

A CHILD'S CHRISTMAS IN WALES

This Yuletide offering was spread across the country (and the U.K. and U.S.A. too) last December, and bids fair to become a classic 'repeater' each festive season.

However, lovers of the Dylan Thomas poem will not find the rollicking rhythms, irreverent abandon, and the glorious Welsh cadences that mark the recorded readings of the poet himself, and of Richard Burton too.

In a modern-day setting, Denholm Elliott as Old Geraint, recalls the Christmases of his childhood. He calms down his excited grandchild, Thomas, who swears he is going to stay awake to catch Santa Claus filling his stocking. "It was always snowing at Christmas. December, in my memory, is white as Lapland, though there were no reindeers."

His reminiscences dissolve into dramatised scenes from the poem. We encounter the cats - "Sleek and long as jaguars and horrible-whiskered, spitting and snarling, they would slink and sidle over the white back-garden walls..." - and participate in the delicious fire at the Prothero home, with the boys running to the telephone box for the fire brigade. "Let's call the police as well... And the ambulance. And Ernie Jenkins, he likes fires."

Christmas Day comes, with a gathering of assorted aunts and uncles, and the opening of the presents, graded into Useful and Useless. In the first category - "engulfing mufflers", "mittens made for giant sloths", "balaclavas for victims of head-shrinking tribes"; in the second, "moist and many-coloured jelly babies", a false nose, a celluloid duck, a painting book, "... toffee, fudge and allsorts, crunches, cracknels, humbugs..." And, in a charming little animated sequence by Dennis Pike, "troops of bright tin soldiers who, if they could not fight, could always run."

The Christmas dinner is fully documented according to Dylan Thomas' words; then the uncles sleep the afternoon away, while Young Geraint goes out to meet friends in his new squeaking boots and to walk to the seashore. Tea followed, and an "ice cake

MINI REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

loomed in the centre of the table like a marble grave."

The film's art direction by Stephen Roloff is to be greatly admired, and manages to provide a smooth continuity between the village of Montmorency (Trefaldwyn) in Wales and the interiors, all shot in Canada. Denholm Elliott gives an understanding reading of the long passages of the poem, but the Welshness is absent. His more authentic grandson is Mathonwy Reeves, who came to Canada from Wales to play the part, while a Ca-

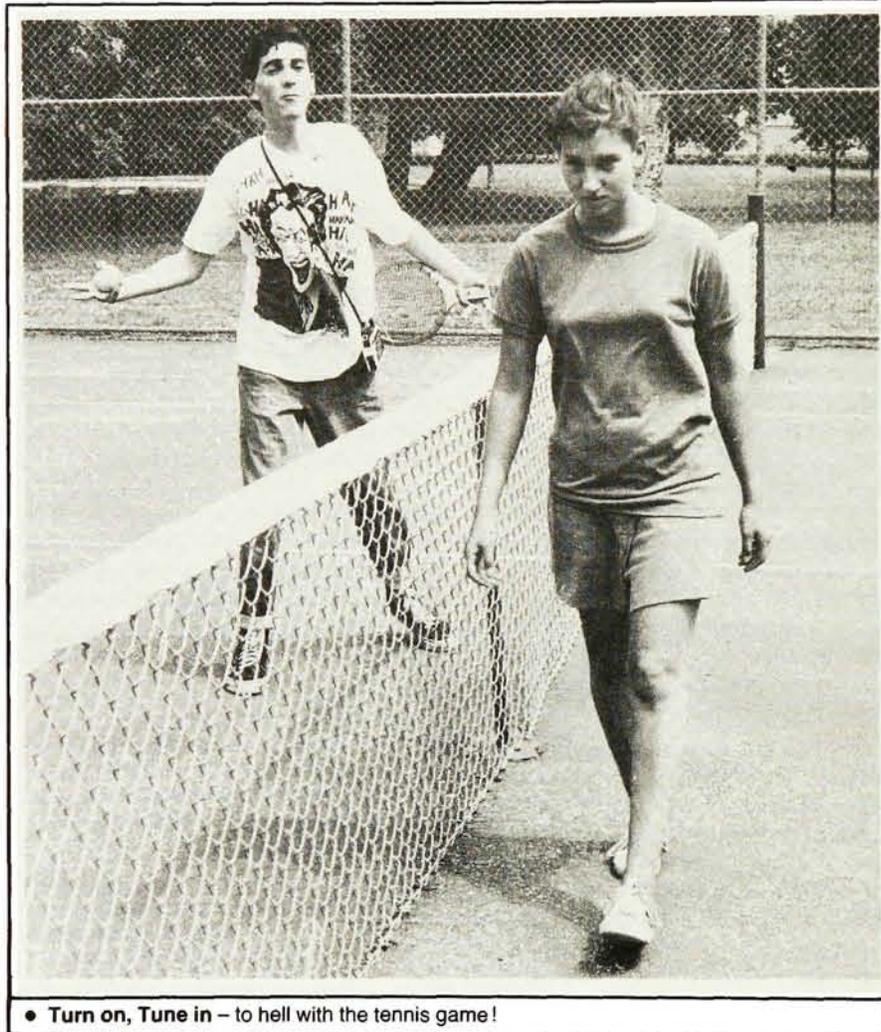
nadian boy, Jesse McBrearty, reversed the process and went to Wales.

The script for *A Child's Christmas in Wales* was concocted by three principals of Cypress Films in New York, brought to Atlantis Films in Toronto, and then produced in association with Cypress and WTTW/Chicago, with the participation of the Global Television Network (Toronto) and HTV Limited.

