

## Morley Markson/ Larry Pall's **Off Your Rocker**

It's easy to see why *Off Your Rocker* was never released theatrically. Not that it is awful, but it has no recognizable box office stars, it's about a bunch of old people, it's depressing, and it's way too Jewish.

Indeed, *Off Your Rocker* can be read as a peculiar epic of Jewish paranoia. Dr. Max Adler (Lou Jacobi) runs a wonderful, warm retirement home, filled with old Jewish people played by Milton Berle, Red Buttons, Helen Hughes, etc. However, Dr. Adler likes to play the horses, and is in massive debt to loan sharks, represented by the evil Michael Ironside. He goes to Lou Carmen, an unscrupulous businessman, who works a deal by which he steals the home and gives Max a stroke. Immediately, Carmen institutes a whole new regime of modern geriatric techniques under the ultra-WASPy Miss Beecher (Helen Shaver).

Ultimately, the patients stage a revolt against the new order by drugging the attendants and blackmailing the evil Lou Carmen into selling the home back to Max Adler, who has made the fastest recovery in medical history.

What the producers and directors were obviously shooting for was a sort of Geritol Capra movie, about loveable old folks fighting off the tentacles of big business for the right to live the way they want in the final years of their lives. What comes out, however, as the moral of the story is 'don't gamble, or you will go into debt' and have to do business with the goyim, who will cheat you, and, once they have you in their clutches,

**"OFF YOUR ROCKER"** d. Morley Markson and Larry Pall p. Norman Glick and Earl A. Glick p.c. Hal Roach Studios International Ltd. sc. Samuel Warren Joseph and Morley Markson from a story by Samuel Warren Joseph assoc. p. Deanne Judson art d. Gavin Mitchell d.o.p. Henry Fiks film ed. Melvin Shapiro orig. music by Srul Irving Glick orch. Ben McPeck assts. ed. Tim Eaton, David Leach superv. sd. ed. Alban Streeter sd. ed. Terry Burke music ed. Kirk Hawkes 1st, 2nd and 3rd a.d. Ken Goch, Sherry Cohen, David Hynes p. asst. Lazar Avramov p. acct. Barry Leyland p. sec. Judith Rubin asst. to p. Jules Brozovsky d.'s sec. Kevin Sullivan 1st, 2nd and 3rd asst. cam. Rick Wincenty, John Hobson, Mark Lipson focus puller Dennis Rindsen cam. loader Ron Hewitt sd. rec. Doug Ganton sd. mix Nolan Roberts boom Tom Hilderley best boy Richard A. Allen asst. elect. Bill Brown 3rd elec. Robert Moor elec. trainee Wayne Bate key grip Jim Craig grip Michael O'Connor, Dan Narduzzi gaffer Roger Bate loc. super. Howard Schmuck loc. maint. Haim Akum loc. cons. David Coatsworth pub. Julie Trumpour still Lawrie Raskin cont. Barbary Ratz, Margaret McClintock asst. art d. Carmi Gallo set dres. Carol Lavoie asst. set dres. Richard D. Allen, Jackie Field props master Andrew Deskin props Peter Fletcher ward. coord. Kathy Vieira ward. mistress Angie Vastagh ward. assts. Eileen Kennedy, Judith Gostick, Gaye Gardiner make-up Sandi Duncan make-up asst. Laurie Finstead make-up app. Linda Dolgay hair Jocelyn MacDonald asst. hair Roger Dalgliesh, Bruce Appleby const. man. Mike Lososky const. coord. Rolf Harvey sp. eff. Michael Kavanagh nurse Donna Holton transp. capt. Nick Scheffer drivers Michael Holton, Pam Henry, Calvin Greenwood, Martin Weinryb, Harro Bauer extra coord. Barbara Greene craftperson Marsha Rovon catering Chapman's Fine Foods lab. Film House titles and opticals Film Opticals of Canada Ltd. cast. Canadian Casting Associates extra cast. Filmextra Services Lp. Milton Berle, Red Buttons, Lou Jacobi, Dorothy Malone, Helen Shaver, Sharon Acker, Helen Hughes, also Helen Burns, Sean O'Conn, Paul Kilgman, Charles Irvine, Robert O'Ree, Dorcen Glick, Michael Ironside, Ted Beattie, Kurt Freund, Tom Butler, Sam Moses, and Peter Sturgess, Rosemary Dunsmore, Marion Gilseman, Mary Swinton, Wally Bondareno, Alfred Humphries, Pierre Tetreault, Grant Roll, Barry Belchamber, Paul Todd, Michelle Dowell, Daryl Wells, Ken Lemaire.

will give you a stroke, make you eat crap, and stop you from schmoozing around the dining room table with your friends. The filmmakers don't even let the myth about Jews being good at business stand.

What's really depressing about *Off Your Rocker* is that, despite its optimistic ending, what we see of the institutional treatment in the middle portion of the film is probably the most true to life. The old folks being drugged, separated from their friends, being forced to eat food that looks like it was designed for adentate astronauts, paints a picture that belies the emotional uplift at the end of the film.

