

# REVIEWS

Eric Till's

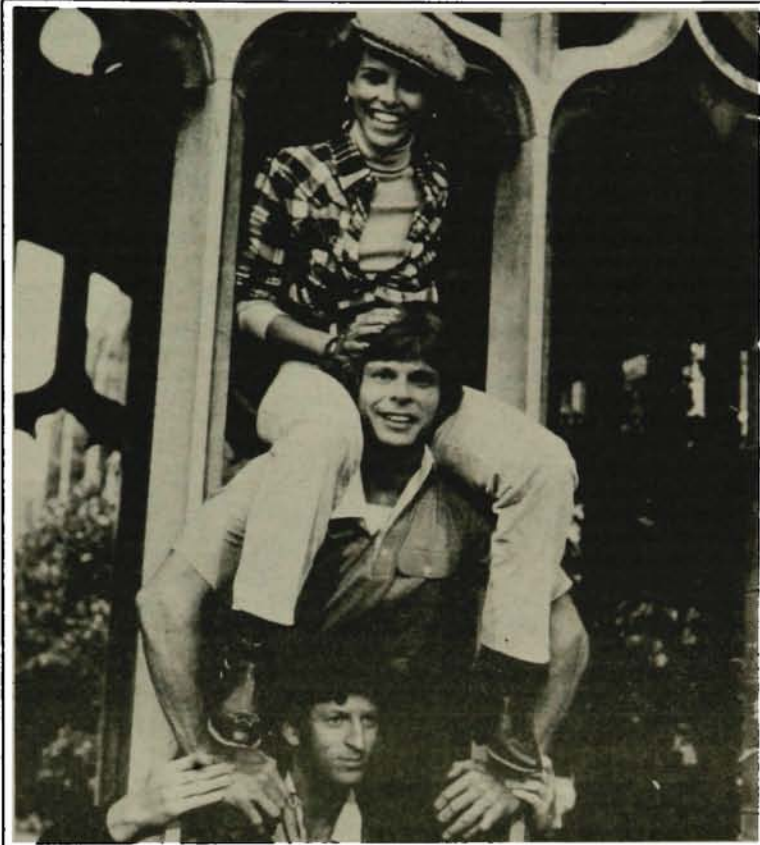
## If You Could See What I Hear

Judging by Eric Till's recent feature films, the director is in hot pursuit of a boffo theatrical hit; a bona fide Hollywood popcorn popper. As if to shed his parochial media image of being a TV man (Till reached prominence with the CBC series *The National Dream*), his films are taking on more and more of an American look and feel. Last year it was *Improper Channels* with Alan Arkin and Mariette Hartley. Before that there was *Wild Horse Hank* and *Hot Millions*. All suffered from varying degrees of "cutesy" and predictability but were excusable when lined up against Till's fine television achievements, most notably *Bethune* with Donald Sutherland. But his current entry into the box office sweepstakes, *If You Could See What I Hear*, cannot be so easily excused. Amassed here is an insulting and totally absurd amalgam of clichés and formula: the kind of film that makes cinema lovers eye Hollywood with contempt.

Tom Sullivan (played by Marc Singer) is a campus Casanova. He's "into" writing music, playing golf(?), horseback riding, sky diving, drinking beer and perpetrating college hijinks. One wild and crazy All-American boy. The clincher is that Tom Sullivan is blind. But he's too dumb to know it. How many variations of this have shown up on the TV Movie-of-the-Week is anybody's guess, as are the reasons why Till and his co-conspirator, writer Stuart Gillard, felt this mish-mash of a premise was worthy of a feature film. Whatever their reasoning, the two are hopelessly mistaken. The "overcoming the personal handicap" genre has been so overmined on both the tube and the big screen that it would take considerably more than a simple thematic twist—a blind man who refuses to accept he's blind—to open the floodgates on our tears. And it would take filmmakers with considerably more talent than Till and Gillard to warrant another look at the subject. Instead of a slightly interesting story of a man coming to terms with his personal tragedy, we are treated to a long string of cobwebbed sequences.

While at school Tom falls in love with a beautiful black coed (played by Shari Belafonte Harper in what must surely be one of the most leaden debut performances in recent memory), only to be heartbroken by her inability to deal with his condition. Tom is upset by this. If he can accept her blackness, why can't she accept his blindness? It seems like a fair trade-off but, alas, the relationship is not to be. It doesn't take Tom long to rebound. By the next eve he's off womanizing with his best friend Will (played by R.H. Thomson). Will is sort of a seeing-eye dog to Tom... a fact inane pointed out on more than one occasion.

Grafted onto this anemic story line is a healthy (that should read unhealthy) dose of slapstick and schtick from a more recent film phenomenon: the whacky campus romp. All this, of course, must have been shrewdly decided upon to win a wider audience. What instead results is an unholy cross between



● The up-beat triumvirate of Shari Belafonte Harper, Marc Singer and R.H. Thompson

*Animal House* and *The Miracle Worker*.

This kind of creative impotency imbues almost every aspect of the film. Marc Singer, who is being touted as a major new talent by the studio, works very hard at making his Tom a likeable guy. To be kind, Singer's performance is energetic. To be not so kind, he just tries too damn hard. It is one thing to be high on life (as Tom is supposed to be), and quite another to run around like an "asshole" (to borrow a recurring term from the film). Singer gives us precious little insight into Tom. He repeatedly resorts to pratfalls designed strictly to get a laugh. Who should take the blame for this, Till or Singer, is up for speculation. But in a film where the main character is solely present to win our hearts, and the actor portraying him manages to do the exact opposite, the actor's performance must be put into question.

