

entertainment

'Harry and Son' fails to communicate

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What we have here is a failure to communicate. Father Harry (Paul Newman) is a gruff, hostile crane operator on a demolition team; son Howard (Robbie Benson) is a sensitive, idealistic would-be writer.

Harry & Son is almost *Terms of Endearment* -- *The Male Version*. Father and son don't understand each other. Harry wants his son to get a job and accept adult responsibilities, "to feel the heat .. to see the light." Howard wants his father to discover the lighter side of life, to learn that work is not the only reason for living.

In the end, each gets his wish. Father and son learn to appreciate one another's values. And doesn't the audience know it! Newman, who directed, starred, co-produced and co-authored the screenplay, leaves nothing to the imagination.

The author's message is repeatedly trotted out in the relationships between father and son, Howard and his pregnant ex-girl friend, Katie (Ellen Barkin), Harry and Katie's mother (Joanne Woodward), mother and daughter, and Howard and an unemployed black man (Ossie Davis). The message is also underscored by Harry during his 'self-discovery': I should have just let things happen; I've missed a lot; I'd better shut up or I'll start enjoying myself.

Harry & Son seems more of a conceptual exploration on Newman's part. Many intriguing ideas are hinted at; none are effectively resolved.

This film is Newman's third consecutive attempt to address the relationship between a man and his job. In *The Verdict*, he was a washed-up lawyer fighting for self-respect. *Absence of Malice* saw him as a self-employed businessman whose life work is destroyed; as Harry, Newman portrays a unionized, blue collar worker fired from his job for health reasons and unable to find new work.

Newman's pre-occupation with story-line tangents sacrifices depth of character for complexity of plot. This trade-off results in over-sentimentality (Benson excels at this) and a meandering thematic development.

The book on which *Harry & Son* is based had neither mother nor daughter. Although the performances of Woodward and Barkin are strong points, the characters add very little to the exploration of the central father-son relationship and could have been eliminated. Encounters father and son have with the secretary who gets off on the sound of a camera motor drive are extraneous and contrived.

Newman is a talented director, as he has demonstrated in *Rachel, Rachel*, *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* and *The Shadow Box*. He is too involved in other aspects of this film to direct competently. He has said another actor was initially supposed to portray Harry. If someone else had taken the role, Newman could have been more objective about his work and might have turned out a better picture.

BLAME IT ON BROOKE
--The main attraction of *Blame It On Rio* is Michelle Johnson, a 17-year-old model. She is the spitting image of Brooke Shields from the neck up and is much more lavishly constructed from the neck down. Unfortunately, Shields and Johnson are undoubtedly equals in the acting department. Neither of them can do it.

Blame It On Rio is a comedy about a middle-aged man (Michael Caine) who falls for Jennifer (Johnson), the daughter of his best friend (Joseph Bologna) during their vacation in Rio de Janeiro.

Caine is absolutely laconic (he probably saw



Harry (Paul Newman, right) and son (Robbie Benson): *Terms of Endearment - The Male Version*.

the daily rushes); Bologna is hopped-up but unbelievable.

Likely heavily financed by the Rio de Janeiro Board of Trade and Brazilian department of Tourism, *Blame It On Rio* features blue waters, sandy beaches, exotic hideaways, tourist night life and, most importantly, young lovelies prancing topless through the sand, our amply endowed starlet included.

Director Stanley Donen has groused recently that the cultural taboo of an older man having an affair with a young girl is the reason for the film's poor critical success. Not so,

Stanley. That topic is dealt with only on the surface and seems to be more of an excuse for Johnson to bare her breasts or walk around in outfits leaving very little to the imagination.

And the comedy? Larry Gelbart, executive producer and co-script writer, can't save this one, despite his triumphs with *Tootsie* and 97 episodes of *M*A*S*H*. A spraying of Gelbart's cynical, witty one-liners is evident, but they are not

enough. The rest of the script is mere padding. More importantly, Bologna's delivery of most Gelbart lines lacks the

lightning sarcasm of Alan Alda, while his performance lacks the energy of his comedy-show host in *My Favorite Year*.

Mainly, the problem is pacing. Too many pauses in the dialogue. Two instances where the thrust and parry vital to comedy succeed are the confession scene where Jennifer tells her father that she has an older lover, and the bedroom fight between the two fathers. The former is ruined by Johnson's total lack of acting ability; the latter is funny, but is too close to the end of the picture to save the film.

Blame it on the exploitation of women.