



## Lights, Camera, Action!

By DAN MERKUR

"...nothing between human beings is one to three. In fact." Sam the Gonoph says, "I long ago come to the conclusion that all life is six to five against."

— Damon Runyon, A Nice Price

Most immediately, Francois Truffaut's *The Wild Child* (*L'enfant sauvage* is stunningly beautiful, both visually and emotionally. Like his *Jules et Jim*, it is a period drama filmed in the romantic tradition of the 1930s Hollywood cinema. Like *Jules et Jim* as well, it is far, far more than that.

*The Wild Child* employs deep focus photography throughout, which Gregg Toland first began using in *Dead End*, (1937). He delights in the awesome beauty of the countryside and the forest, as did Jean Renoir's work of the thirties (*Un journee dans la campagne*, 1936; *La grande illusion*, 1937). *The Wild Child* may also be noted for the 10-irises, the very narration-journal framing of the story, and the many dissolves and fades.

To write of almost anyone that he is an historically oriented director is to say he is an imitator of past master. To say it of Truffaut only explains his background. He is an innovator and a master artist, and his films are clearly some of the best ever made. *The Wild Child* is no exception; in fact it may even be his best.

The story is told by a French scientist of the century before last, who cares for a child of eleven or twelve that is found, by hunters, living alone and wild in the forest. The slow civilizing of the boy to the point where the scientist feels he may properly call him a man, and no longer a beast, constitutes the balance of the plot.

Truffaut plays the scientist, plays him very, very well, as a matter of fact, but the film belongs, as did *The 400 Blows*, to the film's child star, who is Jean-Pierre Cargol. Under Truffaut's incomparable tutelage, Cargol delivers a simply brilliant performance. All the supporting performances are flawless, and well, I think my list of superlatives is running out.

Visually the film is a gallery of stunning photography, and Truffaut has understood well how music should never be used to detract from the visuals, but rather only to complement them. He has also used the music to give a sense of continuity to an episodic story line. The story itself is devilishly intricate — alternating between long, lyric, silent sequences, and extended graceful, poetically simple dialogue scenes — with a sureness and a knowledge that allowed Truffaut even to break his own rules and insert a startling, and successful, rapid montage.

On a primary level the story concerns the civilizing of a wild boy, the tragedy of the happy child who ironically submits willingly to a complex, unhappy civilized world, and the success of the scientist who teaches him. It has a classic grace and simplicity, and a compelling (contemporary) reality to the events.

One can, and rightly so, take *The Wild Child*, only at this level, because, in a way, the film is nothing more than a beautifully tragic story.

But Francois Truffaut is the man responsible for making it, and in light of his New Wave history, and in view of his *Tirez sur le Pianiste*, the best existential statement of the French cinema, it is hard to overlook the philosophical implications of *The Wild Child*.

The child, living alone, out of the company of men, in the forest, in a natural state, concerned only with food, shelter and comparative safety, capable of blotting unimportant sounds out of its hearing, seeing little, smelling more, capable of rejoicing in a brook, the moon or merely running



Jean-Pierre Cargol and Francois Truffaut in *The Wild Child*.

free, the wild child is the ultimate, or perhaps the original, existential being. The moment he is captured, he is taught dependency on others. And the moment he accepts that responsibility, in order that he may gratify his learned dependency on human affection, he is called civilized. Thus *The Wild Child* is the classic existential story, the inevitable destruction of even the finest existentialist. The greatness of the story seems to me all the clearer when one considers that Truffaut tells an allegorical, archetypal story that not only serves as an analogy, but as a proof to modern existential works. It is a very fine work indeed.

*The Wild Child* may very well be the best film this year. I cannot recommend it more highly.

The Ontario Film Theatre is running its Keaton festival all this week and into the next, and I particularly want to recommend *The General*, probably Keaton's best film, which is being shown on Sunday, and *Steamboat Bill, Jr.*, which is pretty good stuff, next Tuesday. Screenings at 7:00 and 9:15. \$1 membership, \$1 admission.



Michael Marshall as "Morsewer" in Brendan Behan's *The Hostage*.

## Toronto's Behan revival

By JOHN OUGHTON

"Borstal Boy" and "the Hostage" are reviving the theatrical spirit of Brendan Behan for Toronto audiences. "Borstal Boy" is a professional, Broadway-style adaptation of Behan's "autobiographical novel on the sentimental and nostalgic elements in Behan's character. It's running until Jan. 30 at the Royal Alex. Toronto Workshop Productions' version of "The Hostage" is an essay in black comedy which integrates references to recent political kidnappings and hijackings into Behan's original text.

"Borstal Boy" is presented as a series of vignettes from the novel, with Michael o'Haonghusa as the elder Brendan Behan constantly on stage, observing and commenting on the younger Behan's brief career in the IRA and longer stay in prison. This is an effective device for conveying the kind of distance from one's past which is generally easier for novelists to suggest than for playwrights. The depiction of Behan given by o'Haonghusa is very convincing, although his voice and gestures seem at times too restrained for the man who was punched by a Canadian critic for affirming that Israel would put a matzoh ball in orbit and Ireland would send up a shillelagh before Canada had a space program.

