

Film Notes

Surprises: Good and Bad

By Dick Lochte

If I've learned one thing from the inordinate amount of time I've spent in the dark dreamworld of movie theaters, boy and man (and perhaps boy again finding myself uncontrollably drawn to such flamboyant adventures as John Milius' *THE WIND AND THE LION* and John Huston's *THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING*), it is that if we must pre-judge a film, we should look to the director. They are never the chancy propositions of actors, who overreach or underplay or otherwise give vent to inbred narcissistic tendencies; writers, who get hungry or careless or, as is more often the sad case, who lose control of their work; or producers, who keep their eyes on the box office rather than the screen.

The odds remain with the established filmmakers. Ford's *CHEYENNE AUTUMN* or Hitchcock's *TOPAZE*, though clearly not the best and the brightest from these two masters, nonetheless deliver enough skill and craftsmanship and style to compare favorably with the best of lesser talents. It is especially distressing then, when one of the pros misses completely, which is what Robert Aldrich has done with *HUSTLE*, a noisy, nasty cop opera that lingers along pointlessly, sloughing through dialogue profundities, mired in swampy dramatics that entangle such normally footloose performers as Burt Reynolds and especially Ben Johnson.

The villain of the piece is the script by Steve Shagan that reprises the writer's *SAVE THE TIGER* despairing sensibility. His plainclothes tragic hero yearning for the simplistic morality of the past while wallowing in the complex clutter of the present is too much for any film to handle. One can understand Reynolds leaping at the bait of a part that would require more than just charming insouciance. But Aldrich should have known better.

The lure for him was probably the screenplay's harsh social criticism. His films have all had a tough, anti-social approach. Even *VERA CRUZ*, one of his earliest and certainly his most entertaining, celebrated the inconstancy of friendship and the corruption of so-called enlightened government. But it, and the bleak and cynical nightmares like *ATTACK*, *THE BIG KNIFE* and *KISS ME DEADLY*, were all clean and lean, fascinating films with dialogue that propelled the action. In *HUSTLE*, Reynolds' unending ruminations stop it in its tracks.

Reynolds can't handle lots of worlds. He's the best one-liner man in the business, but it's folly to give him paragraphs. Just one of many mistakes: Catherine Deneuve's inflexible snow queen call girl seems to have been carved from a cake of ivory, and none too artistically. Joseph Biroc's camera catches all of her bad angles — a few wrinkles here, a slightly sagging jawline there. And for some reason it dotes on her most unattractive feature, her hands. Until *HUSTLE*, I didn't even know she had hands.

Ben Johnson is treated even more shabbily. Asked to portray an embittered man of the lower-middle class, "a nobody" as he continually refers to himself, out to avenge his daughter's death, he flounders uncomfortably in Shagan's morally murky sea, unaided by Aldrich, apparently. The guy is so self-pitying and in the end so psychotically dangerous we can only wonder why Reynolds' weltschmerz-sodden sleuth, or anybody else, should give a damn about him. It's an example of celluloid showing its cellulite — a bloated corpse of a movie.

Paul Mazursky, a director of much more recent vintage, debuted in '69 with *BOB AND CAROL AND TED AND ALICE* and sailed into the seventies, getting progressively better with each new effort. *cont. page 23*

Taxi Driver

More Than Fair Fare

By Karen Stabiner

Travis Bickle is cruising through the American nightmare searching for the American dream. But a night-shift hack has about as much chance of climbing out of the pit as the prostitutes, pimps and junkies he so despises; director Martin Scorsese's "Taxi Driver" is the horribly believable chronicle of the explosion that comes from too many years of nowhere to go.

Scorsese's central character, Travis (Robert DeNiro) can't sleep nights anymore, so he decides to cash in on his insomnia and signs up, almost three unexplained years after an uncertain stint in the Marines, for urban combat duty. Travis is the one cabbie who unflinchingly ferries the lowest of New York city lowlife around, seemingly unshaken by what he hears while the meter's ticking.

In truth, though Travis harbors a deep, fanatical hatred for the ugliness that surrounds him, compounded by a strange, distant fear of people, he dreams a strong dream of salvation, culled, it seems, from popular magazines: he thinks of romance in terms of American Bandstand, daytime soap operas, and the perfect all-American blond goddess. But there's no way Travis can get what he wants, neither for himself nor for the pre-teen prostitute he tries to rescue. When the disappointment builds beyond his tolerance, the hatred takes over.

The result is a bloodbath — and new peace of mind for Travis, who achieves an awful calm after he's weaseled out of responsibility for the slaughter.

