

Peter Wronski's Bad Company

d. Peter Wronski sc. Paul Eichgrun d.o.p. Joseph L. Sutherland mus. Bob Schroder ed. Bob Schroder sd. John Gundy l.p. Rolf Kempf, Clay Borris, Liesja Wagner, Eli Allon, Gene Paulson, Wayne St. John, Perry Thompson, Peter Baily, Vince Guerriero p.c. Faster Films Production, 1978, with financial assistance from the Ontario Arts Council p. Paul Eichgrun, Steven Klys, Peter Wronski Cdn. distrib., foreign sales Asonis Film Enterprises col. 16mm running time 76 min.

Bad Company, Peter Wronski's first feature film is, for the most part, a ragged unoriginal work, made up of what are by now little more than Canadian film commonplaces. Although the occasional accomplished scene stands apart from the rest, these brief moments are too few to uplift the film as a whole. They, however, shed light on **Bad Company's** weaknesses.

One of these effective scenes is set in a quick-lunch restaurant. Billy, the central character, and his girlfriend Dallas are discussing their relationship and its failings. Billy tells Dallas he's decided that robbing a bank will solve their problems. The two of them, and an unshaven man next to Billy, are all facing forward, seated at the lunch counter. As Billy and Dallas converse, the stranger nervously stammers to himself. Billy gives him a side-long glance and asks if he's "playin' with a full deck;" to which the man replies, "I'm just talking to myself, okay?" When Dallas has heard of enough of Billy's far-fetched solutions, she says "You're crazy. He's crazy. We're all crazy," and quickly leaves, with Billy trailing after her. In a close-up the camera concentrates on the stranger's face as he chats to himself and sips his coffee. The dark humour in this scene gives a much-needed depth to the film. The stranger's inclusion provides a subtly ironic counterpoint to Billy's grand and childish plans. He also increases Dallas' frustration by making it hard for her to be heard. As well as adding complexity to Billy and Dallas' relationship, he exists in his own right — a disturbed, lonely man at a Toronto lunch counter, captured in the rough impressionism of simulated cinema-direct. The intensity of human emotion present in this straightforward scene results from the inclusion of elements not totally germane to the film's plot.

The majority of the film, however, is given over to advancing a standard



A classy stick-up to pull off an illegal gambling heist — Rolf Kempf, Clay Borris and Gene David Paulsson (left to right) in **Bad Company**

loser's-last-big-chance plot. As with so many other Canadian films, the protagonist is a male with little left to lose, and a desire to do one big thing to set himself right — or at least go out in a big way. Again, like the many previous films it resembles, **Bad Company** at times seems more concerned with describing characters in context than advancing the actual

story line. Despite this, there is little evidence of real insight into the people and situations portrayed. Ultimately, the spectacular presentation of increasingly extreme events drives a wedge into the film, until the references to a contemporary Toronto milieu are finally irrelevant. What is left is the skeleton of an old story held together by blood and violence.



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FILM REVIEWS

No ethical signposts are erected in this film, but for the cheap, righteous, moral implicit in its conclusion. That all the characters in **Bad Company** are ethically bankrupt (everyone is corrupt, but some, however, are successful) is not a fault in itself; it is rather the delineation of this world which seems too precociously cynical. Because of the film's hollowness precious little intensity of feeling is evoked.

The two cops, "Mutt" and "Jeff," who tail Billy and his friends — harrassing, intimidating and finally killing one of them — are simply other movable pieces in this nihilistic game; two standard, ugly, and evil authority figures. Billy's character too is disturbingly simplistic. He is in no way an enigmatic figure, although his friend Dick, who twice asks him how he got his limp and twice receives evasive answers, seems to think so. He's very much a creature of his environment, but in a typically pat way. The violence of the world he inhabits is demonstrated in a nicely prolonged scene of Billy and his

friends watching two pubescent boys boxing in a makeshift ring in a warehouse, the various adults cheering loudly and making bets. When this scene returns, later as a somewhat crude memory insert, it suggests far more than it ever lives up to; as does Billy's explanation to Dallas of his bank-robbing dreams: "All I want is respect." Never again do we get an inkling of this motive — the words forced to carry much more meaning than the rest of the film supports.