Sarah Torgov who plays Patty, the pretty little creature who eventually calms Tom and marries him, fails a little better. But Torgov is given pathetically little to do. Till circumnavigates their relationship and is content on spotlighting Tom's female hunts at a bar where he plays piano during summer recess.

R.H. Thomson as Will Sly, Tom's dry-witted pal, proves that he's one of Canada's most versatile actors, comfortable with "comedy" as well as straight drama. His performance in *If You Could See What I Hear* is welcomingly tethered. But as with Torgov's role, Till never bothers to elaborate on Tom and Will's friendship, restricting it to fights in bars and picking up girls.

A great deal of the messiness in this film stems from Gillard's painfully disjointed script. The premise, the plot, the dialogue, all have an out-of-date ring to them. For instance, a five-minute sequence has Will putting on his blind

friend about the proper way of wearing socks. And when Will comments on the musical abilities of the blind to a bar owner, the man retorts "Yeah, but they make lousy astronomers." This sort of stuff may not come entirely unexpected from the writer of such TV gems such as *The Donny and Marie Show* and *Captain and Tennille*.

Howard Makin's photography is pretty, too pretty. His fog and star-filtered approach is totally inappropriate to the low-level humour being presented here.

What is particularly objectionable about *If You Could See What I Hear* is the claim that it is a true story (a claim that is made not once, but twice, during the credits). By stressing this fact Till and Gillard seem to be seeking absolution. They should consider themselves lucky that the real Tom Sullivan will never get to see this picture.

S. Paul Zola ●

### IF YOU COULD SEE WHAT I HEAR

p.c.: Cypress Grove Films Ltd. Production exec. p. Gene Corman, Dale Falconer p./d. Eric Till co-p. sc. Stuart Gillard prod. consultant Tom Sullivan d.o.p. Harry Making C.S.C. art d. Gavin Mitchell ad. Rod Haykin prod. mgr. Joyce Kozy King 1st asst. d. David Shepherd 2nd. asst. d. Richard Flower loc. man. Otta Hanus continuity sup. Lili Fournier prod. acct. Ann Fitzgerald prod. sec. Debbie Zwicker prop. mast. John Fisher set dec. Earle Fiset sp. eff. Martin Malivoire wardrobe Patti Unger makeup Ken Brooke hair. David Beecroft gaffer Ray Boyle key grip Steve Sheridan ad. Eric Wrate ad. ed. Jim Hopkins 2nd. unit d. Rod Malenfant 2nd. unit cam. Bert Dunk stills Bill Langstroth Marni Grossman unit pub. G.R.O.-Glenda Roy pub. Guttman & Pam (USA) music performed by Helen Reddy & Tom Sullivan ("You're the One") l.p. Marc Singer. R.H. Thomson. Sarah Torgov. Shari Belafonte Harper. Douglas Campbell. Helen Burns Harvey Atkin. Barbara Gordon. Sharon Lewis Lynda Mason Greene. Tony Van Bridge. Jack Creley. Neil Dainard. Michael Tate. David Gardner. Noni Griffin. Adrienne Pocock. Hugh Webster Eastern Cdn. dist. Citadel French Cdn. dist. Cine-360 Western Cdn. dist. Roke Film Distributors colour 35mm running time 103 min.

## Stuart Gillard's Paradise

*Paradise*, a strange mix of *The Blue Lagoon* and *The Wind and the Lion*, offers the not particularly edifying spectacle of two clean-cut American teenagers frolicking unclad in sylvan glades while the creatures of the forest coo and snorkel at their feet. This picture is afflicted with the terminal cutes—of course, any film with not one but two (count'em) funny, loveable chimpanzees (which are African forest animals, not Iraqi desert beasts) is enough to strain the patience of any adult.

It is Baghdad, 1823 (it is never made clear why the film is so precisely dated) and Sarah, a young English girl (Phoebe Cates) with a flat American accent, is on her way to Damascus with her faithful manservant, Geoffrey (the usually reliable Richard Curnock). Joining the caravan is David (Willie Aames), an American boy travelling with his missionary parents (Neil Vipond and Aviva Marks.) However, the beautiful young girl, who actually has a rather pudgy, unformed face, has caught the lustful attention of the Jackal, an evil Arab shiek (Tuvia Tavi), who is willing to kill to get the girl. Soon after, he attacks, wiping out everyone but David, Sarah and Geoffrey, who escape into the desert. They quickly lose Geoffrey, who is murdered by the Jackal, and are forced to press on alone, discovering perfect little oases every few miles; which is a good thing, since the Jackal is in hot pursuit and David is in the habit of saying things like "If we miss Damascus, we can hit Alexandria," which, according to my atlas, is several hundred miles beyond, with an awful lot of sand in between.

They build homes (rather elaborate sets that are straight out of a Gilligan's Island view of life) and discover each other's sexuality. Mind you, with Cates' full-body tan, it looks as if she's been hanging out in the sun for years, something rather unlikely for an English girl in 1823.

They run around in clean, designer loincloths, never experience hunger, and manage things without difficulty until the Jackal shows up. (What I want to know is how does the Jackal, a deadly Arab chieftain, a scourge of the desert, manage to keep missing these two incompetent teens, who look as if they'd be more comfortable boogieing on the disco floor than dragging their camel through the desert. I rather like the camels—they're wonderful beasts, pregnant with comic potential, as when Arnold Schwarzenegger punches one out in the current *Conan the Barbarian*. They are shamefully underexploited here, replaced by those unfortunate chimps who were last seen as accomplices to the felonious assault committed on *Tarzan* by Bo and John Derek.)

Director Stuart Gillard is suing the producers, RSL Films, over questions of salary; he is also concerned about the addition of some nude/sex footage. While the added material stands out, bearing no visual or stylistic resemblance to the rest of the film, the producers may