

BAD PROGRAM FOR E F S

One of the activities that the Edmonton Film Society exists to promote is "the study and appreciation of the motion picture film as an art form by means of discussion and study groups and through showing of selected films to its members." Sounds unfortunately pompous doesn't it? But (omitting "the motion picture" and "as an art form") the aim is a laudable one. How successful is the society in promoting this activity?

In the absence of any formal discussion or study groups its success or failure in encouraging "study and appreciation" must be judged in terms of its selection of films. The following comments attempt such an evaluation. There are, so far, three series lined up: the Main, the Classic, and the Third. I'll begin with the Main and the Classic series which cost \$8 each, consist of 26 films and run from October 18 to March 6.

The Main seems to be designed to offer a sample from the recent European cinema: Truffaut's *Bed and Board*, Olmi's *One Fine Day*, Resnais' *Je T'aime*, *Je T'aime* and Bergman's *Passions of Anna* are very very recent; Bertolucci's *Before the Revolution*, Truffaut's *Stolen Kisses*, Passer's *Intimate Lighting* and Makaejev's *Switchboard Operator* are very recent. Films like these can usually be seen without too much difficulty in ordinary cinemas in Europe and so can be left out of European film society programs. To attempt, as our society has done, to include them — with some justification, since most of them are not otherwise easy to see in Edmonton — means that the program will inevitably suffer from thinness. For the simple reason that recent films tend to be more expensive than less recent films.

Now one is certainly grateful for the opportunity to see some of these films (not *Stolen Kisses* or *Harakiri*). But such a Main

Series only increases the need for intelligently planned selection in the Classic. And, instead, what we are offered there — as the headings sufficiently indicate: Westerns, Science-Fiction, War, Comedy, Western, Eros, Comedy, Thriller — is a lucky dip. Take, for instance, the double-bill under War: Jean Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*, one of the cinema's genuine masterpieces, set alongside Peter Watkins' *The War Game*, a horrifyingly pretentious little squib, the simple-mindedness of which is accurately caught in the label "anti-war film". Even the argument that the crudity of the one film will serve to highlight the subtle complexity and power of the other is invalid: (1) Renoir's movie needs no such highlighting, and, (2) instead of wasting money on *The War Game* why not include a second Renoir?

This last question points to what is the most serious weakness in the entire program. It can be more forcefully brought out by pointing to two more (splendid) double-bills: Anthony Mann's *The Far Country* and Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* are together on January 17; Fritz Lang's *M* and Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil* on March 6. Renoir, Mann, Ray, Lang and Welles are all important directors (though not equally important) but the only way in which their different kinds of achievement are going to be recognized is by showing two or three (at least) representative examples of each man's work. Furthermore, it is all very well to call *Johnny Guitar* "one of the major auteur films" but the crucially important point that this otherwise rather glib phrase contains is hidden rather than brought out by the selection of the films as a whole.

If you want to include a science-fiction film why show stuff like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Robert Wise, we are told, directed "with restraint and a sure understanding of a pure

science-fiction theme": Robert Wise!) and *The Time Machine* when you could choose, say, Donald Siegel's *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (which few will have seen) or Hitchcock's *The Birds* (which many will have)? Even now, how many realize that Hitchcock's best movies are as important as, say, Bergman's or Fellini's? The main criticism to be directed against the society is that its method of selection makes it more difficult for its members to reach this realization. (If you are going to show one movie by a director of the stature of Howard Hawks, why choose — as the society did last year with *His Girl Friday* — one of his decidedly minor works? In what way can this possibly promote appreciation of Hawks in particular or of film in general?)

The conspicuous absence of any real thinking about how film appreciation might be served in the Classic series prepares one for the disastrous Third series which is titled British Cinema of the Sixties. To spend \$5 on this series would be a waste of anyone's movie money. Consider what we are being offered: John Schlesinger's *Billy Liar* which, it should be enough to say, contains the seeds of such tasteless ejaculations as *Darling* and *Midnight Cowboy*; Peter Brooks' *Lord of the Flies* which demonstrates that an interesting stage director is not necessarily qualified to work in the cinema (and is not helped by such pretentious material as Golding's novel); Lindsay Anderson's *This Sporting Life* which has the dubious distinction of being better than his later *If*; Peter Watkins' *Privilege* which is utter rubbish and almost makes *The War Game* seem a masterpiece by comparison; and, Joseph Losey's *Modesty Blaise*. Losey, of course, is an important director, but he has made some bad films. *Secret Ceremony* is one of them and *Modesty Blaise* is another.

The first two series are worth most people's money. (Those of us who have seen most of the movies in the Classic series three or four times and so have to decide whether to spend \$8 just to see *The Far Country* and *Johnny Guitar* are not necessarily

in a majority.) Does it matter that the Edmonton Film Society is not notably successful in its efforts to promote the "study and appreciation of the motion picture film"?

— Garry Watson

Monty Python !!!!!

Well folks, as your friendly arts editor, I feel that it is my prerogative, nay, my duty to inform you that the last scheduled installment of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* flickered its affected little way across your television screens one week ago last Thursday. I shall pause for a minute to let that sink in.

Yes friends, the last. No more will that most splendid of audio-visual affectations hurl its demented way into your lives each and every Thursday night. No more will its mad sanity assault your myths and illusions. No more will you be able to invite your friends over, have a little bit of Mother Nature's organic sunshine, and sit for half an hour as your cerebral cortex is progressively mashed to about the same general consistency as porridge.

Is this just?

Is it fair to that segment of the population who can see beyond the lame and pointless "humour" of *Laugh-In* (God save us all!) to cancel one of their few televised pleasures?

Haven't we got enough *Country Music Halls* and *Hockey Nights in Canada* (ho ho, get that, "Canada", heh heh) and *Carol Burnett Shows* and *Eddie's Fathers* and *Mod Squads* and *Flip Wilsons* and a million and one other unspeakable abominations that have been coyly thrust upon us without change or let-up by the Canadian networks for the past decade and more?

Haven't we suffered enough anguish and torment to be spared one half hour of retribution per

week? One half hour, for Pity's sake!

(At this point the reader should be worked up into a frothing frenzy and should be begging to know "What can I do?")

Well the answer is simple my friends. Just write the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and tell them how you feel.

Tell them how you feel about their programming in general and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* in particular. Then demand that they bring it back and install it on a seasonal basis (there are at least four completed seasons of the show in England).

Then, if you really feel active, write a bunch of letters to some major corporations (General Motors, Philco-Ford, General Foods, Safeway, Humble Oil, Gulf Oil, etc; you get the idea) and tell them that you won't buy anything that they advertise on CBC until CBC re-instates the *Flying Circus*.

And most of all, spread the action around to your friends. A few crank letters can be dismissed quite easily. But an avalanche can't be ignored.

(By the way, CBC's address is Box 500, Terminal "A", Toronto. Address the letters to the Director of Programming. A good way to write fine letters is to gather together your friends in front of the television Thursday night and write them together while you watch what they've replaced *Monty Python* with.)

For one way or another, we must get *Monty Python's Flying Circus* back on television. Consider it a sacred duty — a crusade.

And good luck.

SPEEDREADING

What is it?

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Room 176, Education Building

Wednesday, Sept. 29 at 2 p.m.

Thursday, Sept. 30 at 12:30 p.m.
& 3:30 p.m.



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