George Connolly gives an excellent performance as the younger Behan, portraying the sensitivity and frustration of a sixteen year-old Irish rebel in a British prison so well that you forget he's acting. Another standout is Bruce Heighley as Charlie, Behan's friend behind the bars. The scenes which are set in Borstal are the most entertaining, as those lovable Borstal boys clown around and sometimes wish they were free. Songs are often used to good effect and occasionally the two stage Behans get together for a duet.

The defects in "Borstal Boy" are largely the fault of the director, Tomas MacCanna. Stage props are sometimes brought on obtrusively to no dramatic advantage, and since the sets are very bare the actors sometimes seem lost on the vast Royal Alex stage when they should seem cramped into their jail cells. Lighting, however, is very well done, and the opening scene (an explosion), is great for a shock beginning. It's basically a good, solid, traditional show which has some very funny moments and some

moving reminders of the early death of Behan.

"The Hostage" is more ambitious in its scope and more experimental in technique. The original plot involves a British soldier who is kidnapped and held hostage by the IRA (Ireland's FLQ) in reprisal for the planned execution of one of its members. The action takes place in a boarding house occupied by a bizarre set of characters: Princess Grace, a homosexual; a kilted, bagpiping Englishman who supports Irish liberation, a Russian sailor, a sexually frustrated charity worker, and so on. Reminders of other political kidnappings, including the Laporte event, are well used in the production.

As in "Borstal Boy", there are a number of musical interludes, although the cast of "the Hostage" also dance. Leo Burdak and Phil Savath display impressive versatility since they play, respectively, piano and mandolin as well as turning in strong characterizations. On opening night the cast seemed to have a little trouble in moving smoothly into the musical sequences, but this was probably initial nervousness which vanishes during successive performances.

Staging is very well handled. The set is extensive; there are always a number of actors on stage, often partly concealed by screens which suggest separate rooms. The inclusion of a piano on stage helps make the musical bits more natural. The only directing mistake involves the drummer; he provides some excellent sound effect but is left on stage throughout almost the entire production with a total of one spoken line. No play needs a non-acting observer on stage. The director, Geoffrey Read, makes no mistakes with the large group scenes, and the final transition from comedy into the dramatic death of the Hostage and back into comedy: "Oh death where is thy sting-a-ling-ling?" is really well done.

Everyone in the cast deserves commendation for their acting. For me, the best parts were played by Ray Whelan, as the landlord, and Barry Wasman as Princess Grace. All in all, "The Hostage" is more bawdy and exciting than *Borstal Boy*, and also succeeds better in expressing the political side of Behan's Ireland. It's running until Feb. 7 at TWP, 12 Alexander St. and student prices are low there.

## Weekly rock show at Market

By STEVE GELLER

With the closing of the Rock Pile, The Hawks Nest, and the slow but final death of the Electric Circus it became apparent that Toronto was going to suffer from a musical deficiency — which it did; that is, until the recent announcement by rock entrepreneurs Archie Macdonell and Jan Launder that the St. Lawrence Market would become the Fillmore North once a week.

Fillmore North will feature music in basically the same manner as the Fillmore West (San Francisco) and Fillmore East (New York) are accustomed to presenting. This means that three major acts will appear on one bill while the admission charge will be kept down to a very reasonable \$4.00.

The St. Lawrence Hall has been outfitted with a specially designed Traynor Sound System which is undergoing modification for stereo and quadraphonics during live performances.

The promoters have agreed that since they are providing music for people a percentage of the profit will go back into community projects.

Beginning on January 29, Friday night is to become regular concert night. Promoters Macdonell and Launder have already signed Rod Stewart, Edgar

Winter and White Trash, Blues Image, Canned Heat, Fleetwood Mac, Black Sabbath, Mainline, Tin House, Savoy Brown, Taj Mahal, and there are already rumours that Lee Michaels will also appear at the new Fillmore.

This Friday at the Fillmore North the headlining spot will be filled by Little Richard. The "Bronze Liberace", as he refers to himself, dropped out of the rock and roll era in 1957 right at the peak of his career. With many hits under his belt by this time, Little Richard had won many gold records for songs such as Tutti Frutti, Long Tall Sally and Whole Lotta Shakin' Going' On. Although temporarily out of touch with any part of the music industry what-so-ever, the path he began paving was to influence groups from The Beatles to Creedence Clearwater Revival during his absence.

Along with Little Richard will be S.R.C. and the always unpredictable Alice Copper who is quite capable of headlining a show by himself.

Hopefully the new Fillmore North will be able to overcome the pitfalls that spelled disaster for the other late, weekly entertainment spots that Toronto once homed and continued to bring a steady flow of first rate talent into the city.