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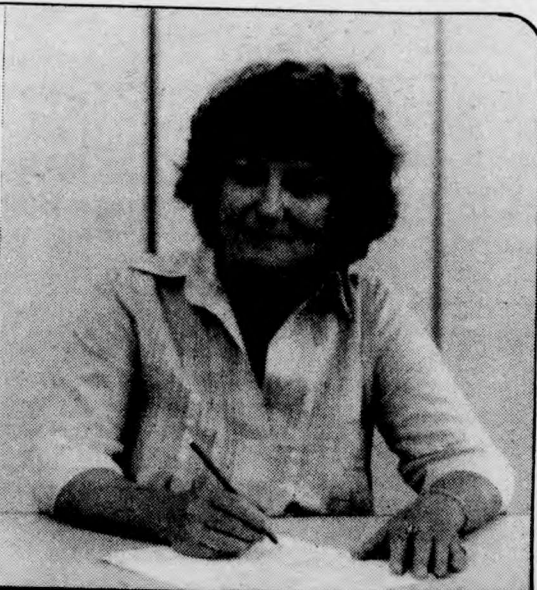
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# entertainment

## 'Comes a Horseman'

By Mickey Trigiani

*Comes a Horseman*, now playing at the Imperial Six and Towne & Country Cinemas, is a western action-romance directed by Alan J. Pakula and starring Jane Fonda, Jason Robards and James Caan.

Set in World War II Montana, *Comes a Horseman* explores the life-style and value system of cattlemen and cowboys. The very existence of these last of the great romanticized figures of nineteenth century America is threatened not only by the hardships and rugged nature of their work, but by progress — a violation of the frontier concept of freedom and personal independence.

*Comes a Horseman* is not an historical epic spanning 30 years. It presents an almost too simple story examining meticulously the lives of its three central characters. Robards is J.W. Ewing—the great cattle baron obsessed with empire-building and threatened by bankers and oil-hungry prospectors. Caan, who in real life belongs to a professional rodeo association, fittingly portrays cowboy Frank Athearn — a World War II veteran hoping to start a small peaceful ranch where he can rope steers during the day and strum on his guitar at night. Jane Fonda represents the tough but feminine woman rancher, Ella Connors, determined to hold onto her land no matter what the cost of the struggle.

By presenting what could easily pass as epic-line material in a simple, subtle, sentimental way, the film succeeds in drawing empathy from its viewers. The most successful technique employed to do this is the omnipresence of the mountain valley which frames all the action.

Understanding the force which drives Ewing, Frank and Ella necessitates an understanding of their love for "the land." In *Comes a Horseman* we are overpowered by the extraordinary scenic grandeur of the Rockies. The awesome beauty of the terrain is so important an element to the plot that Pakula allows us only three pauses from the land's almost narcotic energy — the interiors of Ella's homestead, the interior of Ewing's home and the inside of a saloon.

But once inside Ella's home and the saloon, it becomes dark or crowded. Ella escapes to her attic

to admire a miniature model of her farm. The effect is the same as if she were considering her home from the outside. And the most striking aspect of Ewing's home is a large painting on his wall glorifying the land.

Once the audience is penetrated by the land, the dynamiting for oil, "the tearing up of the land" as Frank says, becomes an evil reality. When Dodger, Ella's cowhand, mortally wounded from a fall, crawls out of bed onto his horse in order to die on the land, the pictorial effect of the silent act summarizes the womb-like quality the land holds for its ranchers.

*Comes a Horseman* is a slow-moving, careful film. It is not the action-packed western we are used to. It avoids dialogue by communicating through wordless pictures tempered by the character of the land. It delights in presenting a simple picture of the simple cattlefarmer.



Caan eyes Fonda in one of the few indoor scenes of "Horseman".

## New company stages gay play

By Ann Marie Wierzbicki

"And ladies, no sacrifice is too great for the theatre."

These are the words director Sean Mulcahy, in what he termed as a "plug" for the show, left us with after last Wednesday night's performance of *Total Eclipse* at the Bathurst St. theatre. My sympathy goes out to this new Toronto company, Labyrinth Productions, which is attempting to survive "without corporate or government subsidies". Indeed I would be greatly elated if such an endeavor could find success, but I have misgivings in this case.

*Total Eclipse* is an obscure play which Mulcahy himself describes as only accessible to a "refined" audience. One must, he claims, be familiar with the poets Verlaine and Rimbaud to really appreciate playwright Christopher Hampton's account of their three-year homosexual relationship. A company whose success "relies entirely on the public" is going to have great difficulty if they produce works geared toward such a small segment of the population. If they persist in producing such

admittedly obscure plays one can only see financial failure ahead.

In many ways this company deserves the chance to continue. Though their interpretation of Hampton's play lacked cohesion and in the majority of scenes failed, a number of them were wonderfully acted and directed.

These were the scenes which provided comic relief. An early bar scene in which an avant-garde composer friend of Verlaine's explains his new cantata to a meat pie elicits bursts of laughter from the audience. Later, Angelo Fusco, playing one of Verlaine's mistresses, gives the best performance of the evening. Her callousness is total, showing even in the way she drinks her absinthe.

The major problem in *Total Eclipse* is a distinctly wooden portrayal of character and situation. Much of this is due to Hampton's overly verbose script which included more scene changes than could be viably hadled by Tony Abrams' set.

The play could be greatly improved by some judicious cutting. Both Micheal Zelnicker (Rimbaud) and Aaron Schwartz (Verlaine) are hampered by the complexities of the language Hampton employs. It does not seem to be a logical conclusion that because Rimbaud and Verlaine wrote poetry their normal speech

patterns would carry over the complexities of their poetic language. *Total Eclipse* would be far less refined and therefore open to a larger audience if Hampton cut many superfluous adverbs and adjectives.

Rimbaud, at age 16, intrudes into Verlaine's life, and impresses him with his poetry and "incredible beauty," but Zelnicker's Rimbaud hasn't the fiery personality one would hope to see. Though he is articulate his physical energy does not live up to his angry words.

Verlaine's adulation of this boy, whom he finally leaves his wife and new-born son to follow, is unfortunately only explained as a physical dependency and a desire to love for the sake of loving. Though the language of the play attempts to maintain a poetic level, the relationship between these men as poets is not revealed.

*Total Eclipse* has the ingredients of a great play; monumental characters, strong conflicts of love and ideology, and a topical contemporary question—homosexuality. I would advise everyone to see a well-reworked production of this play. However, as it stands now I can only endorse it to those of you who have either an interest in Verlaine and Rimbaud or a desire to help build theatre support in Toronto.

## Student film screenings

The Faculty of Fine Arts Department of Film is presenting an on-campus screening of films by former students on Monday November 13, in Curtis lecture hall I. The film department has scheduled screenings at 4 pm and 7:30 pm, making it convenient for both on and off campus students to view the films.

As Excalibur goes to press the full film agenda is not definite, with the exception of three award-winning films: *Back From Paradise* (Best Actress Award, Canadian Student Film Festival, '78) *Opus 1 No. 1* (First Honorable Mention, Festival of Musical and Coreographical Film, '78), and *Nomads* (Best Fiction Award and Honourable Mention, Cinematography Canadian Student Film Festival, '78). Admission is free.