What Scorsese is suggesting, by taking us step by step through the experiences that lead Travis to the final battle, is that Travis is not to be ignored as a fringe psychopath, a crazy man who acts differently than the rest of us would under the same circumstances. Scorsese has

arranged the components of the story, beautifully, to force us to recognize that the opposite is true: Travis is disenfranchised in a country where a bunch of white, upper middle class kids run a presidential campaign for a candidate named Palantine, all of them sporting big buttons that proclaim "We are the people."

Right there, on the vest of his three-piece pinstripe suit, the ivy league graduate (Albert Brooks) is wearing one. Betsy (Cybill Shepherd), the object of Travis' adoration, wears one. If they are representative of "the people,"



Photo courtesy COLUMBIA PICTURES

then who speaks to — or for — somebody like Travis?

Scorsese insists that nobody speaks for him, but that Travis is not alone in his dead-end alienation. The tribal undertones — Travis' Mohawk haircut, his warrior training — are there for a reason. Travis vents his anger because he's too far gone to recognize an alternative, but "Taxi Driver" is not the story of a single crazy who goes on his own private warpath. It is the story of anybody who is being left behind to scrap it out — as a hack, as a prostitute, whatever — because people like Betsy and her high gloss candidate don't even comprehend that they exist.

"Taxi Driver" works because of a rare combination of talents which give the story balance and depth. None of the comic strip violence of Sam Peckinpah's "Killer Elite," no tawdry sentimentality for the poor weird crazy person all alone in the big city: except for a big push for solemnity and grand significance following Travis' spree, "Taxi Driver" synthesizes music, visuals, dialogue and exceptional performances into a powerful, engrossing whole.

Travis, manages to touch both the extremes his character experiences. He is the highpitched joker with a gun who just has to talk to a secret service man at the political rally, to show how fearless and clever he is. He is, horribly, the weasel who turns everything around, and ends up back in his cab.

But he is also the weak, lost dreamer who keeps a daily journal and finds childish hope in what to anybody else would be a meaning-

less event. After having coffee Betsy says "I had apple pie with a slice of yellow cheese. I think was a good selection," as if he was talking about an important conversation, a significant communication. Almost through the line away, DeNiro makes it one of the small sad moments that Travis his humanity.

What breaks him, though, is initial inability to save Iris, a young prostitute who becomes a symbol to him of how awful the world is. Jodie Foster, late of television adaptation of "Paper Moon," manages somehow to be too old and too young at the same time; she makes Iris into a character strong enough to validate Travis' concern.

The only place that "Taxi Driver" falters, in fact, is just the point where Scorsese asks things to get a bit out of hand, he realized subconsciously that material wasn't strong enough to make it without help. Scorsese wants us to see that Travis needs to work, after murdering people, somehow soothed and assured by his deed. So he sets a major contradiction between Travis' desperate violence and horrifying calm: the music out of hand for the first time camera takes too much in showing us how dead everyone the moment is frozen as Scorsese points out how imper-

That it's important is difficult, unless you've been in it during the hour and a half that's preceded it. The question that remains unclear, beneath the heavy-handedness, is Scorsese sees in all of this. We see a psychopath who, having no notions and not knowing how to plausible new ones, strikes at evil in the perverted hope of what he considers to be some good. Does Scorsese think that there's a solution, short of a crazy spree? Is he trying to remind that pseudo-populists, what they do, have no real concept who "the people" are?

Had the film not been carefully constructed, had these not taken us, methodically down the path he had chosen, would be no expectation of a stronger ending. But the fact that "Taxi Driver" is a contrived film; it gains its power from the way the story is designed and told. So the ending becomes a small stumble, a weak step, otherwise vivid, provocative experience.

DON'T WAIT FOR THE NEXT ISSUE

subscribe now



to the only Los Angeles alternative weekly

☐ Please send me 52 issues (1 year) for only \$10 (save \$3 off the newsstand price).

☐ Please send me 104 issues (2 years) for only \$18 (save \$8 off the newsstand price).

☐ SPECIAL INTRODUCTORY OFFER:

Lifetime subscription: \$25

Lifetime subscription: \$25.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

Total amount enclosed: \$ _____

Send with coupon to:

Los Angeles Vanguard, 1060 Crenshaw, #207, L.A., Ca. 90019.

CITY _____

STATE _____

ZIP _____

The Haymarket
715 So. Park View, Los Angeles, CA

FILMS, CONCERTS
POLITICAL FORUMS
DEBATES, CLASSES
BOOKSTORE
COFFEE HOUSE
POETRY, MUSIC
WORKSHOPS,
SOCIALS, OFFICES

THIS MOVEMENT CULTURAL
CENTER ENCOURAGES ALL
PROGRESSIVE IDEAS AND
DEMOCRATIC
PARTICIPATION. OPEN
MEETINGS THURSDAYS, 1 PM

387-0932

Helen Reddy and Jeff Wald

She Is WOMAN He is MANager

by Melly Peterson

en and Jeff have more than just an equal partnership in life; they have an equal partnership in business as well. What business? Show business, and the business of the Helen Reddy career, which is managed by her husband, Jeff Wald.

