

## arts

Wooden Bissett, distilled Finney in under-explosive **Volcano**

By KEVIN CONNOLLY

"There are some things you can't apologize for." So says Geoffrey Firmin, the alcoholic hero of the summer film *Under the Volcano*. And, after watching this long-awaited film by celebrated director John Huston, one would be inclined to agree.

Based on the 1947 Malcolm Lowry masterpiece, the film is perhaps an attempt to do the impossible: adapt what is essentially a psychological tragedy into some sort of coherent drama for the screen. Still, most of this film's problems cannot be blamed on the source material. Huston seems to have made some rather baffling decisions, not the least of which is the manner in which he employs his actors.

Albert Finney's performance, one of the few bright spots in *Under the Volcano*, is nonetheless only a limited success. Finney plays Geoffrey Firmin, a self-destructive dipsomaniac who is driven to near complete mental break-

down by the departure, and subsequent return of his wife Yvonne (Jacqueline Bisset).

Strangely, Finney seems to be playing the role for laughs; and though he is a far cry from Lowry's brooding depressive, he still manages to generate an emotional focus for the drama. In quick, schizophrenic shifts from drunken tomfoolery to wild emotional outbursts, Finney is often very effective in exposing the volatile intensity of his character. But there are times when Finney is too foolish. His verbal tirades and wild gesticulations often go far beyond what is necessary, or desirable, for a given scene. As in last year's *The Dresser*, Finney walks a fine line between acting and over-acting, and one can't help but think how much more effective he could have been had Huston kept him under greater control.

Visually, Bisset is perfect for her role, but the illusion is shattered every time she opens her mouth. Her lines are delivered in a flat, two-dimensional monotone, and like co-star

Anthony Andrews, Bisset appears lost for most of the film. It is impossible for the viewer to believe such a cardboard creature could drive Firmin to such desperation, and thus the drama falls apart at its very core.

Andrews, a young British actor of considerable capabilities, is woefully miscast as Hugh, Firmin's half brother—the third member of what should be a love triangle.

Still, poor acting is often the least of the film's problems. It suffers from so many structural difficulties that the end result is an incoherent garble of scenes; some of them excellent but most very poor. Major plot elements, such as the past affair between Hugh and Yvonne are left hanging in mid-air while the film races from scene to scene, image to image, with the audience struggling to make some sense out of it all. Most of the script's key lines are delivered by Finney in a drunken garble—it's like asking a wino for directions.

In the end the film demands an intimate

knowledge of Lowry's novel if the viewer is going to make sense of it. When one is dealing with a work that until quite recently has remained obscure, even in literary circles, it's a bit much to ask of the beleaguered viewer.

Even for those who do know the novel, there is little here to cheer about. Lowry's Mexico—alternately hellish and paradisaic—is transformed by Huston into some sunny tourist spot. There is almost no sense of the sinister or that feeling of impending doom that is so essential to the impact of the story. Huston's inexplicable lightning pace allows no mood to be created, no plot to take shape, no theme to be explored. In his exuberance to include nearly every motif in the original novel, Huston robs almost all of them of any intelligible meaning. And, when Huston finally gets his act together (the last 20 minutes of the film are outstanding), much of the audience may be too lost to appreciate it.

## Book gives musicians sober advice about the business

By JASON SHERMAN

*Some Straight Talk About the Music Business*

by Mona Coxson  
CM Books, 204 pp., 1984

"What if music stopped completely?" asked Mona Coxson, lowering her voice. "Is there anything people do that they don't celebrate with music? We take it for granted and in turn we're inclined to take the musicians for granted."

Completing the cycle, musicians themselves also tend to take the inner workings of their profession for granted—a form of naiveté which could ultimately endanger their livelihood.

In the past, Coxson has tackled this problem by offering courses on the business of music but was recently asked to write a book on the same subject.

The result, *Some Straight Talk About the Music Business*, destroys or corrects many of the assumptions which musicians carry with them into their profession: dangerous assumptions about the legal, business and marketing aspects of musicianship. It is precisely this "non-approach" to things "non-artistic" which has long plagued artists of all disciplines, leaving them prey not only to industry hustlers, but to their own ignorance.

