

# FILM REVIEWS

**Don Taylor's**

## Echoes of a Summer

**d:** Don Taylor, **sc:** Robert L. Joseph, **ph:** John Coquillon, **ed:** Michael F. Anderson, **sd:** Richard Lightstone, **a.d:** Jack McAdams, **m:** Terry James, **original theme** Richard Harris, **cost:** Ton Talsky, **wardrobe:** Denis Sperdouklis, **i.p.:** Richard Harris (Eugene), Lois Nettleton (Ruth), Jodie Foster (Deirdre), Geraldine Fitzgerald (Sara), **exec. p:** Sandy Howard, Richard Harris, **assoc. p:** Dermot Harris, Muriel Bradley, **p. man** Michael S. Glick, 35 mm Eastmancolor, **running time** 99 minutes.

There is a seed of an idea dropped into the script of **Echoes of a Summer** about the middle when we are desperately trying to fix our attention in this story. The director, Don Taylor, caught it for a moment, then dropped it; the author, Robert Joseph, played hide-and-seek with it to the end of the film.

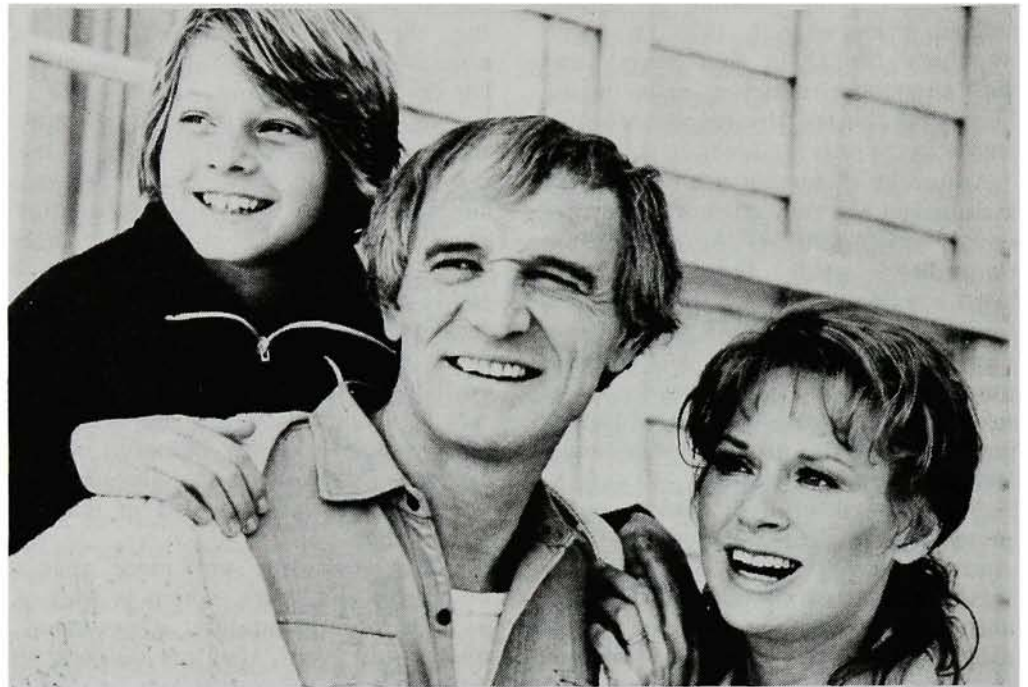
The "idea" has to do with a young girl, who knows she is close to death, feeling cheated because she will never get old, because she will never make love and because the fantasies of her childhood will never be tested against life. Perhaps not original in itself, but **Echoes of a Summer** needed some strong element to tie the film together and to bring an authenticity to the emotions portrayed in it.

In one sharp yet poignant scene, 12-year-old Deirdre (Jodie Foster) is caught unawares playing in her castle. When she turns we see that Deirdre has made up her face to look pale, wrinkled and old.

Later, on the beach with her 10-year-old friend Phillip (Brad Savage), she asks him to lie down beside her so she can get the feel of a man close to her. If neither actor quite musters the proper mix of awkward eagerness for the scene, we let it pass because there is a deep well of meaning to their clumsiness.

However, these two scenes are isolated high points in a film story which is more concerned with the tensions and misdirected concern of the parents of the dying child.

Her parents have gone into debt to buy a big white house with a ve-



The unhappy family in **Echoes of a Summer**

randa overlooking the Nova Scotia seashore to make Deirdre's end a little easier. The three of them and a governess, in unfamiliar surroundings and completely isolated, can neither cover up the horror of the impending death nor attempt some semblance of normal life. They are waiting, playing games while they wait, but waiting.

Deirdre is the one who faces the situation squarely, even making rather osé jokes about it. Her mother (Lois Nettleton) is still looking for some last ray of hope among the many heart specialists she has consulted. Father (Richard Harris) is lost in a fantasy world he shares with his daughter.

My gosh, but Richard Harris is stiff and glum in this film. An actor with considerable physical presence, he somehow lacks the emotional wherewithal to give depth to this role.

The fault lies, in part, with a script which is merely wordy when it attempts wit, and is overly punctuated with lines calculated to pull at the heart strings.

One suspects Jodie Foster felt more comfortable as the whore in **Taxi Driver** than she did in this pity role. With lines like "I miss you already, Daddy", even someone more cuddly than Jodie would have trouble convincing us.

**Echoes of a Summer** is an emotional grab bag. It builds a case on de-

spair, then turns to champion the happy ending; well, a relatively happy ending... Deirdre's courage forcing her parents to come to "peace" with their loss.

Though this film is frustrating to an extreme both for the inadequacies of script and presentation, it is the kind of film that develops a following. A following among people who are looking for an antidote to what is perceived as a frenzy and emotional sterility in the society they live in and in their own lives. Many of these people will go home satisfied with **Echoes of a Summer** and its message of conciliation.

If I am sour on this film it is not because it is a melodrama but because the actors in it, perhaps with the exception of Brad Savage, don't give any indication that they believe in the script. It seems to me that is important when a film is fishing for emotions.

I would be willing to make a case in defense of melodrama for the development of the Canadian film industry as a whole. Our filmmakers cannot all afford to be *les artistes!* **Echoes of a Summer**, however, never departs from the ruts of the genre and, to set things straight, it is an American film shot in Nova Scotia with some locals on the crew and the "participation" investment of Astral Films, in Montreal.

**Joan Irving**