

person starting a career in 1947.

The film could be stronger dramatically if the leisurely pace were tightened somewhat. No scenes need be excised, just trimmed slightly to make the overall production as compact and biting as its individual scenes, and yet retain enough of the leisurely pacing to preserve one of the most effective aspects of the film: the fact that we are permitted an experience of Montreal in the 40's which allows us to appreciate the era more completely, and to understand more fully the depicted experience of young Harry Barnes, cub reporter.

The supporting cast is uniformly impressive from the memorable appearance of Patricia Gage and Henry Beckman's suitably menacing P.L. Butcher, through Ken James's charmingly raffish Ronny Waldron (Witness photographer and Harry's confidant), to the solid performances of all members of the Witness staff including Sean Sullivan as city editor Herb Scannell, Budd Knapp as Fred O'Neill and Patricia Hamilton as Hilda.

Only Tiiu Leek's performance as love-interest Julia Martin is a disturbingly weak link in an otherwise strong chain. This is due primarily to an uncertainty, perhaps partly attributable to director Howe, of whether to portray Julia as a one-dimensional send-up or a more substantial and complex character. Leek's Julia is affable and somewhat amusing in her superficiality; and, in keeping with the style of the film, she is supposed to be rather unreal and larger than life. But then so is Harry Barnes, and actor Gillard *has* managed to balance caricature with human complexity. Thus, one can only assume that Leek's emerging talents are not as yet ready for such a challenge.

Stuart Gillard, whose portrayal of Harry could easily have been a boring one-dimensional cartoon of a naïve innocent, here establishes himself as one of Canada's finest actors because he has refused to depict Harry as anyone less than an interesting and complex human being. Neither a neurotic Duddy Kravitz obsessed with succeeding at any price, nor a spineless nobody, Gillard's Harry is a delightfully complex characterization, a lovingly detailed portrait of the kind of person national surveys delight in labelling "normal". We can identify with Harry Barnes out of instant self-recognition rather than out



Stuart Gillard and Ken James

Scene from "Why Rock The Boat?"



of a certain detached sympathy.

What a pleasure it is to watch Gillard, as Harry subtly yet perceptibly evolves during his newspaper apprenticeship and his excursion into the world of romance! It is a bravura performance of a different breed – instead of a series of clever and dazzling character revelations, Gillard's portrayal is impressive for its restrained and delicate internal quality. When the film is over, it is Stuart Gillard that looms in one's memory, his performance growing steadily in stature because it dominates the film through intelligent and controlled understatement.

Ultimately, although one or two elements are not entirely successful, **Why Rock the Boat?** is certainly a successful film. It is enormous fun because it is fun with perception and insight. That is one of the film's greatest attributes, one that should be applauded loudly and not undervalued.

– Laurinda Hartt

## Why Rock the Boat?

A person must be pretty big at the Board to get to be the producer of his own screenplay of his own novel. Or perhaps *A Matter of Fat* so impressed the NFB heavies that they decided to give William Weintraub the big chance, along with director John Howe, to fold, spindle, and mutilate a full-blown feature idea.

Yes, it's another Canadian screen comedy, in the grand tradition of *Foxy Lady*, *Another Smith for Paradise*, *Tobias Rouke*, *Following Through*, *Keep it in the Family*, and *Only God Knows*. Proceeding in the familiar somnambulistic stagger from one tired situation to another, uncorrupted by much in the way of verbal wit, **Why Rock the Boat?** concerns itself with the journalistic and sexual initiation of a cub reporter on the Montreal "Witness" in 1947. Weintraub, I gather, graduated from McGill in 1947, and joined the

Montreal *Gazette*, and it's strange to see how little imaginative use he is able to make of that experience.

The story is set in the middle of the struggle to establish the newspaper guild, against the unscrupulous opposition of owners and editors. Harry Barnes, our goofy, virginal anti-hero, has no political ideas to rub together, but the Girl he Loves is a guild organizer, and in order to win her esteem he reads a little Lenin. With this intellectual equipment, plus a few shots of rye, he surprises himself and everyone else by delivering a passionate speech to his colleagues, snubbing the apoplectic editor, and inspiring a confident solidarity. A union is born.

Rather a good moment. Makes you want to cheer, like those scenes in schoolboy movies when the timidest boy in the class finally leads an attack on the sadistic headmaster. But the script pushes the moment over the brink into farce, and the scene collapses into a silly rough-house, with people spraying the fire hose all over the office.

Harry hasn't "acted himself into a new way of thinking"; the film sticks to its comic premise that courageous radical action is the accidental by-product of male courtship rituals. Maybe that is essentially what Weintraub believes, in which case the film's vacuous nihilism has at least the virtue of sincerity. But if he doesn't believe that, and has adopted the idea simply in an effort to be funny, then it betrays a pathetic failure of the imagination.

