeg)

Don't Look Now has an eerie atmosphere combined with a clever plot. It's slow moving, however, and requires you to pay attention. No big thrills, just a lingering chill throughout. Donald Sutherland is suited to the role he plays.

The Body Snatchers

(1945, dir. Robert Wise, prod. Val Lewton)

Paul Rotha in *The Film Till Now* said this film is "almost certainly the superior of all horror films, at least in terms of literacy and mature approach." *The Body Snatchers* hasn't lost its impact after all these years. It features Boris Karloff at his best with a performance that will give the creeps to even a modern viewer.

Dead of Night

(1945?)

Anthology of spooky stories with a clever wrap-around story. The final segment, featuring Michael Redgrave as a ventriloquist who's slowly losing control of his dummy, and his sanity, is the best and most famous.

Seance on a Wet Afternoon

(1964, dir. Bryan Forbes)

This hard-to-find film is pure suspense at its best. A fake medium has her husband kidnap the young daughter of a wealthy man, intending to 'find' the child with her 'powers'. The tension is almost unbearable when they try to keep the coughing child quiet while people discuss her 'kidnapping' downstairs. The plan goes wrong and the medium, who we suspect is not entirely sane, orders her husband to take the child to a secluded spot and kill her. This one's a real nail-biter.

The Mindbenders

This film really fits in no category unless you think of the implications of what's going on. Then it becomes a frightening psychological thriller that is all too realistic. Dirk Bogarde is frightening as a professor who subjects himself to a sensory deprivation experiment beyond the recommended limit. There are no monsters or murders. Just the horror of watching a gentle, polite man change completely. The ending offers no easy answers.

The Cat People

(1942, dir. Jacques Tourneur, prod. Val Lewton)

This film relies almost entirely upon Lewton's trademark: the power of suggestion. The nuances of light and shadow and the natural spookiness of Simone Simon work well in this film.

The Haunting

(1963, Dir. Robert Wise)

Based on Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, this film comes up on almost everyone's top ten list of good horror movies and with good reason. Intelligent and thought-provoking, with atmosphere that contributes to the story, rather than overwhelming it. This is the best in the field.

The plot focuses on Eleanor, a lonely woman selected by a professor to be part of an investigation of Hill House.

The stereotypes inherent in movies which copied this idea are not present here. This study is a hobby for the professor, not a life-long obsession. An entire team of investigators were invited. Only Eleanor and a physical medium, Theo, show up. There is doubt that the house is actually haunted. Depending on your interpretation of the ending, that doubt may still remain.

Eleanor becomes the ultimate target of the house; but is it really the house? Is Eleanor doing this to herself, utilizing powers that are subtly hinted at? Is Theo responsible? The gift of this film is that, if you put in the effort, there's so much to it. And not a drop of blood.

The Wicker Man

(1973, dir. Robin Hardy)

The atmosphere of this film is one of unease. We constantly get the feeling something isn't right. Something is lurking under the surface. If you are a devout Catholic, this film will make you feel very uneasy.

Ballet's not macho, it's sexy

by Miriam Korn

It was a hopelessly uncoordinated person's dream come true: being within three feet of a real live ballet dancer.

After the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's final performance in Halifax, this relentless and often ridiculously romantic reporter managed to muster up enough nerve to crash an apres-ballet "private reception" to chat with one of the wonderful creatures just seen dancing across the Rebecca Cohn stage.

The interviewee was Daniel Nelson, an ex-figure skater who joined the ballet school's professional division when he was 18 years old, 13 years ago, and is now featured as one of the company's soloists.

This was the end of another long day, beginning with a 9 a.m. bus call — what Daniel claimed to be "the hardest thing about being a ballet dancer" — followed by a morning workout and dance lesson and, for Daniel, a practice for the *Nutcracker* — all before the show. This is the typical daily routine of the dancers when on tour.

They are presently in the midst

of a seven week tour which began in Winnipeg and played New York and New England before arriving in Halifax.

Unfortunately, Haligonians did not get to see the full splendour of the show's featured dance. The set of "Green Gables" could not be used on the Cohn's small stage. Nevertheless "Anne" was very enjoyable. "Le Sequoia" was electrifying with its many dazzling jumps and countless sleek moves.

Daniel said joining the ballet "was not a big sacrifice, since at the time [after graduating from high school], I knew that was what I wanted to do. Nothing academic was really pulling me anywhere else."

Although the National Ballet School is now integrating academic education into its program for young dancers, the Royal Winnipeg Ballet School remains, for the most part, a "graduate school" teaching exclusively dance-related classes.

However, academics are not missed by Nelson. "I feel that I will eventually go on with my education, since dancing is such a finite career, usually ending in one's late 30s. I'm not really inter-

ested in teaching or choreography"

"Men are lucky," Nelson said. "They can start dancing at a much later age than women. The point work requires many years of practice." One male member of the company joined when he was 22, after he had already earned his undergraduate degree.

When asked about the stigma associated with this stereotypically feminine pursuit, Nelson admitted that he had indeed been glibed on occasion about his ballet. "Yes, it bothers me, but what can you do?"

On the other hand, Daniel reports meeting many pleasantly surprised men after his performances, all of whom had never thought to come to a ballet "until their wives dragged them." All eventually confessed to have really enjoyed the show.

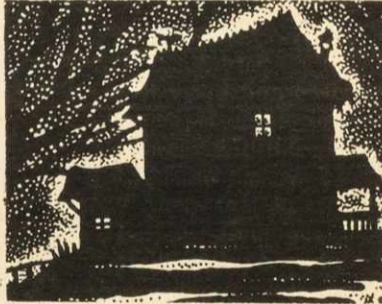
(Here's a message to you macho men out there: you've got it all wrong. Ballet is sexy, be it performed by a man or a woman.)

As the reception was wrapping up and my conversation came to a close, I overheard a group of sophisticated-looking women chatting in the corner. "It's too bad they're leaving.... We could

all get on the bus and be groupies!"

One woman, seeing me frantically scribbling notes, asked if I was catching up on my diary. I clarified my role as a reporter. "Oh," she said, "I thought you were a dancer."

I think it was the loveliest compliment I have ever received.



IT WILL TERRIFY YOU

CHILD'S PLAY

You'll wish it was only make-believe.

DOLBY STEREO

UA

Adult

Admission: \$3 with CFS Studentsaver Card \$3.50 University Students
\$4 General Admission

Monday Nov. 20, 8 pm McInnes Rm.