

## 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 fount 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 down-home 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, but 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 draft or two on the script to bring out the dramatic moments. There are rarely any of the moments that one finds constantly in a film like Truffaut's *L'Enfant Sauvage*, or like 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, suggesting quite well that she may in fact be illiterate - she masters just the right degree of embarrassment com-



● Everything's o.k. until they wise up. Rick (Burton Cummings) and Melanie (Glynnis O'Connor) play cut-out

bined with curiosity about what she's shut away from. Indeed, the best scene in the film takes place between O'Connor and Donnan Cavan, a punkie girl she meets on the bus to L.A. As they sit in a restaurant, Cavan realizes that Melanie can't read, and Melanie knows that she knows, and the whole scene is shot through with potential embarrassment and a very delicate sort of feeling.

Burton Cummings, in his feature film debut, is good until the last half hour of the picture, when he sobers up and flies right under Melanie's ministrations. Cummings is great as an obnoxiously stoned rock star, but as a sweet sensitive guy he doesn't have anything like the acting tools required to make the character interesting.

Trudy Young, as Melanie's friend who left Arkansas and lives in the big city is all right, but how can anyone who grew up watching *Razzle Dazzle* take this

woman seriously as an actress (we will not speak here of *Face Off*).

Bromfield's real triumph as a director here is the creation of interesting - even narrative - "walking on the beach" sequences.

A "walking on the beach" scene generally occurs after the starring couple realizes that they are in love. For five minutes or so, a bad song plays on the soundtrack and we are treated to the unedifying sight of two highly paid actors walking on the beach, eating in restaurants, playing touch football and shopping for cute things that they don't need. Usually, it is the best time to sneak out for a cigarette.

Bromfield's scenes, wherein Melanie learns to write and stretches her relationship with Manning and his lawyer, Walter (Paul Sorvino) actually move the story along, which is a minor achievement.

Yet stuck in the film are some very odd scenes. One has a Norman Maine-ish Cummings playing his songs at a party for his friends, all of whom walk out on him. I don't know why - the songs seem no worse than any other Burton 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 *Prom Night*, is not interested in making Canadian films, and I would much rather watch Peter Simpson's fair-to-middling American-style 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 aesthetics of their Paul Lynch epic.

John Harkness ●



● John Savage only adds to the amateur effort

## 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 primeval 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,

**MELANIE** p.c. Simcom Ltd. Production d. Rex Bromfield exec. p. Richard Simpson p. Peter Simpson sc. Robert Guza, Jr. and Richard Paluck d.o.p. Richard Clupka ed. Brian Ravok p. des. Roy Forge Smith p. man. Gerry Arbeid loc. man. (Canada) Brian Ross loc. man. (U.S.A.) David Nelson unit pub. Pat Whittingham p. co-ord. Judith Rubin loc. co-ord. (U.S.A.) Angela Heald cast. Mitchell-Polley Casting 1st asst. d. R. Martin Walters 2nd asst. d. Alan Goluboff cam. op. Fred Guthe focus puller Andy Chumra clapper/loader Marvin Midwicki ed. mix. Douglas Ganton boom op. Tom Hilderly cost. des. Julie Ganton ward. Gaye Gardiner make-up Shonagh Jabour hair Jenny Arbour p. accountant Robert Duckworth sc. superv. Pauline Harlow stills John Williamson asst. art. d. Barbara Matis 2nd asst. art. d. Dave Davis art trainee Birgit Siber art. dept. asst. (U.S.A.) Michelle Minch set dresser Angelo Stea asst. set dressers Enrico Campana, Gareth Wilson, Tony Bennett prop. mast. Anthony Greco asst. prop. mast. Joe Hampson gaffer John Berrie best boy Richard A. Allen elec. Bill Brown key grip Norman Smith 2nd grip Michael O'Connor 3rd grip Sean Ryerson gen. op. Greg Daniels transp. capt. Don Baldassarra p. asst. Michael Curran 1st asst. driver Tom Pinteric driver Curtis Brown orig. music Burton Cummings l.p. Glynnis O'Connor, Paul Sorvino, Burton Cummings, Trudy Young, Don Johnson, Jamie Dick, L.Q. Jones, Lisa Dal Bello, Yvonne Murray, David Willis, Donnan Cavan, Jodie Drake, Martha Gibson, Jim Martin dist. Twentieth Century-Fox.