

Les Rose's

Gas

A calculator embedded in its belly, a dead stuffed beaver ornaments an executive desk in *Gas*. Intended as a joke, the shot lasts for only a few brief seconds, but it unwittingly provides a most telling image. If *Gas* is an example of a Canadian movie, the beaver probably died of embarrassment when he read the script. Given the crass intentions of the filmmakers (who, as the movie proves, are obviously not as easily embarrassed) they would use his corpse in such a practical manner - anything for a laugh. The juxtaposition of the two - our national symbol and the instrument of commerce - makes a perfect comment on this sorry product from our film industry. And just as this shot misfires as a joke when examined, so does *Gas*. To call it a travesty of comedy would be a compliment. Despite all efforts (and some strove mightily, especially the stunt drivers and special effects people), *Gas* is painful, a mess of miscalculations about the nature of mayhem comedy.

The central story-line in *Gas* concerns the stockpiling of gasoline by the megalomaniac oil tycoon Duke Stuyvesant (Sterling Hayden), who looks like a Hollywood version of Howard Hughes and acts toward his inane sons, Earl and Baron (Dustin Waln and Vlasta Vrana), like Pa Cartwright gone berserk. His actions create an artificial fuel shortage and endless lineups at his station, which is manned by Ira (Keith Knight in one of the better performances in the movie). Waiting in the crowd is Matt Lloyd, a salesman and one half of the sex-not-love-interest (a very innocuous Howie Mandel). On the fringes are those on the make: Rhonda, a hooker in a bordello-van (Helen Shaver in a role that wastes her talents); Jane Beardsley, a hard, ambitious TV interviewer looking for the big story (Susan Anspach); and a somewhat aimless, perhaps brainless, photojournalist who is the other half of the sex interest, Sarah Marshall (Sandeé Currie). Overhead in the WGAZ helicopter commenting on the scene is the Noz, the local rock DJ (Donald Sutherland, of whom it must be said that he doesn't walk, but sits through his part).

The main plot becomes complicated by the avarice of the silly nephews of the local Godfather, Leo Vespucci (Vincent Marino, nodding his head menacingly while wearing the requisite white suit and travelling in the usual black limousine). A pair of US Army motor pool MPs (Alf Humphries and Philip Akin), running their own scam, also become involved. The boy-meets-girl plot is complicated by Sarah's over-protective brother, Ed (Peter Aykroyd). But Ed isn't protecting his sister's honour; he's lusting after her himself, thus introducing the ugly, distasteful theme of incest. His destructive kung-fu mentality may be responsible for the big set scenes in *Gas* - the demolition of the restaurant, the explosion at the gas station and the spectacular climax of the car chase - yet his motivation is sick. Ed is mentally ill, not amusing.

Through Ed, however, comes some understanding of why *Gas* fails as a comedy, for his role makes it the most obvious that the movie is influenced by earlier models. That the similarities are

supposed to be noticed is stressed by an incident near the end, of a crew filming a James Cagney gangster scene. The scene echoes its various predecessors suggesting that films are made and then re-made - memories of the past enriching the present. Thus Ed's kung-fu tactics are reminders of Peter Sellers in the *Pink Panther* series. Moreover, Ed imitates Groucho Marx outright in the restaurant scene. A Lone Ranger (in black not white), driven by Tonto, takes his gas at gun-point. The Noz, while a pale creature, functions like the Wolfman of *American Graffiti*. Surely those dozens of firemen rescuing fat ladies from the spa are descendants of the Keystone Cops. Behind the Duke's sons, about to weld a gasoline storage tank with a blowtorch, or the Mafia nephews, dealing with broken waterpipes, lurk the quarrelsome comedy teams of Martin and Lewis, Abbott and Costello, and Laurel and Hardy, all inept and constantly on the verge of being blown to bits or washed away. What *Gas* could have been is a celebration of its antecedents. But it is not.

Essentially, *Gas* misuses its comic material. When Ed descends to slobbering over his sister, he can no longer effectively play his part as the wrong-headed guardian of family virtue who sets off devastating chain reactions for what are seen as the right reasons. Quite noticeably too, *Gas*, like the Marx brothers' movies, is conceived around "big" scenes of controlled mayhem. But unlike its ancestors, *Gas* does not entertain as it builds up to them. Groucho gets off one good line after another; *Gas* contains nary a single, solitary memorable line. The pairs here are ineffectual for similar reasons; they don't engage in comic banter, usually based on semantic misunderstanding, but simply make a lot of tedious noise. Furthermore, since each one is almost indistinguishable from his mate (even physically), the smart-stupid reverses that form the foundation for the comedy of the earlier teams cannot even exist. Imitation, as well as being the sincerest form of flattery, is also a dangerous game to play. By inviting comparison, *Gas* shows how far short of its model it falls.

Finally, comedy usually, almost formally, metes out justice in the end. The vicious, in this case the avaricious and corrupt, should stand revealed, stripped



• "Gas is painful".

of their pretensions and humbled, at least for the present. But in *Gas*, with Duke believing the fuel seeped into the ground and the others just standing around, none of the lines of the plot are tied off. The unresolved problems presumably just evaporate - like gas. The only good jokes in this movie are on its title.