The cast is unflaggingly professional, with Milton Berle surprisingly effective and Red Buttons surprisingly unpleasant. Unfortunately, most of them are

## Barry Greenwald's **Taxi!**

Years from now, when "driving hack" is remembered only as a quaint and long-forgotten profession, a social phenomenon of the 20th century, someone will dig out a dusty copy of Barry Greenwald's *Taxi* and rediscover a small treasure. What they will find is a documentary crammed with information, insight, and artistic expression; a film lovingly devoted to the complexities and idiosyncrasies of driving a cab in the heart of a big city.

What makes *Taxi* so exhilarating is the way in which it embraces its subject, the gentle exploration of the unique relationship between driver and passenger. In scene after scene this partnership is emphasized as the very heart of the profession, and the drivers emerge as lay psychiatrists, social workers, doctors, delivery boys, chauffeurs, and substitute parents. But content is by far not *Taxi*'s only merit. Beautifully photographed by Mark Irwin, the film carries the quality and atmosphere of a full-length feature, and its editing is concise and disciplined. The final product leads one to suspect that many hours of enjoyable footage lies rejected on the cutting room floor in the interests of time. Weaving gently into the whole is a crisp and melodious narration by Cedric Smith, one of Canada's most underrated and under-used actors.

Greenwald, who both directed and wrote the film, drove a cab in Toronto for three years and his experience and contacts have paid off handsomely. It is doubtful whether someone not so closely aligned with the business could have outlined the soul of it all so clearly and precisely. From the weary dispatchers dealing with irritated customers and drivers alike, to the harried drivers and demanding public, Greenwald has embroidered a colourful canvas indeed. In addition, *Taxi* is providing an important public service, for in its lively depiction of the profession it clarifies many of the public's most oft-asked questions. This is one film that could well change the attitude of the people it reaches. Viewers will be slower to snap at the dispatchers for too long a wait, and will think twice before accusing a driver of deliberately choosing a less direct route.

Cab drivers are seen by motorists as a necessary evil, the demons who clog traffic, and by most passengers an expensive necessity. The reality of what it

sabotaged by the script or the camera angles. Dorothy Malone, in particular, is shot from the least flattering angles imaginable and is further saddled with a wig which looks as if it were recycled into *Quest for Fire*. It is very difficult to believe that she was ever the beautiful young dancer she claims to be, seeing herself in fantasy flashes (a dancer who looks nothing like the Dorothy Malone we remember from *Written on the Wind* and *The Tarnished Angels*).

Lou Jacobi is settling even further into deranged ham - put a Lou Jacobi picture in a multiplex cinema and he'd probably start chewing the scenery in other theatres. Helen Shavers is unfortunately miscast as the strait-laced spinster administrator. Shaver's chief quality as an actress is her remarkable sexual presence, and turning her into a

toned-down version of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest's* Nurse Ratched would seem a waste of her talents. Of course, wasting Helen Shaver's talents has been the national sport of the Canadian film industry for years now.

While *Off Your Rocker* is not at all a bad picture, it typifies one of the problems that exists within the Canadian industry. It's not that we don't have the technical expertise, for it is quite well made, but our producers seem to have no commercial instincts. The question is not whether millions of people would want to see *Off Your Rocker*, but whether anyone would shell out five dollars to catch Milton Berle and Red Buttons at the local Rialto.

John Harkness ●



● Taxi dispatcher Syd Glass at work

takes to "make it" on the streets is methodically outlined here, stripping away the illusions of easy money for an easy job. As in any profession, the serious mingle with part-timers out for a buck, the caring compete with the brusque, and the tricks must be learned to survive. But what makes cab driving so especially interesting as a film subject is the characters that form the base of the profession, the tough old-timers who have been through it all, and seen it all. From the brokerage houses to the dispatchers' cramped and dirty offices, to the individual personalities of the independently-owned cars, nothing is boring about the film or its real-life subjects. If anything, one's credulity is sometimes strained at the amazing tales that emerge on camera. Take, for example, the driver who took a pregnant woman and her husband to the hospital.

They didn't make it on time and after the husband passed out, the cabbie delivered the baby. As if that weren't enough, just two years later the same cabbie drove the same couple to the same hospital. Once again, she began to give birth, the husband passed out, and the driver delivered the child. Unbelievable? Maybe. But then, that's just part of "driving hack" in good ole' Toronto.

Mira Friedlander ●

**TAXI!** d. sc. Barry Greenwald ed. Murray Battle d.o.p. Mark Irwin. C.S.C. loc. sd. Tom Mather add. photography Rene Ohashi add. sd. Bryan Day. Andy McBrearty camera assist. Rolf Cutts grips Carlo Campana. Maris Jansons music. Don Thompson performed by Pat La Barbera. Don Thompson narr. Cedric Smith re-rec. Hans Peter Strobl, Adrian Croll admin. Louise Clark tech. adv. Frank Ciavaglia assoc. p. Judy LeGros p. exec. p. Arthur Hammond p.c. The National Film Board running time 60 min.