In most cases, such a combination of business and marriage would raise skeptical eyebrows. But, as in every rule, there is an exception. For many reasons, the Reddy/Wald partnership has prospered on both counts. For them it has been one relationship.

mean, it's so much a part of our lives," Helen relates, "I use we share a career. So it's something that comes up all the time." She hesitates before adding, "I'd like not to be in the room when he's making a lot of calls you know — I mean, sometimes the bedroom becomes an office when I'm not there."

But no one else was ever interested in managing me. No before we were manager and client, really."

Now anyone who knows anything about Helen Reddy knows the story of her disastrous trip to New York in 1965 — a talent contest in Australia and the failure of the spon- sored New York record company contract materializing after she and three year old Traci arrived in New York. Helen is the first to admit that her meeting with Jeff was disastrous — she was broke and he was ambitious. They met, it took all of three days to set the Reddy/Wald partnership into motion.

"I know I couldn't have made it without Jeff," Helen admits. "Because I think that to become a star it's 50% management, and I think he's the best manager in the business. And talent is really a very small part of it."

Helen is not entirely right when she says that talent is a very small part of it, because there is also a talent in management. And this is a talent in which Jeff excels — he is capable of maintaining the proper perspective as his wife's career.

"I'm sure there are a lot of husbands who are capable of managing the artist's career in the toilet," Jeff explains. "They're not objective, they have a very narrow perspective. They're managers who manage other people who don't manage their wives' careers. Everybody's got to work out how to suit them."

That suits Jeff Wald had to be learned through experience. He has managed other artists' careers in the past, but found it was not feasible to devote the obligatory time to them. Helen's career took precedence. So Jeff, perhaps inadvertently, made the decision to devote his full efforts to Helen's career, present and future.

Longevity, that's important," states Jeff. "Everything is controlled going in as it possibly can be. But Helen's got talent to deliver it. I've felt that way in every step of her career. Whenever we've been able to go on to the next step, she's been able to handle it. And that's important! That gives me security. That gives me confidence to go and be a bit of a risk."

Jeff has garnered a reputation of being ballsy. But it all stems from his total dedication to Helen Reddy. He is determined to get what he wants — and what he wants is to do whatever is necessary to further insure Helen Reddy's career. And he will be ballsy if that is what it takes, although he can occasionally backfire.

"Nobody's perfect," Jeff admits. "It's easy to make mistakes. It's easy to be abrasive — perhaps if I had handled it differently we'd be on with a series. It had nothing to do with Helen's summer show, just my relationship with NBC. My hindsight tells me in retrospect that while what I wanted was to be picked up for a series, it would have been a long move career-wise for her at that time."

Perhaps he is able to see it that way because she was readily available to make "Airport '75." This in itself was considered a bit ballsy on Jeff's part — to cast Helen Reddy as a nun in her screen debut — but Jeff defends their choice.

"Let me explain about 'Airport.' We chose 'Airport' for a very simple reason. There was no way she could get hurt in it. And it gave her film experience. It's a new medium and you really can't just walk into any new medium cold and handle it. You know. So I chose 'Airport' because it's pure entertainment. There's no message. It's not an important picture in terms of what people think. It's pure entertainment. And for the first shot in, you can't get hurt in something like that. Helen looks good on the screen. She developed a film credit. It established a price. It established billing. It took care of a lot of those things."

Ballsy? Perhaps, but "Airport '75" did accomplish its purpose. It gives Jeff the bargaining power to insist on starring in Helen's second film, which is all part of Jeff's half of the partnership.

"We're partners," emphasizes Jeff, "because of trust, first and foremost. I think that's where it starts. You trust your manager, and you're not second-guessing or questioning his decisions and the motivations behind his decisions. With Helen and me,

she knows what my decisions are financially because it's not a question of having to live off 15% or 20%. We're partners."

Helen adds that "there are a lot of managers who want to make a fast buck. They're not building toward a long term career. They're not thinking about where the artist is going to be in terms of growth five years from now. They're thinking, 'Well, I can make a lot of money right now.' And they push them into certain situations and, you know, it's wrong."

"It's a combination of trust and being objective," Jeff reiterates. "And understanding your own limitations, your lack of limitations. You know where you can go with a career. A lot of people get a lot more mileage out of the same set of circumstances than others."