The film looks good, and has all the first-rate production values that are expected from Atlantis Films, but it lacks the rambunctious energy and unbut-

toned humour of the time, and episodes have a strung-out feeling, with a certain forced air about them. The music is a sampler of parlor pieces and Christmas carols sung winsomely by The Toronto Boys' Choir. *A Child's Christmas in Wales* has to be viewed as a simple heartwarming family story, designed for a special season. Then read the Dylan Thomas poem after the event...

exec. p. Michael MacMillan, Joseph Pierson p. Gillian Richardson, Seaton McLean d. Don McBrearty. sc. Peter Kreutzer adapt. John Glascoe, Peter Kreutzer d.o.p. Mark Irwin csc. art d. Stephen Roloff ed. Sally Paterson mus. Louis Natale. l.p. Denholm Elliott (Old Geraint), Mathonwy Reeves (Thomas), Young Geraint (Jesse McBrearty) Christmas choral selections: The Toronto Boys' Choir, d. Ned Hanson sol. oist. Thomas Reynolds running time 55 mins. col. 16mm. Availability: Atlantis Films (416) 462-0016.



• Turn on, Tune in - to hell with the tennis game!

TURN ON, TUNE IN

A little cautionary tale! Marty is your sort-of-average teenager, an OK scrawny type with a long-suffering female friend, Buddy, who likes wrestling and other intelligent conversation. Of course, Marty has problems with his parents - his mum usually does all the talking and never stops, while his dad is mostly a silent onlooker.

The big day for Marty is when he empties his piggy-bank and takes off with Buddy to buy a \$49.95 Walkman. From then on it's music, music, music, for Marty - he lies on his bed rocking and rolling, boogies to the beat along the street, and his tennis game goes all to hell. Buddy is incensed and gives him a tongue-lashing - "You're no fun any more" - the Walkman is taking over his life, and she's fed up. Marty listens, cogitates... puts on the headset, strums on his tennis racquet 'guitar', and lopes off along the street. He's made his decision!

A pleasant little exercise, beautifully shot and well-edited, but the whole somewhat hampered by the amateur acting. (The sappy music doesn't help either...). But, hey, Jim Blokland gets his little stories made, and is working towards a feature film, right?

d./p./ed. Jim Blokland lighting cam. Allan Pili asst. cam. Mike Bennyworth l.p. Jason Tevelowitz (Marty), Elizabeth Becker (Buddy) running time 15 mins. col. 16mm/tape: 3/4" & 1/2". Availability: Jim Blokland Film Productions (416) 485-5216.

BOOKSHELF

In a well-documented study, *Dancing in the Sun: Hollywood Choreographers*, Naime Prevots explores the 1915-37 period when Hollywood offered dancers an attractive field of creative activity and financial reward. Theodore Kosloff, Leslie Horton, Adolph Bolm and Benjamin Zemach were some of the choreographers/teachers whose work helped shape American dance and cultural life through the numerous movie musicals they designed and the popular Hollywood Bowl performances they staged. (UMI Research Press, Ann Arbor, MI, \$44.95).

Two dancing idols of the '30s are memorialized in Arlene Croce's *The Fred Astaire & Ginger Rogers Book*, an informative survey as well as a delightful tribute. Originally published in 1972, this reprint includes synopses of their movies, full credits lists, song-and-dance numbers and an abundance of

stills. (Dutton, NYC, \$12.95).

Another engrossing reprint, Fred Astaire's 1959 autobiography *Steps in Time* recaps his busy stage career and his smooth transition to films in 1933. It is mostly an intimate, anecdotal memoir about his early child labor law problems, his hobnobbing with British royalty, his partnership with sister Adele on stage and his later coupling with Ginger Rogers for a succession of memorable movie musicals. (Harper & Row, NYC, \$7.95).

Fred Astaire's contribution to choreography as an art and a dynamic expression of life is revealed in *Dance and Photography* together with that of Pavlova, Nijinsky, Martha Graham, Nureyev, Gene Kelly and other great dancers. William A. Ewing's expert commentary and over 200 plates of exceptional quality illustrate this history of dance photography in its various styles:

aesthetic, technical, glamorous and experimental. (Henry Holt, NYC, \$50).

Among recently published screenplays, Oliver Stone's Oscar-winning *Platoon* is a searing example of the current style of film realism; in the same volume, *Salvador*, a hard-hitting portrayal of civil war that earned Oliver Stone and Richard Boyle an Oscar nomination for best screenplay. (Vintage, NYC, \$8.95).

Playwright David Mamet's *House of Games*, a script he wrote and directed, is a psychological thriller transferred from the stage into a suspenseful motion picture. It bears the unmistakable imprint of the author's personal vision. (Grove, NYC, \$5.95).

John Briley's screenplay *Cry Freedom*, published in the form of extensively captioned, brilliant stills from the film, is basically director Richard Attenborough's pictorial record of the life of Steve Biko, the black South African polit-

ical activist and his eventual murder at the hands of the security police. (Knopf, NYC, \$15.95).

The younger breed of actors is getting an increased share of biographical attention usually reserved for established, or departed, stars. Sally Field, profiled by Jason Bonderoff, emerges as a cheerful person who can fight for her place in the sun and, in the process, win two Oscars and an Emmy. Toby Goldstein's *William Hurt* traces the life story of a complex actor who can play, with equal conviction, a macho adventurer in *Body Heat* and, in *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, an insecure homosexual seeking refuge in dreams. (St. Martin's, NYC, \$15.95 and \$13.05).

George L. George •