Quite often the psychological problems that manifest themselves in breakdowns, alcoholism and drug abuse, can be directly linked to economic difficulties. There still exists, however, the sort of Ivory Tower mentality which arbitrarily separates the interests of the art and business worlds.

Well, one need not look much past the front pages of trade publications like *Billboard* or *Variety* to recognize that this kind

of provincial thinking is archaic rubbish. Coxson points out that as recently as 30 years ago business training simply wasn't available for musicians in this city, for the very good reason that the only training ground here for musicians, the Royal Conservatory, didn't teach it.

This all changed drastically when Don Johnson, the music coordinator at Humber College returned from a whirlwind tour of some American training centres where business was very much a part of the musician's schooling. Johnson asked Coxson, his former tutor, to put together what she half-jokingly refers to as her survival course. Coxson was elated by the reception she received from her first class, a group of student musicians making sizeable incomes, but whose futures Johnson worried about.

Humber, unfortunately, remains the exception among Ontario's colleges and universities. Although York is no better than any other, Coxson says, "I separate York a little from the community colleges. The whole premise of the colleges is to prepare people for their chosen work fields. They still accept students who will not make it in the music business. It takes more than being able to play—it takes the right temperament, it takes health, stamina, but the colleges won't tell the musicians that. They spend three years and they concentrate all their time on music, then they go out and they can't cope." There is a subtle shifting of responsibility from the institutions and teachers to the students themselves, at least those "who will not listen," says Coxson, "because they know it all, 'man'."

Those students who are fortunate enough to be able to take a few music business courses, or smart enough to read Cox-

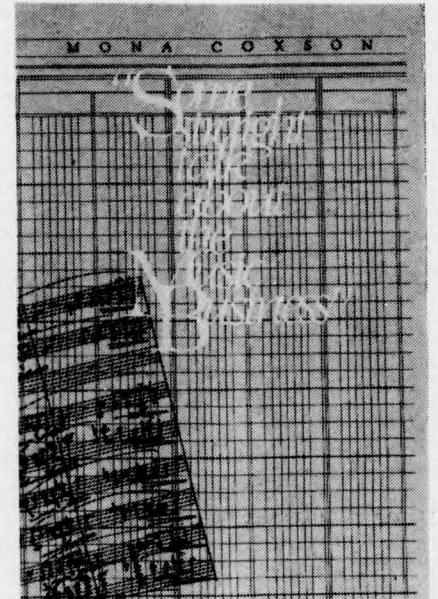
son's book, will still not know all they need to about the music business. But reading Coxson's book will give the musician—amateur or professional, emerging or established—a great deal of information which might otherwise take years of experience, and plenty of misfortune, to discover.

Coxson covers every imaginable angle, and then some. In chronological fashion Coxson covers everything from making the initial decision to become a musician to one's conduct in an interview. The latter topic is a typical one in a book which takes nothing for granted: what seems superfluous at first glance becomes worthwhile information to store away for future reference.

There are two faults with the book, neither of which would bother Coxson, nor should they stop anyone from buying the book.

The first problem is Coxson's condescending tone in the book. Coxson tends to treat the reader as though they had just arrived home from high school band practice. No one likes to be talked down to, never mind written down to. On the other hand, no one wants to read a book full of business terms and legalese. We might just accept the compromise.

The second complaint is that, although the book seems well-structured, there are points at which Coxson interrupts with apologies about missing important information in earlier chapters; information which is then simply plopped down wherever the interjection happened to be. Again, this is indicative of poor editing more than anything else. As Coxson admits, with a flair for overstatement, "I'm not an Ernest Hemingway, but the book is very honest; there's no hype in it."



And because the book is meant to be read cover to cover we may forgive Coxson for her less-than-flowing prose and for avoiding merely listing streams of related information—a characteristic of a simultaneously released book: *Music Directory Canada '84*.

The music directory is an extensive and much needed, but not all-inclusive, guide to the people, places and practices of the Canadian music industry.

The book is a first for this country. As Coxson says, "If any Canadian has written a book on the subject, they're hiding it." The directory is also replete with "tips from the pros"—which could also stand a little editing.

This book is recommended for musicians and other interested parties. So put down that instrument and pull up a ledger.

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