

Characters sturdily performed

The French Connections: a tough film

By LLOYD CHESLEY

The French Connection is tough. It's got lots of action, an incredible chase, a nifty plot and strong characters strongly performed. Movement is the key to this film and it has dynamic use of editing, compositions and transitions and anything else that will keep it going. A major virtue is the gritty New York realism: the film has the cold, wet feel of the city, the sticky dirtiness inimitable to big American cities.

Actually, that's about all there is to say about *The French Connection*. I could tell you the story, about the accidental cracking of a narcotics smuggling operation through the efforts of two psychotically determined New York pigs, but why tell you that when the movie can, and makes it a lot more exciting and enjoyable.

You see, I really enjoyed *The French Connection*, action-movie freak that I am, but, action-movie freak that I am, I had certain reservations about the film, especially after hearing the director, William Friedkin, talk about it. He is a young director I really like, mostly because of *The Night They Raided Minsky's* and also because of *The Boys In The Band*. Last year he was in Toronto and mentioned that after doing a lot of stage adaptations he was in to doing a real chase film with lots of action. I was excited by this news.

He really did make that action film he wanted to. He used the stunt driver who did Bullit to do an even better chase and,

like I said, the film really moves. But he said he was influenced by the old Hollywood gangster films, when, as a literate director, he missed the point of what they were doing in them days entirely. Sure they did terrific action then, but they WERE DOING SO MUCH MORE, TOO. For one thing, they used to use heroes in their films. In fact, as Robert Warshaw pointed out in an article written in the fifties, the gangster was America's great tragic hero. The films were heavily laden with philosophy, basically existentialism, using the action setting as a stage for the thought. Guys like Howard Hawks spent their time making films about guys that don't compromise their morality while Raoul Walsh was into amorality and death as freedom. The end of Hawks *Scarface* is an apocalyptic inferno of a man lost and alone.

On top of that, the old gangster films had the finest of Hollywood's magnificent dialogue. Hawks' *The Big Sleep* was written by Jules Furthman, Leigh Brackett and William Faulkner, providing hilarious double-entendres and eloquent epithets, in fact the best dialogue I have ever heard on screen. I mention all this because it seems to me Friedkin's track record of working with writers like Harold Pinter put him in a good position to revive this kind of total use of action films. But, like Sidney Lumet in *The Anderson Tapes*, he is probably too intellectual to catch the point of what was being done or what he could have done. He missed a terrific op-

portunity and made a film inferior to his talents.

Like all good action films, *The French Connection* has its feet on the ground, but it couldn't manage to get its head into the clouds.

As usual the best thing to see in town is a revival. Why? Because it's a comedy, something they seem to have forgotten how to make. (With the exception of *Rip-Off*, which Dan has already reviewed.) The film is *Ninotchka*.

If the twenties were the Golden Age of Comedy with the great clowns like Chaplin and Keaton at work, then the thirties rate at least a silver. This was the time of the screwball comedy filled with fun, wit and satire. *Ninotchka* was directed by one of the absolute masters, Ernst Lubitsch, a name fast becoming legendary, for good reason. It was written by Billy Wilder who became something of a master himself (he wrote and directed *Some Like It Hot* and *The Seven Year Itch*.) And the film stars Garbo. I would not even attempt to evaluate her. All I know is she was brilliant, inimitable and unmatched. The film is filled with many terrific supporting characters, as old Hollywood films always seem to be. So if you really want a beautiful and good time, go see *Ninotchka* at the Crest.

The flamorous Greta Garbo plays a Russian emissary to the decadent and romance filled city of Paris in the classic satire, *Ninotchka*, now at the Crest.

McGuinness Flint climb with Ruby Baby

By STEVE GELLER

Although McGuinness Flint were an entity for about a year and a half, they are still having their troubles getting firmly established on the contemporary music scene. This problem is largely due to the type of music they put out.

It originally followed along the same lines as the very unprosperous Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, an American group whose one time seeming potential was overshadowed by an obvious lack of stage presence and talent. Fortunately, talent deficiencies are far from being an immediate problem for McGuinness Flint. Instead, hindering their progress is a slow maturing process in a difficult field of music — the country dirt band sound.

The latest album released by McGuinness Flint, *Happy Birthday Ruby Baby* (Capitol Records ST-794) will probably become an intermediary step in their future progressions. Overall the album does not appear to generate a distinct sound. It doesn't leave a lasting impression. It seems that you can listen to it time and time

again and with a few exceptions, not really remember what it was like. Lack of diversity appears to be one

major flaw. Most of the cuts seem to be basically the same, save for a few timing variations.

In spite of its shortcomings, *Happy Birthday Ruby Baby* definitely reflects the potential of

McGuinness Flint. Faith and Gravy depicts a down to earth, rustic gospel tune. It's good, but does resemble the writings and arrangements of J. Robbie Robertson a little too much. The introduction of a little jazz into the country sound remedies this situation and appears to be the strong point of the album.

The group comes into its own with a tune called *Fixer*, which is definitely the best thing on the album. The basic jazz piano and brass backing blend with the strong vocals to sophisticate the already set McGuinness Flint sound.

If McGuinness Flint continue to progress along their own lines, a lot more may be heard from them in the future.

**At A Glance
Pink Floyd**

Relics (Harvest Records SW-759). The music of Pink Floyd has not changed drastically from any past works. Concentration seems to be on production and arrangement but the album, at times is difficult to sit through due to the outer-space flavour.

Indians at Glendon

By DAVID LEACH

If you liked *Little Big Man* for the right reasons, then you would have liked *Indians*, a play by Arthur Kopit which was presented by Glendon's contemporary drama class at Glendon's Pipe Room last Friday night. The play is an interesting treatment of the indian situation, and one man's guilt, Buffalo Bill's. Four of the performers really stood out. Brian Marshall and Bob Conacher each handled two parts of opposite interpretation; that is, of the proud, honourable indian, and of the scheming white man. Jim Reid was impressive as a proud, defiant *Sitting Bull*, and Bob McBryde provided the unifying force in



Brian Marshall as John Gras in *Indians*.

the play as Buffalo Bill. His deterioration from fame to guilt ridden insanity was accurately portrayed by effective use of lighting and hallucination-sequences, and by a very good Buffalo Bill. It is surprising, that this small class was able to put on such an impressive performance of such a complicated play in so

little time. Imaginative directing by Lori Dennich was the solidifying force, and Dave McTaggart's props were beautiful. He also found time to turn in a great Geronimo. So if you ever get bored of Friday nights (or Thursday nights) in residence, drop in on Glendon's Pipe room and see what can be done.

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