Overall exposure is where Jeff has intently focused his direction. He has not been satisfied with Helen's best-selling records. He is proud of the fact that she has also had her own television series, made her movie debut and continually headlines the MGM Grand in Las Vegas and concert halls across the country. And now she has added a new dimension to her long list of credits — she is the guest hostess of this year's weekly television program, "Midnight Special."

Exclusive



Jeff claims that "success in one medium doesn't necessarily guarantee success in another medium. You have to deal with each thing as its own thing, you know what I mean? Record success doesn't necessarily transfer to concert success. Concert success doesn't necessarily transfer to nightclub success. And none of them necessarily transfer into TV or motion picture success. And that's what counts: when you're multi-media. Overall stardom. Or the public forgets too quickly. If you give the public a lot of areas, they'll never forget. They like it! You can just go so far with management, and then what they can do is get their artist the opportunities to show what they can do. And at that point, it's up to the artist."

As far as these decisions are concerned, it is not always a strictly down-the-line 50/50 partnership. Not even with Helen and Jeff.

"That really depends on the decisions involved," Jeff explains. "The day to day decisions — we don't talk about most of them, in terms of just day to day going on with the business. In terms of a major decision — I mean, I'd never make a deal for Helen to do a movie that we both didn't feel strongly that that was the right thing to do — we'd both read the script, we thought it was right. The same thing with most television, or if we decide to do a concert in Milwaukee — I don't ask her. If the time is right to go out and tour, I don't have to ask. I don't consult her for the most part."

"And in terms of the support elements involved, if she knows she's appearing some place, she knows when she shows up the set will be there, which we designed. I mean, all that stuff is all done without her having to get involved in it. You know what I mean? On the other hand, I don't sit here and rehearse a song with her. There I'm out of the picture. I'm not a record producer, so I don't get involved in that. I have gotten involved in choosing some of the singles, but we each do our own thing."

Helen agrees that "for the most part, he doesn't interfere with what I choose to sing or what I choose to wear. And I leave a lot of the business decisions to him. Because we trust each other's judgment, you know?"

"It's not a cut and dried thing," says Jeff. "We're partners at all times. There are patterns set. You get organized."

Both Helen and Jeff agree that Helen is not a "fluke" artist. They feel strongly that there will always be a market for Helen Reddy, and that this market was possible only in America.

"I was as successful as one could be in Australia," Helen reflects. "But, you know, this is the only country that has a 'star system.' This is the only country that you can become rich being a musician or an actor or whatever."

"This is the only country," supports Jeff. "In Australia you can't get rich. You make a living — a bad living."

Helen and Jeff are more than making a living in America. They have been successful possibly even beyond their own dreams. This success didn't happen smoothly or overnight, so now that they are able to accept the reality of success, they are forced to think about the future.

"We just want to expand our involvements into a lot of other levels besides show business," says Jeff. "A lot of our time is being spent being more politically active, which is something we want to expand on. I think show business gives you a perfect opportunity and the financial base to be able to expand. It gives you some kind of credibility — which is important. Helen has credibility with women, therefore, we've never done any commercials. You've never seen Helen sell anything — outside of Helen — if you know what I mean. And to maintain that credibility you don't cheapen it and you don't spread it out. Women like Helen for what she stands for. Little kids like her because they like 'Delta Dawn' or whatever. Everyone's got their own reasons for liking an artist. And to be a true star you have to have mass appeal. You've got to appeal to everybody. You can't appeal to a clique or clique."

The Reddy/Wald partnership has succeeded in gaining that desired mass appeal. Helen has been dubbed "The Queen of the Lonely Housewife." She encompasses what the lonely housewife yearns for — a life away from home. Helen has a husband and two children (Traci, 13, and Jordan, 3), but she also finds fulfillment in a career. How does she cope with her two roles? And how does Jeff?

"I don't separate the two," says Helen. "It's our life."

"I don't think she'd want to be married to a plumber," suggests Jeff.

"No," agrees Helen, emphatically.

"And I don't think I'd want to be married to a schoolteacher," continues Jeff.

"No!" laughs Helen.

"I'm not putting down plumbers or schoolteachers!" exclaims Jeff, as he excuses himself to make "a few" phone calls.

"I always wanted somebody who would share my interests," Helen continues. "And show business is a prime interest, you know. That was a strong qualification for me in a husband. I wanted somebody who would understand my life style, because I was not about to give it all up and go live in a cottage somewhere."

"And I couldn't have made it without Jeff," she smiles. "No, no, I don't think so. It takes that kind of devotion. It's not something that happens all by itself. And he really believed in me and that's what made the difference."

Helen and Jeff's marriage is so inextricably intertwined with their common career that they have managed to achieve a rare balance. Their 50/50 relationship seems to be the perfect situation — as long as Helen's 50% of the career remains active. Nevertheless, Helen has thoughts about her future.