

Gripping but hard to relate to

Lesson in young Establishment

By DAN MERKUR

Frank and Eleanor Perry, the husband and wife team that made David and Lisa, The Swimmer and Last Summer, have again explored the \$100,000-a-year social maelstrom in Diary of a Mad Housewife, which, as usual, is full of all the Perry's faults and virtues, with the accent on virtues this time out.

The story concerns a young establishment lawyer who is trying to join a socially elite circle of artists, bluebloods and other assorted snots. His wife (an English lit M.A.) equates feminism with submission, and suppresses most of her objections to his social climbing, his desire to be a wine connoisseur, his patently absurd notions of child-rearing, etc. So she has an affair.

Richard Benjamin plays the lawyer, and Carrie Snodgrass makes a brilliant debut as his wife. Frank Langella plays George, the fiery, young suppressed homosexual writer who completes the menage a trois.

It is primarily in the characters that the faults and virtues of the Perry's (Eleanor writes: Frank directs and produces) are evident. They have a penchant for types, ever stereotypes, and while Benjamin gives an exceptional performance, he remains an unbelievable stereotype for though the character has depth and scope and seems real, it is nevertheless unbelievable. Carrie Snodgrass plays a type, not a stereotype, that is equally well conceived, and comes across as a real person George, as a character, is less well drawn.

The values of certain social circles are difficult for most people to relate to, particularly when the social level is that of the rich or nouveau riche.

Benjamin is so terribly concerned with social climbing, with ultra sophistication with keeping up with the Charlotte Rady's, with being part of the Idle Rich, that he neglects family and job.

Snodgrass, so concerned with pleasing and serving her husband, allows him to spoil their children, go heavily into debt, and disintegrate emotionally.

Diary of a Mad Housewife is a gripping tragicomedy that is marvellously entertaining. But because the values of the characters are so patently absurd and their lives so removed from the norm (these people can afford The Alice Cooper Band at a party), the film has a fantasy-like appearance. But, like David and Lisa, it is sensitive and full of insight.

It is hard to relate to, very easy to appreciate, well conceived stylistically, handsomely mounted, slightly absurd, and quite moving — a nice movie.

What can I say? It is better than some, worse than others: worth seeing, an object lesson in young Establishment America.

Just a note: Cinematheque (in the Music Library, 559 Avenue Road at St. Clair) will be playing Bogart and Bergman in Casablanca on Friday night, at 7.15 and 9/30. 50 cents membership and \$1.50 a ticket.

Next Friday night the Marx Brothers and the incomparable Margaret Dumont appear in seldom seen Animal Crackers, in my opinion the very best film of the Marxes.

The story as incident plus insight (as in Steinbeck) has been employed by film makers in films like A Married Couple, Goin' Down the Road, The Sterile Cuckoo and others, where the plot per se is unimportant; it serves only to explain the characters. Jack Nicholson's new film, Five Easy Pieces, is such a story — just another guy who has rejected his father's values, who goes home to see the old man before he dies, reconsiders his choice, and gets back on the road again.



Gallery scene from Diary of a Mad Housewife with Carrie Snodgrass and Richard Benjamin.

The film is well enough done, but that flash of insight so important to this sort of story is missing. One feels like a voyeur rather than audience, because there is so little being told; a man's life is on exhibition, but with no direction from the story-teller. One watches, and when the film is over, one forgets. There is no illumination, no insight.

However, it is well made; the script is good; only a couple characters are stereotyped; Jack Nicholson is very, very good; the cinematography is fine; the colour okay. But is all that worth going to see a movie for? Or making one?

I don't think so. At this writing I think I can definitely say Five Easy Pieces is not a memorable flick. And about the come-on title, the five easy pieces are Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. Nicholson plays a musical family drop-out.

See him, dat man with face of stone? Take da ride . . .

By JOHN OUGHTON

Every morning thousands of gray units erase their expressions and are clogged into a linear process the operative myth of which is that if each unit reads his quota of ad nausea and does not react he will be delivered to his where.

But the dark side of the myth is that all the units are totally dependent for their light and motion while underground on the North American power pool, fate, and the chance that another drunken engineer won't pull the big switch; maybe we're all wired and don't know it. Such is the basic premise of Subway (not by Arthur Hailey, despite similarities in theme and dullness), now enjoying a long run beneath downtown Toronto.

Although the price is low and the light show quite spaced out, few people experience the subway as entertainment. The fun in any more or less regular system lies in observing or creating aberrations in it.

For passive sport, sit in the front, and watch the driver, note trains which don't stop at stations, get trapped between stations, observe the relative motion of empty Parkdale Wine bottles on the car floor, and look for the mice who live beside the rails in the St. George station. These rodents never seem to get run over and are good behavioral models for anyone who will be living in the flight path at SSTs or beside the Spadina Expressway extension.

Active forms of subterranean excitement are more exciting. Someone recently brought a small

dog into a station which got onto the tracks ahead of an eastbound train. It evaded attempts at capture all the way from Spadina to Yonge, forcing the train to move at dogspeed. A less sadistic idea is subway hide and seek, in which 'It' has to start at the last car in a train and find everyone else by a predetermined stop. Or you could organize a group of people to get on at successive stops with musical instruments, play for a while, and then leave without ever speaking to each other. . . Wheels and rails are a rhythm section.

Recommended only for hardcore cultural revolutionaries is the Harpo Marxist trick of getting on a

morning rush-hour train with scissors and collecting as many ties as possible before the next stop.

The old stop-and-go is also good for people trippers: the socio-ethno-economic status of passengers varies markedly according to station of the line. For all you other trippers, the best part of the whole movie is the night ride between Castle Frank and Broadview. Or if you are tired of the turn-on style, try the turnstile. The TTC is 3-day-old porridge with rare raisins and thus more restful than a Wolfian electric pudding. See dat man with face of stone? He took da ride, oh TTC rider. . .

Cricklewood Green is a success and then some

By STEVE GELLER

Since the movie Woodstock was released, Ten Years After have received more publicity and popularity than they had experienced ever before. Their newest album Cricklewood Green was awaited with great anticipation and was marked for success due to its pre-release sales. Musically it has lived up to all its expectations and then some.

Structurally, Cricklewood Green is continuous in the rock'n' blues Ten Years After tradition. In past albums the group has concentrated on their personal instrumental improvement and then aimed at creating a distinguishable, uniform cohesiveness. With their new album however, Ten Years After seem at last to be content with their musical abilities (and they have every right to be) and have turned to making sound improvements by a creative manipulation of studio regulators and sound computers.

The result is an album recorded in layers of sound instead of absolute separations. Thus separation has been in order of varying frequencies rather than by each instrument and a new and musically penetrating effect has been created. Each cut seems to be a living, three-dimensional experience.

If you have been confused by the explanation of Ten Years After's technological advancements, here's something simpler: Cricklewood Green is a damn good album.

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