



Lights, Camera, Action!

By DAN MERKUR

Paul Almond said to me, "For a film to have validity, it must be a personal statement." In a sense that statement defined the sort of review I could write, because for any review of *Act of the Heart* to be valid, it must consider the filmmaker. It is likewise impossible to neglect his earlier film, *Isabel*, from this consideration; the two are only different facets of the personality responsible.

To dispense with the necessities: *Act of the Heart* (at York I) and *Isabel* (available for \$25 from Paramount 16mm. department) are two exceptionally fine films produced, written and directed by Paul Almond, who lives with his wife (and star) Genevieve Bujold, and their child, in Montreal. Both films are first-rate. While *Isabel* may prove the enduring film, *Act of the Heart* is warmer, more real, and far more comfortable.

In viewing the films, one is aware of a tremendous mind behind them, pointing, shaping, adding influences and nuances, directing the films toward a single artistic end. His works leave no doubt that film is an art, and he, an auteur. In meeting him, one is aware of a sincere, intelligent, articulate, vital individual; and all the peculiarities of his films are at once explained. Paul Almond is that rarity in film, the individual artist allowed to pursue his craft, complete to all the personal idiosyncracies, the subtle insights and the greatness of purpose that only a single, undistorted vision can produce.

He said to me that *Isabel* is "a film about the nature of fear, and *Act of the Heart* is a film about the nature of love," which, I suppose, shows clearly the limitations of a single vision. Almond does not see that both films are about love: the first about the sort of love that a fearful person seeks; the second about love and sacrifice.

Many artists seem to be unsatisfied with any subject less than the natures of love, of

life and of art. We count greatness as the measure of perception and illumination in evidence (though too often the artist sees and his audience still cannot grasp his meaning, witness Sartre or Bergman.)

Almond is clearly an emotional man: squealing with child-like delight at questions that set him to thinking; speaking warmly to Genevieve (JEUNE-vieve) on the phone; slipping into nostalgia and wistfulness about his CBC days. His cerebral approach to film shows tremendous perception, yet it does not involve an intellectualized position (like Bergman's), merely a considered emotional one.

His films succeed because they operate on a level of emotional truth as well as on simple narrative reality. They take getting used to because most films never aspire to that secondary level. *Isabel* will endure because it works on a third, and intellectual, level as well.

Isabel dealt with a rurally raised girl who returns from Montreal to the farm to attend her mother's funeral. With her rigid country upbringing, she has been unable to embrace Montreal life. A product of a mixed marriage, unable to find solace in either church, her life at home is little better. Frustrated, embittered, alone and frightened, she finds her senile uncle and the ghost-filled house oppressive. And then she reaches out for love.

Act of the Heart concerns a girl who puts the farm behind her, yet brings the rural values, the naivete, and simplistic morals to life in Montreal. She turns to the church out of confusion, where she sings in a choir, and she turns to the monk who conducts it, for strength, for guidance and for love.

The rural French-Canadian's (mal) adjustment to city life, like the down easterner's problems (in *Goin' Down the Road*) is a specifically Canadian story. America was concerned with the subject in



Genevieve Bujold stars in *Act of the Heart*

the early 1900s, and has forgotten it since. But the impregnability of the modern metropolis is a subject neither Dreiser nor Lewis ever began to explore. It is a force that affects our lives in new and ever-changing ways, which are not to be understood from novels half a century old.

On the emotional level, Almond, in *Isabel*, says that there is a sort of love born out of the need for protection, which is simultaneously the solution to fear and a further cause of it. This love, says Almond, is a small love, a clinging, a taking. In *Act of the Heart* he focuses on a girl with a great deal of love to give, and who thinks her gift worthy of someone special.

The one is a realistic, slightly cynical view; the other, a romantic, beautifully tragic vision. Together they are strikingly contemporary and significant.

I suppose what I am getting at is that I like *Isabel* and *Act of the Heart* very much; that I think they are very fine films; that there is more to them than entertainment; that there is philosophy and truth, (well considered, and not at all trite), as all good film, theatre and prose should have; that the specific context of themes is inherently Canadian; that in general these films are relevant to Canadians; that you ought to see them if you can.

Shakespeare revisited

By BLAIR HAMMOND

The Scarborough Music Theatre's offering at Playhouse 66 October 27 - November 1 is indeed 'fantastick'! We see a skillful mixing of modern play characters — a boy, a girl, their fathers — with a collage of Shakespearean types. The entire play is a reversal of our expectations; the fathers are friends; we see at first a happy ending in sight.

But this fanciful theme runs as awry as the play's misquoted Shakespeare and garden imagery. Such a play admirably suits Garth Allen's usually hyperbolic treatment of the musicals he directs. The central message of the play is symbolized by the wall — in this case an invisible wall — which must not be torn down, for without this facade the truth is too hard to bear.

The Shakespearean-like stage is dominated by the sombre, mysterious figure of El Guile, played by David James, both the narrator and an important character in the play. Charlene Shipp, as the girl, is vibrant and expressive in her difficult role. The fathers, Peter Purvis and Ed Mounsey, are a duo of buffoonery. The scene-stealer of the play is the old actor, played by Albert Negus, whose boisterous antics remind one of the lively gravedigger in *Hamlet*. "The man who dies" is a true professional; you must see him to believe him.

Rod Stewart solos blues

By STEVE GELLER

Gasoline Alley is Rod Stewart's second solo album. Aside from being a fine musical work, it offers a pretty fair indication of what, why and how the Rod Stewart sound has recently demanded tremendous amounts of attention.

While with the Small Faces, Stewart was a standout and when singing for the Jeff Beck Group, he regularly stole the show. *Gasoline Alley* captures his dynamic style at its best. It allows his rough, raspy voice to penetrate through the unusually tight musical backing to firmly establish Rod Stewart as one of the best white blues singers in the entire recording industry.

The selection of material creates a coherent, forceful, and constantly moving album. Stewart's own songs (*Gasoline Alley*, *Lady Day* and *Jo's Lament*) by Dylan (*Only a Hobo*), Steve Marriot (*My Way of Giving*) and Bobby and Shirley Womack (*It's All Over Now*).

It must be remembered that Rod Stewart is primarily a great showman. A good deal of *Gasoline Alley's* excellence stems from the fact that it allows Stewart to come through as the excellent performer that he has proven himself to be.

Little Fauss and Big Halsy are not your father's heroes.



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