

Neighbours: Y'all don't come back, Y'hear?

by Ken Burke

It's the part of my nature that instinctively roots for the underdog which makes me admire most things with good intentions behind them, regardless of the actual movie, play, book, record, (political act?) or whatever. That's why I recommended **Pennies From Heaven** last week, although it didn't quite live up to its promise, but **Neighbours**, the latest vehicle for Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi, lands belly-up because those good intentions are suspect. Director John G. Avildsen

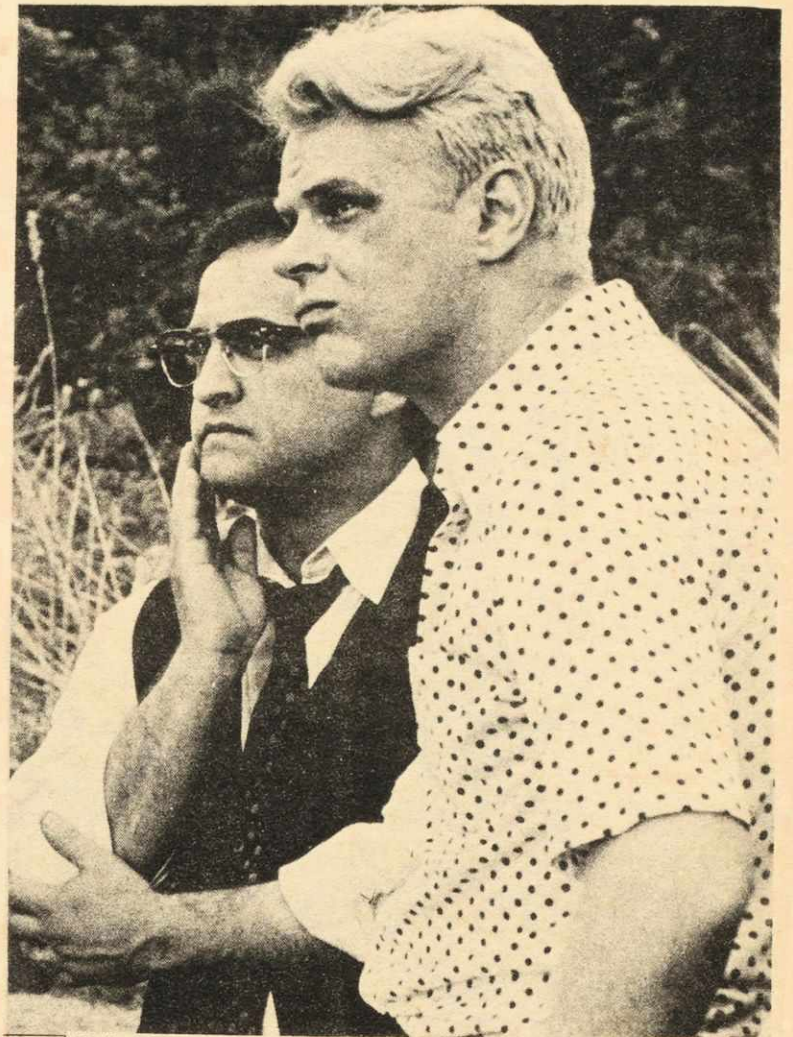
could have made a great free-form comedy a la Blake Edward's **The Party** but instead he opted to play it safe time after time in the film and left somewhat of a "nothing" product behind.

One of the biggest problems with the film was that from the beginning it was clear just how good it **could** be and also how good it wasn't. The premise -- a fantasy of complete destruction of the Suburban Dream -- was certainly a good starting point for the film, and the three main actors in the film were just the

people who could have carried it off, too. Having John Belushi's paranoid, hyper-middle-class average-Joe character clash with both Aykroyd's over-loud, numbingly tacky and sensual "Captain Vic" and Cathy Moriarty's sensuous, knowing slut-tease was brilliant casting, and all three do quite well in their roles (the surprise, perhaps, being Cathy Moriarty after her entirely different role in **Raging Bull**). But nobody took it past that in making the film. Sure, they had a great idea, but they never took it past the "Hey, I got a great idea! What if we..." stage and turned it into the comedy it could have been.

For instance, during the twenty-four hour time span of this movie, just about everything imaginable happens to disturb the tranquil boredom of Earl Keese's life. But the terrorism of Captain Vic and Ramona doesn't really build in any comical way -- it just keeps happening. Frequently a string of gags were started, then abruptly dropped to move on to another scene, leaving me with that same dissatisfied feeling I get when I stay up at night to watch **Citizen Kane** on T.V. and instead find some shit starring Kris Kristofferson on the tube. What Avildsen and screenwriter Larry Gelbart haven't realized is that creating a simple bunch of misfortunes isn't in itself funny, but connecting them all in a line, keeping the laughter building and the plot rolling (something that Buster Keaton never forgot in his silents), is.

Another problem the film has to wade through is the inadequacy of support for the main story. The minor characters are immediately forgettable (except for Tim Kazurinsky as an old son-of-a-bitch of a mechanic), especially Keese's wife, and his daughter, who maybe was just in there to mention something about "getting a mohawk" or whatever Gelbart thought was the current epitome of punk. (So why the Police posters in her bedroom, I ask?) If the film



Belushi & Aykroyd try their best in "Neighbours".

had been taken past the "vehicle for Belushi & Aykroyd" phase, real characters might have been added as well. Running gags such as do exist in the movie, a sinister, spark-spitting transmission tower, don't run anywhere except on, being used to connect the plot gaps with little explanation as to their purpose.

But the sorest point of the film for me was the soundtrack, or, properly, "that goddamn fucking annoying thing!" Bill Conti, who did the score for **Rocky** in better days, decided that, "like, the audience for dis-comedy's gonna be some dum, so's they's gonna haveta have funny music too, right?" What he came up with is a cross between a Three Stooges

soundtrack and a Brady Bunch score, never leaving us alone with the film, always intruding and making potentially good scenes farcically awful. If I live to be a hundred and twelve, I'll never hear the "Hallelujah Chorus" used in such a tacky way (as Belushi nears orgasm, we hear a choir singing "Come- come, come, come!").

Paradoxically, if the film had been a bit worse, I might have enjoyed it more (without the music, that is). If I couldn't have seen signs everywhere in the film of just how good it **could** have been, it's being not-so-hot mightn't have turned me against it. This goes in my "should-have-been-a-nice-try" section. Shame.

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