

CONCEPT : REVIEW

across 110th street (this year's black horse?)

There's a movie in town just now that has all the characteristics of a real sleeper. It's playing at the Rialto under the uninformative title, "Across 110th Street". This one is slick, fast, and gutsy, in more ways than one. There's a lot of viscera let loose in this one. Violence is definitely in style this year. This movie is about crime, Harlem style, which provides a good many plausible permutations. When the syndicate is ripped off for a succulent slice of their numbers racket's profits, they set out to eliminate the uppity competition. Since crime has a habit of attracting the police, a couple of them are also eliminated in the proceedings. This being the case the forces of the law are also hot on the tail of the competition. Warm on the trail actually since they are continually aced out by the more efficient syndicate machine which is greased by magical, tongue-loosening money. The chase is one the police are destined to lose. Without this provision there wouldn't be much of a story but the movie makes it all very convincing.

The one thing about this movie that is heavy handed is its message. Relevancy is written all over and through this movie. To escape the sensation that this movie has a message is next to impossible. The difficulty is trying to ascertain with any certainty just what that message is. Possibly this is because there are too many threads to handle comfortably. The filmmakers efforts at relevancy are everywhere. It's an up to date progress report on a deteriorating ghetto. Harlem stars as the toilet bowl of New York and it needs flushing badly. Just in case you still think of Harlem as the Spanish Harlem of immortal song the filth is to be seen everywhere in all its depressing redundancy. The point that strikes home is that beneath the everest of filth and despair there are fortunes to be made if you're short on scruples.

Harlem has been an economic property for the syndicate for generations. Their operations there have been handed down from son to son for a long time now. But Harlem is going through some agonizing transitions lately and some changes have been necessary to retain it as an economically viable situation. Today blacks do the dirty work of collecting profits and enforcing family policy. Being on the inside now they have begun to cut themselves in for a slice of the action. They can't be pushed around so easily anymore. They're a very real threat to both the syndicate and the law which can't contain them any longer. Not much wonder either, the police here are corrupt, just like the newspapers have been telling us about a cop's life in New York. They take bribes. The moral position on this is that it's "only gambling money." It still comes from the same cash

register as profits from whores and drugs. The police are also in a transitional state. There are black cops now, "college boys", up and coming and squeezing out their predecessors who graduated from the same ghetto in an earlier time. Time moves to fast for some and they never quite catch up with what's happening to them.

Anthony Quinn and Anthony Franciosa are the token whites in this movie. Other than that it's a black movie all the way. Seldom has Harlem seemed so definitively foreign. This endows the movie with an exotic flavor such as cinematic 'slumming' can produce. There is an excellent cast of black actors most of whom were unknown to me.

The central image that dominates *Across 110th Street* is black Harlem. It's a very valuable piece of property to everyone concerned. In uncertain times it's hard to know who owns it. Everyone involved takes something out of Harlem at very little cost and no one wants to let their interests go. Quinn's job is threatened by Lieutenant Pope. The syndicate is threatened by their black henchmen who have developed profit motives of their own. The black hoods are threatened by blacks even more desperate than themselves. It's all very finely balanced and everything has to be kept in line or all hell breaks loose. When two of the sewer rats try to beat the game on its own dirty terms they end up running in a maze they can't escape from, persued by all sides. They are marked men. But everyone is marked in this story. It's all very fatalistic. It couldn't be otherwise.

The credits flashed a long list of unfamiliar names before my eyes. I regret I didn't catch them all because I'd like to give the editor, cinematographer, and director the credit they deserve. The editing is sharp and keeps the movie moving at an insistent pace. The camera work ruthlessly and relentlessly focuses attention on the peripheral trivia and paraphernalia of the rat hole that is Harlem without losing sight of the central story and characters. The direction has created a forceful document on the destructive potential of a big city's cancer—creating overcrowding and her doppelganger, despair. There is a claustrophobic sense of desperation. Everyone is running for their lives, trying to pick up some of what's theirs as they see it. A lot of people get mixed up in this mix-master of a jungle and they are cast aside like last year's pigeon droppings.

Like I said, it's a slick movie. It's very well done. Its attendant embarrassment of exotica might slow you down because of its intrinsic argot but the movie has all the ingredients of a ripping good story whose complexities are all lovingly unravelled in good order. This is one movie that is well worth checking out.

Walter Plinge

Dietfried Loves Mozart. And if Mozart was alive today, I'm sure that this love would not be unrequited.

Mozart's 41st Symphony "The Jupiter" was definitely the highlight of the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra's concert last Saturday night. On the surface this symphony seems, like many of Mozart's works, to be a pleasant and easy going composition. In actuality, it is a work of great depth. Its frequent chromaticism creates an ominous tone to what otherwise is a high spirited 1st movement. This tension continues throughout the whole symphony; as soon as it looks as if relief is in sight, a new idea, foreshadowing things to come, is introduced. It isn't until the last movement that the "Godlike" qualities of the work (hence, the title "Jupiter") is realized.

The ESO's performance of it certainly milked all the tension that Mozart obviously put into the composition. Guest conductor, Dietfried Bernet was also able to create a perfect balancing of strings and woodwinds, without allowing them to be submerged in each other.

The second word, "The Flower Clock for Oboe and Orchestra" by Jean Francaix was written in 1958, and contains seven short movements, each one bearing the title of a flower. At first I had difficulty getting into it, since it is such a contrast to the intense Mozart work. Part of the difficulty arises when one tries to figure out what the hell each movement has to do with the flower that is supposedly portrayed.