And I'm not saying that everyone has to be solemn and respectful about radicalism. The theory and practice of radical activists cries out to be satirized, if only to 'expose the contradictions' of people whose vocation is exposing those of everyone else. But to satirize something you have to be interested in it; you have to know its real strengths and weaknesses. The authors of *Why Rock the Boat?* might just as well satirize the Catholic Church by implying that all nuns are sexually frustrated — which is possible, unlikely, and as an idea *trivial*.

Well, they will say, but the point was not to satirize anything, but to make a fun film with some honest-to-goodness laughs. So we have yet another film about a goofy guy's stumblebum attempts to get laid. Why do Canadian film-makers find this so funny? (It's the theme of *Foxy Lady*, *Rip-Off*, and the genuinely funny *Chester Angus Ramsgood*, while the type makes another appearance in Markson's *Monkeys*.) I suppose more men than would care to admit it find themselves identifying with the humiliating pangs of despised lust. But a film has to do something

inventive with this material. *Why Rock the Boat?* takes us through the familiar frustrations and longueurs, and eventually propels the voyaging prick into the welcoming harbour of Patricia Gage (the city-editor's wife), who has the dubious pleasure of taking that long-preserved virginity. The nicest moment in the movie occurs when Harry gigglingly admits this conquest to his friend Ronnie, photographer and stick-man. Stuart Gillard's acting sometimes has an engaging authenticity.

Not so Julia, the girl of his dreams. As played by Tiiu Leek she is singularly lacking in warmth or genuineness. In an interview in *Cinema Canada No. 15*, Weintraub declares that his screenplay is "more generous" than his 1961 novel, in that he now allows the guy to get the girl. If Julia were sexually attractive, personally likeable, or credibly admirable as a radical consciousness, there might be some generosity in matching her with our young reporter. As it is, the conclusion of the film looks like throwing a cub to the Christians.

— Robert Fothergill

## The Hard Part Begins

*Directed by Paul Lynch, with Donnelly Rhodes, Nancy Belle Fuller and Paul Bradley.*

If American hucksterism has accustomed us to the bloated claims of Hollywood, so Canadian hatred of hyperbole has encouraged the celebration of a tight-lipped quietism. We admire the small and true, praising those mirrors that reflect harmless angles of our society while forgetting that art is the things we do with gained reality not the capturing of its pale image. In many ways *The Hard Part Begins* is a fine directorial debut for Paul Lynch and a measure of its success is that the film makes one wish that it had risked more; aimed a little higher.

Set in southern Ontario the film follows a country singer, Jim King, back to his home town, now just another dismal stop in a career that lives on dreams of Nashville while facing indifferent beer-swilling faces in half-empty clubrooms. During a week of such outrageous fortune that John Hunter's script reads like a caricature of *The Great Canadian Losers* theme, King watches an old friend dying, has his dreams of a Toronto recording contract smashed, loses girlfriend and partner, becomes once more embroiled in the slings and arrows of old family responsibilities and, to round off the week, is beaten up. Jim King will go on, for pride and hopes leave no alternatives and the pleasures of the film particularly Donnelly Rhodes' fine and powerful

performance as King is that we come to care for this tired, battle-worn man. Surrounded but rarely supported by Nancy Belle Fuller as Jenny, the talented girlfriend, and Paul Bradley as the vulgar side-kick, Rhodes' performance shines with memorable truth. A truth gained despite a script that seldom allows the actor the luxury of creative invention, and a director who is clearly insecure with the more revealing moments of an actor's craft.

But Lynch has other skills to offer, especially a good understanding of action. All the musical sequences ring with quiet conviction. So also does a fight sequence that, leading from a fine exuberant solo by Paul Bradley, ends on a quiet note of reality that in a single shot rubs the excitement of the action with the taste of truth and place that is one of the small joys of the film. It is in the quieter scenes that Lynch seems unable to break from the banalities of the script and an obvious awareness of the material's triteness and his own limitations really doesn't help. In almost all the emotional scenes the direction fails to add that stamp of authority and intelligence that would take the viewer past the flat reality of the screen into the heady world of imagination and understanding. Occasionally this passiveness works, as in a harsh and bitter moment between King and his ex-wife where limited means and the viewers sympathy mesh, and the effort, like the words and gestures, lies helpless before the hurt of old wounds and rekindled pain. But by delivering so grudgingly in the scenes that work, false notes and small insecurities become all the more obvious in sections that don't, as in the next pivotal clash between King and his angry son. By couching the performances in the reticent language of master shots, conservative angles and taut editing Lynch draws undue attention to the structure and technique, which, spawned from television documentaries, too often mistakes tired generalities and hackneyed thinking for local colour. Away from the intelligence of Rhodes' face, parts break away from the fabric of the whole leaving "meaningful" pulled focus that arrive only to reveal other linking shots; overlapping scenes that add nothing to the story and cut-aways that prettify in order to look ugly.

Great film is the unity of thought and feeling through action and while one grows to respect the director's effort in this film he never manages to break away from the faulty looking-glass that is the camera lens. *The Hard Part Begins* is often an honest portrait of a sordid world and a fine frame for a moving performance by Donnelly