Bad Company is an easy depiction of an ethically destitute world. But lacking a real understanding of such destitution, its "surprise" ending (Billy and Dallas outwit the cops and get away with a large sum of money), while convenient, suggests a moral again not wholly supported by the

film. **Bad Company's** only resolution is a narrative one. Although its one-dimensional characters and superficial sociology do not allow for a more insightful summation, its ending is a disconcerting value-judgement, disconcerting, because it is totally unfounded, given what has preceded it. As opposed to detailing Billy's plight, the film merely sides with him, suggesting that he's a good-guy in the anti-hero sense, who, in his own way has beaten the bad guys. Previous to this, however, there haven't been any good or bad guys. Apart from those few brief scenes that convey a little of life's true complexity, **Bad Company**, is finally false to even its own would-be cynicism.

Mark Mercer

Tin Drum hearing (cont.)

that I have spoken to in the House, has been with respect to the matter of the procedures of the board. If, from the polls that have been taken or from whatever the term "community standards" means, there is some desire within the province of Ontario to have a form of overview of films, then that may well be the society in which we live and that may well be the conclusion that the government reaches, rather than dealing with classification or other themes.

But the point that I raise is one of dealing with procedures. I have followed quite seriously this entire involvement of "The Tin Drum" and the operations of the board. I would put this question to you which comes out of an article that was in the Kingston Wig Standard, because it is the theme of the procedures that I would hope each board member would want to consider — and, indeed, the minister as well.

This is the question raised by Michal Cobden in this article. "Why do we need a censor board which deliberates in private, which provides no criteria for its judgments, no explanations of its censorship and which is accountable to no one." The question involves procedures, the theme of appeals, the whole review of responsibilities and an opportunity to question, not in the informal way, but in a somewhat more open structure. How would you answer that question? If you think you are able to.

Mr. J. Cunningham: I think this is a tremendously legitimate concern in any

democratic society; that I, as a citizen, understand the process that is going on in government or government agencies. If I don't know, I am suspicious of what is going on. I would wish that, as a taxpayer, I would be given more information as to what is going on in the censor board.

Further excerpts, and coverage of the Tin Drum controversy can be found in *Cine-Mag*, issue no. 41.

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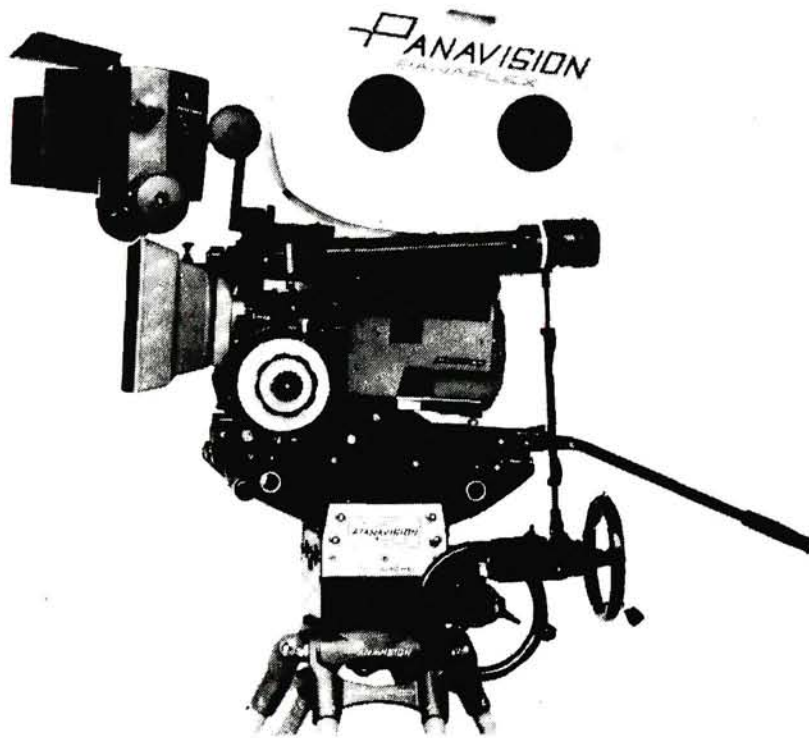
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