However, being from the French Impressionist school, Francaix probably does not intend it to be programme music; it should simply be appreciated as is. It certainly is



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one of the more charming 20th century compositions. Like many modern French works, it does not reject tonality, and emphasizes counterpoint at the expense of rich harmonies. Each movement utilizes a fairly strict formal structure, yet is still free-flowing. The last movement provides a splendid finale, where the full orchestra enters, contrasting with the earlier movements which consisted, for the most part, of dialogue between the oboe and a small string and woodwind section. This movement consists entirely of variations on a single theme. The danger of performing such a witty piece of music is that it can take on the makings of a musical exercise. However, Dietfried Bernet and the ESO interpreted it tastefully, neither over-romanticizing it (as some European conductors are prone to do) or loading it with technical gimmicks (an American trait). Also, congratulations to Robert Cockell for some fine oboe playing.

For the performance of Beethoven's Eroica Symphony

Larry Saidman

(The third), the most impressive feature was the re-emergence of the symphony's french horn section. Though the 3rd horn did seem to have difficulty with a few of the more difficult passages in the third movement, the horns played with more confidence than I ever heard them play under Lawrence Leonard. About the actual composition, I can't say too much, except for the fact that I'm not really a Beethoven freak. But in the first, third and fourth movements, the orchestra played crisply, and was quite "together". The second movement, on the other hand, dragged—which is a shame, since it is probably more thematically interesting than most of Beethoven's symphonic movements. One thing Bernet seems to like to do, especially with Beethoven, is to really bring out the dynamic contrasts. In fact, I felt that in parts he was overdramatizing it a bit—as if it were possible to overdramatize Beethoven).

Another good thing about Dietfried Bernet—he brings the "visual" aspect back to ESO concerts. His expressive gestures are a pleasure to watch—something that was lacking in Lawrence Leonard's conducting. But for visual effects, I don't think that anyone could match Brian Priestman.

All in all, it was a very enjoyable concert. True, it could have been a little tighter,—but that's something that's probably due to lack of rehearsals. I think that the power and feeling was put into the performance outweigh any of the minor technical flaws. If Dietfried Bernet is any indication of the type of conductor that will head the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra next year, I think I'll go out and buy season tickets.

pete 'n' tillie isn't neat and silly

Pete n' Tillie, which is still hanging on at the Odeon has a couple of surprises to offer. The greatest of these is that it is actually a much better film than you might expect. Not that it's a great film by any stretch of the imagination but it is much more than you would expect from a 'family' picture. The other leading surprise is Carol Burnett's performance. Limited it might be and it is lacklustre in the moment of grand passion, but it is a revelation; the nature of which is totally unforeshadowed by her television persona.

The publicity blurbs with which this film has been promoted, or fobbed off on the public, as the case may be, are misleading and tend to thwart the intention of the movie's offerings. The promos would have you believe that this is a hilarious grown-up version of the Doris Day-Rock Hudson suspense comedies. (Will she or won't she?) The truth is the first half of the movie is witty in a wry way but the comedy sours in the second half when the romance fades to a paler shade of reality. This tinge of tragedy has upset more than one reviewer and the movie has been panned for its inconsistencies. Not fair. The movie does not live up to the expectations engendered by the sales pitch but it does satisfy on its own premises.

If one considers the movie as an examination of an adamantly average post-pubescent love affair and marriage the movie

has life. The story is excruciatingly simple. Basically it is: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl. Complications and elaborations are minimal; the lovers, Pete and Tillie, are in their thirties, they have sex before marriage, (eliminating the suspense element), they have a child, child dies young, marriage has breakdown, wife has breakdown, they start to pick up the pieces. Now the bit about the dying child may seem like an overly maudlin fillip but consider that someone has to be the parents of those that die young. Anyway this isn't Love Story; it is a love story and it happens.

Walter Matthau and Carol Burnett are admittedly very much the movie's main attractions, Burnett for all the wrong reasons, Matthau for all the right ones. Matthau is incomparable at playing the common man. To do it well requires an uncommonly fine player and Matthau is just that. Burnett appeals because of her large television audience. This is frequently the kiss of death to an actress trying to make it on the big screen but in this case Burnett is a fine foil for Matthau. Together they carry off their scenes in perfect tandem. On her own, Burnett falters, especially in her 'curse God' scene. Unfortunately this bit is too embarrassing to dismiss as a minor quibble but she does have other compensatory charms. Geraldine Page is slightly tedious in another of her routine finicky matron

impersonations. One hopes that some day she will go back to acting which she is really rather good at when she wants to be. Rene Auberjonois, fast becoming a familiar face in Altman's movie repertory company, delivers a finely controlled fog flitting around the twilight zone of the cocktail and charity circuit.

Martin Ritt's direction is a problem. To call it uninspired or unimaginative might be reasonably accurate but it would also be somewhat malicious. At best his direction is unobtrusive but consequently, it is seldom introspective. Ritt hasn't quite been able to smooth out the transition from the comic to the tragic but that's about par for that kind of difficulty. After all, Shakespeare had the same kind of problem in Measure for Measure. Mostly, Ritt's direction is affectionate and compassionate. His treatment is light and at times, strangely quiescent. It is not entirely satisfying but to his credit he has not tried to overburden the story with significance which is not there. For a fuller look at or a comparison of his directorial talents check out his other film in town, Souther.

Pete n' Tillie is worth a look. But see the movie on its own terms and forget about how the promoters have been trying to sell it to you. Don't expect too much and you'll be pleasantly pleased. Any other way, you'll be disappointed.

Walter Plinge