Anna Carlsdottir •

**GAS** d. Les Rose p. Claude Héroux sc. Richard Wolf, based on orig. story by Richard Wolf and Susan Scranton exec. p. Victor Solnicki, Pierre David d.o.p./cam. op. René Verzier mus. Paul Zaza ed. Patrick Dodd p. des. Carol Spier p. man. Roger Héroux 1st a.d. John Fretz 2nd a.d. Mac Bradden 3rd a.d. Patrick Ferrero unit man. Jean Savard sc. girl France Boudreau p. coord. Daniele Rohrbach gaf. Kevin O'Connell elect. Richer Francoeur, Jean-François Pouliot, Alex Amyot, Gordon Cournoyer, Jacques Girard, Antoine Léger, Denis Ménard asst. art d. Rose Marie McSherry (1st), Barbara Dunphy (2nd) admin. art dept. Maurice Tremblay art dept. trainee Nikki Geoghegan set dress. Ronald Fauteux, Patrice Benge, Serge Bureau, Simon Labaye asst. set dress. Pierre de Grodailon prop. master Jean Bourret asst. prop. master François Beaugard props buyer Michel Comte des. Dominique Ricard spec. efx. coord. Gary Zeller spec. efx. assist. Peter Bodrowsky, Louis Craig, Peter Dowker, Pierre Davreux, Renée Rousseau action vehicles capt. Michael Saint-Laurent action vehicles driver Réal Baril cost. des. Gaudeline Sauriol, Paul-André Guérin (asst.) ward. asst. Mariane Carter ward. master Luc Le Flaguais asst. dresser Christine Gribbin make-up Louise Rundell, Katherine Casault (asst.) hair Constant Natale, Marcel Ouellette (asst.) foc. puller Denis Gingras loader Jean-Jacques Gervais key grip François Dupéré grips Michel Périard,

Paul Morin sd. Patrick Rousseau boom Thierry Hoffman assoc. ed. Monika Lightstone Dorfman asst. ed. Rit Wallis, Jean-Marc Magnan stills Pierre Dury, Denis Fugère sec. to p. Monique Legaré admin. Serge Major p. acct. Wayne Arron compt. Gilles Léonard p. sec. Penny French sc. coord. Denise Dinovici loc. man. Guy Trinque constr. sup. Claude Simard trans. capt. Charles Toupin helicopter man. Gilles Farand 2nd unit d./stunt sup. James Arnett 2nd unit stunt coord. Gaëtan La France 2nd unit prin. stuntman David Rigby 2nd unit 1st a.d. Michel Wachniuc 2nd unit man. Frank Ruszcynski 2nd unit cam. Torben Johnke, Peter Benison, Joël Bertomeu, Serge Ladouceur 2nd unit foc. pullers Luc Lussier, Larry Lynn, Glen MacPherson, Bert Tougas 2nd unit sc. girls Therese Bérubé, Claudette Messier 2nd unit sd. Rolling Jacob 2nd unit grips Marc de Ernsted, Normand Guy, Grégoire Schmist 2nd unit key rigger Peter MacMillan 2nd unit set dress. François Séguin 2nd unit props. Lewis J. Wolfe, Jean-François Roussel 2nd unit make-up/hair Camille Bélanger 2nd unit transp. capt. Blair Roth casting Dani Hausman (T.O.), Ginette D'Amico (Mt.) asst. casting Flo Gallant unit pub. Pierre Brousseau marketing Publifilms Ltd. worldwide pub. Paratel, David Novak Associates post-p. coord. Bill Wiggins sound d. Jay Wertz sd. ed. Eric Lindemann, Joe Melody asst. sound ed. Amable Aguiliez, Michael Rea mus. superv. David Franco, Pierre Brousseau mus. rec. engineer Frank Morrone mus. score Paul Zaza lp. Susan Anspach, Howie Mandel, Sterling Hayden, Helen Shaver, Sandee Currie, Peter Aykroyd, Keith Knight, Alf Humphries, Philip Akin, Michael Hogan, Paul Kelman, Donald Sutherland, Dustin Waln, Vlasta Vrana, Harvey Chao, Brian Nasimok, Violet Bussey, Vincent Marino, Carl Marotte, Bob Parson, Richard Donat, Domenico Fiore, Dino Tosques, Art Groszer, Dioto Kretschmar, Gershon Resnik, Walter Massey, Jeff Diamond, Mac Bradden, Terry Haig, Ralph Petteofrezzo, Joe Sanza, Joost Davidson p.c. Filmplan International (1980) col. 35mm running time 98 min. 51 sec. dist. Paramount Pictures.



• Cecil Taylor in *Imagine the Sound*.

Ron Mann's

Imagine the Sound

*Imagine the Sound* is less a film, than it is an art exposition brought to the screen. Music is the art form portrayed; more specifically, the music of jazz musicians Cecil Taylor, Bill Dixon, Archie Shepp and Paul Bley.

To best understand the music which they create and perform in the film, it is important to consider the historical context from which their sound has emerged. The reaction against the confines of late-forties/early-fifties jazz music ('Bebop') and the 'Cool Jazz' of the late fifties and early sixties, spawned a new breed of musician which sought the purity of sound itself.

The unspoken hope of every artist is that his work imitates, and thereby becomes life. Cecil Taylor expresses this desire in the opening sequence of the