

Arts

Peter pulls off peerless Poirot performance

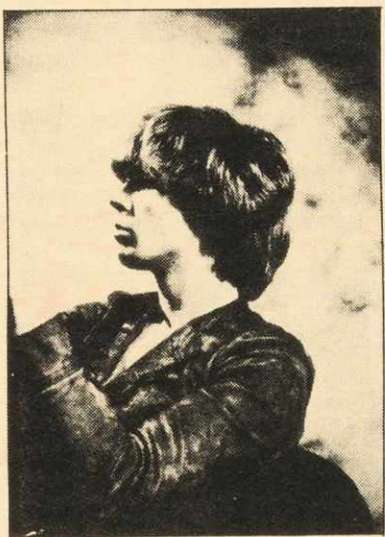
by Mike Marvell

Evil Under the Sun is an adaptation of an Agatha Christie Hercule Poirot mystery. A placid, dully written, uninspired, insipid, practically boring, watered-down and not-really-worth-bothering-over-or-writing-home-about adaptation of an Agatha Christie Hercule Poirot mystery, nonetheless.

This film is about a bathing cap, a bottle, a bath, a watch, a glass ring, the breath of the sea (ha! Watch that one. It's tricky.), a pipe, and the height of a cliff. If you know all that, you should be able to solve the murder. Poirot does.

This is the third Agatha Christie movie made by these particular producers, and the second featuring Peter Ustinov as Poirot. The first such one, **Death on the Nile** (1974), was very entertaining. This one isn't very entertaining, except for the marvellous performance of Ustinov.

Hercule Poirot is a fat, meticulous, conceited, pushy Belgian who likes to snoop into other people's affairs. Insurance companies frequently remunerate him for snooping into the affairs of those making suspicious



claims. He is, as Maggie Smith quaintly puts it in the movie, "the most insufferable man in the world".

Ustinov handles the role perfectly. He is obnoxious as only a fat, presumptuous, disgusting Belgian prig can be. To top it off with joyously unbearable injustice, he is right when no one thinks he can be.

Unfortunately, he is wasted in

a bland film. The screenplay Tony Shaffer has produced is improvident, not to mention lacking in excitement. While mysteries are not known for character development, the dialogue here aggravates the problem. So does the half-hearted acting which stagnates throughout most of the movie.

Roddy McDowell is offensive in a fatiguing manner as an English scandal monger who, regrettably, is not murdered or sentenced to hang. Sylvia Miles and James Mason also inexplicably get off scot-free despite their pretentious and inconsequential rendition of a pretentious and inconsequential pair of show producers. Emily Hone embarks on a career which promises to be morosely spiteful and dull as a dull, morosely spiteful little girl. Colin Blakely is eminently forgetful as a rich but aging playboy what's-his-name. He doesn't die either.

The only person who really provides support for Ustinov in this cinematic wasteland is the marvellously spirited Maggie Smith. She comes up with wonderfully British sayings and suggestions which annoy Poirot to no end, especially when she

mistakes his Belgian accent for French. When she muses about an 11 year old who strangled someone with a pair of nut-crackers "in Hungary - or was it Crete?", she pouts quizzically with an absent-minded tilt of her head.

All these people share a distaste for Diana Rigg, who is refreshingly pompous and overbearing as a social climbing ex-showgirl. She dies.

Two other people kill her. I'm not going to mention their names. After all, they didn't mention mine. Besides, they're terribly boring. They deserve to hang, or whatever happens to them after they're taken away - Poirot uncovers them with fiendish cleverness and nauseating fatuity. Happily, one murderer punches him in the mouth before leaving.

The plot won't affect your enjoyment of the movie. Most of it is equally boring, even when you don't know what's coming next. The only consistently entertaining part is Ustinov's summation of events and his apparently anti-climactic master-stroke as he bags his kill. And you won't be able to manage that by yourselves no

matter how much I tell you. Only Poirot could; only Poirot.

We leave the master sleuth nursing his jaw, and learning he has been awarded the Order of St. Goodwin the Inquisitive, first class. Suspiciously, Poirot demands "How many classes are there?"

If it's like Ustinov, there will be one and only he'll be in it. If it's like most of this movie, it will turn out to be second-class anyway.

Going wilder with the Teardrop Explodes

Review: The Teardrop Explodes **Wilder**
(Vertigo/Zoo VOG-1-3301)

by Gisele Marie Baxter

This is a fabulous album. This could very well be one of the best albums of 1982. True, there were some great things about The Teardrop Explodes' debut, **Kilimanjaro**, but I almost dismissed the band as another lot from Liverpool with an odd name; a second-rate Echo and the Bunnymen. No more. **Wilder** is so good it could be definitive.

So who are The Teardrop Explodes? There's Gary Dwyer on drums, Troy Tate on guitar and David Balfe on keyboards in the present lineup, and at the front of it all, there's Julian Cope, vocalist, songwriter, and bassist. He has been praised as a genius and condemned as an arrogant egotist, and maybe both assessments have some truth in them. The music on **Wilder** contrasts delicate, poignant ballads with Middle Eastern influences and brassy soulful pop; it's bright yet mystifying, featuring an intricate yet energetic interplay between the musicians, and always keeps Cope's vocal in the forefront. And that vocal is special, extremely appealing: Cope conveys a sense of innocence with a definite edge, and while his images are usually more suggestive than clear, they can catch at you powerfully.

I'd love to see The Teardrop

Explodes' English hit, "Passionate Friend" burn up the charts on this side of the Atlantic this spring, with its wonderful vocal, tight, clean horn section, joyful 1960's style choruses, and direct reference to "Take Good Care of My Baby," which I am old enough to remember. However, that song's only one part of **Wilder**, which also has some gently introspective moments in "...and The Fighting Takes Over" and "Tiny Children." The first has a lovely, lightly choppy guitar riff throughout, while "Children" keeps its instrumentation down to an understated synthesizer line under Cope's nakedly emotional voice, which edges on sadness in its tale of loss, of the failure of fantasy; the music is exquisitely sustained.

A Middle Eastern influence finds its way into "Seven Views of Jerusalem" with its light, rhythmic touches echoed in the harmonies and the strings, and the more powerful "Like Leila, Khaled Said," which keeps up its Eastern motifs under some fine guitar and keyboard work, creating a dark sense of menace. However, it's the final track, "The Great Dominions," which may be the key to the often enigmatic images of **Wilder**. Stark, almost scary in effect, the directness of the singing gives the lyrics emphasis over the exquisite arrangement.

Suddenly I came to my senses. A night on fire put out all traces of feeling

I'm only concerned with looking concerned

But you know it's more complex than that. This music is about tensions: between internal turmoil and external appearances, the fantasies we cherish and the realities we're forced to face, the way we build ourselves up only to be rudely deflated. Cope keeps repeating in his edgy, childlike voice "Mummy, I've been fighting again," and it's a beautiful, searing confrontation of the sometimes frightening person one can see inside

as childhood ends.

Yet for all that, I agree with Julian Cope's decision not to call this album "The Great Dominions," because the best of this music has a freshness and power that refuses to sink under any dilemma. If this lineup can stay together, The Teardrop Explodes could be part of a new pop for the 1980's which no one should call the psychedelic revival. This music is more than that name might imply. Right now, **Wilder** is driving me wilder; it might do the same for you.

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