Rex Bromfield's
Melanie

Back in the late '50s, there was a short series of films built around the central character of Tammy, an uneducated southern girl who was an absolute font of motherly wisdom. In films like Tammy Tell Me True and Tammy and the Doctor (with a pre-Corman Peter Fonda) she solved the problems of the rich and the well-educated with a dash of downhome country wisdom.

The Simcom production of Melanie could easily be called "Tammy and the Rock Star," with Glynnis O'Connor taking the old Sandra Dee role and rescuing on-the-skids, stoned rocker Burton Cummings from his own bad habits and writer's block, while rescuing her son, who has been kidnapped by her redneck husband.

Actually, this sort of throwback plot does not really hurt the film — much more damage is done by the absolute lack of focus and purpose. There are about three plot threads going here: Melanie's struggle for literacy, her battle to get her son back, and Rick Manning's (Cummings') struggle to get back on the road to stardom. None of them ever really rise to the surface.

The scene at the divorce hearing is shot without dialogue as one of Cummings' tunes whines away on the soundtrack, as is most of her struggle with the ins and outs of letters and words. Melanie even seems to forget at times that she's there to hunt for her son.

While the film is more than competently made and well-directed by Rex Bromfield, it needed another or two on the script to bring out the dramatic moments. There are rarely any of the moments one finds constantly in a film like Traffic's Ellen Burstyn, or the more emotional parent-child moments in Kramer vs. Kramer.

Despite this script problem, Melanie is not a bad picture. One feels no real urge to run from the theatre. Glynnis O'Connor, who is sort of a cross between Sissy Spacek and Barbara Hershey, is quite good as the eponymous heroine, unspeakable in need of focus and purpose. There are more damage is done by the absolute lack of focus and purpose.

O'Connor needed another or two on the script to bring out the dramatic moments. There are rarely any of the moments one finds constantly in a film like Traffic's Ellen Burstyn, or the more emotional parent-child moments in Kramer vs. Kramer. Yet stuck in the film are some very odd scenes. One has a Norman Maine Cummings playing his songs at a party for his friends, all of whom walk out on him. I don't know why, but the songs seem to be written for another Burton Cummings. Some of Cummings songs that have sold millions of records.

One could ask the question "What does all this have to do with Canadian culture?" but that would be irrelevant. Simcom, as it proved with From Night, is not interested in making Canadian films, and I would much rather see Peter Simpson's fair-to-middling American-styled movies than, say, Garth Drabinsky's awful American movies. In Melanie, the producers have real, human-scale characters at work, which is a pleasant change from the slasher archetypes of their Paul Lynch epic.

John Harkness

Charles Jarrott's
The Amateur

There lurks a dark, reptilian instinct within us all. It goes like this: when something strikes out at you, strike back and chew hard. Having endured The Amateur, this primordial urge is now uncontrollable.

First of all, to entitle a film as such, must certainly be an act of masochism, because the makers of The Amateur have set themselves up to be skewered with catcalls and cries of amateurism. This is not to say that the film is ostensibly bad. But then again neither is an amateur. The looks may be there but it is backed by little substance or skill.

Producers Joel Michaels and Garth Drabinsky have once again lived up to their Romulus and Remus legacy by doling out the mega-bucks to come up with an appetizing package. And on the surface they've succeeded. The Amateur has all the trappings of a taut espionage thriller; along the lines of Three Days of the Condor and The Marathon Man. They've supplied a long list of stars: John Savage, Christopher Plummer, Marthe Keller, Arthur Hill and John Marley. Included in the price of admission is a European travelogue. (Accomplished smartly, so that Vienna not only serves as itself but Munich and Prague,