

FILM REVIEWS

Peter Collinson's TOMORROW NEVER COMES

d. Peter Collinson, sc. David Pursall and Jack Seddon, adapt. Sydney Banks, ph. François Protat, ed. John Shirley, sd. Brian Simmons, sd. ed. Peter Best, a.d. Michel Proulx, set dec. Normand Sarrazin, cost. Shura Cohen, lp. Olivier Reed, Susan George, Raymond Burr, John Ireland, Stephen McHattie, Donald Pleasence, Paul Koslo, Cec Linder, Richard Donat, Dolores Etienne, Sammy Snyder, Jane Eastwood, Mario Di Iorio, Stephen Mendel, Walter Massey, Earl Pennington, Jack Fisher, p. Julian Melzack and Michael Klinger, assoc. p. Denis Héroux and Bob Sterne, p. manager. Robert Ménard, p.c. Classic Films Industries Ltd. 1977, col. 35mm, running time 106 minutes.

When Canada becomes involved in a co-production deal and it turns out to be very very good, no one remembers Canada's involvement in the project. A *Special Day* is considered to be an Italian-made film and *Violette Nozière*, which won a well-deserved best actress award for Isabelle Huppert at this year's Cannes Film Festival, is considered to be a French film. Yet, Canada has input in both.

However, when a co-production turns into an abysmal schmozzle, everyone conveniently forgets the other party's involvement and remembers only Canada's.

Such is the case with *Tomorrow Never Comes*, a feeble police melodrama that makes *Dragnet* seem like intelligent, thought-provoking drama. Produced by Canada's wiz-kid Julian Melzack and Britain's Michael Klinger, one has to wonder what this pair of enterprising backer ever saw in the property in the first place.

The film, directed by Peter Collinson, blends together several fashionable topics that are popular both in the movies and in real life: the disillusioned cop, urban violence, hostage-taking and the evil machinations of local authorities. The shimmer of social comment is present but, under Collinson's direction, it lies dormant.

As the credits roll up on the screen and a suitably drippy ballad sung by Matt Monroe drones in the background, a young man returns home, after months away, to reclaim his girl friend. But he flies into a tizzy when he finds out that she has jilted him in favor of the town's highfalutin' influential bigwig who owns everything and everyone. Following a barroom brawl, Frank — that's our hero — suffers a bump on the noggin, goes bananas, finds Janie — that's our heroine — living in the big shot's beach cabana, terrorizes her maid, accidentally shoots a cop, takes Janie hostage; and the scene is set more or less.

Meanwhile, on the other side of town, the local men-in-blue are singing 'For He's A Jolly Good Fellow' to their lieutenant who isn't jolly and who is leaving because he's "weary and revolted by the violence and brutality of modern police work," according to the press notes. The humane lieutenant, played by Oliver Reed, rather than just saying goodbye, decides to take control of the erupting hostage drama. (Have you noticed that newspapers love to call these events "hostage dramas" or "hostage incidents", neither of which sounds appropriate.)

At 90 unrelenting minutes, *Tomorrow Never Comes* is at least 60 minutes too long and never rises above being a made-for-television movie, on the Kojak level. But that comparison may not be totally fair since Kojak did pack a wallop from time to time. And Kojak had the driving presence of Telly Savalas who also played a cop tired of corruption. Reed's character bows out like a martyr; Savalas accepts it as a universal, inescapable, fact of life.

Peter Collinson has directed the film in a straight-forward no-nonsense style and that, oddly enough, is the biggest fault of the film. In a time when movie making has become over-written and over-produced, a simple story shooting right from the hip should be welcomed. But the sterility of the plot and its stylistic obviousness robs the film of any high-voltage impact it might have had. Being straight-forward is one thing; being a one-note drama is quite another matter.

What should be a gripping film fraught with tension, something along the lines of *Experiment In Terror*, becomes a talky overlong movie devoid of any suspense. The title telegraphs the conclusion.



Holed-up in a beach cabana, Janie (Susan George) comforts her kidnapper and x-lover, Frank (Stephen McHattie)

Reed, the patient, understanding cop, wants to solve the situation as peacefully as possible. An overzealous plain clothes officer (Paul Kosto) would just as soon use brutish SWAT-tactics, and the crowd that gathers only wants to see blood, anybody's blood.

Collinson's style lacks subtlety. The police, except Reed are portrayed as trigger-happy gunslingers. The crowd, one aspect that's overdone makes asinine comments like "where is Telly Savalas" thinking it's a television shoot, and orders snacks as the drama drags on. It's all so heavy-handed. But when Raymond Burr, as the corrupt commissioner and paid flunky of Mr. Big, pops in on the siege scene dressed all in black, that's too much. The "oh-nos" are audible.

Directors, too often, resort to the flashback in narratives but here, not only would flashbacks be ideal, they are essential. We never really get a feeling for the characters we're dealing with, especially Janie and Frank, who are hold up in the cabana. Why did Frank leave for so long? Did he really expect Janie to hang around for him? Why did she go off with Mr. Lotta Bucks? Was she attracted by \$\$\$\$ only? During the siege, she pleads with Frank and tells him she still loves him, but does she mean it? And if she does, why?

Susan George has so little material to work with the only thing she can do is look puffy and terrified, and sob on cue. It's not a terrific performance but it's like the Olivia Newton-John role in *Grease*, I'm not sure any actress could do much better.

Stephen McHattie, who did a splendid job in the TV James Dean Portrait and made less of a splash in *Grey Lady Down*, does remarkably well with the typical stereotyped-crazy-man role. He fluctuates nicely between the irrational ravings of a bonafide madman and the fuzzy bewilderment of a youth trapped in a situation he doesn't fully comprehend. McHattie keeps the built-in histrionics of the part in check.

The other performers do okay with one-dimensional characterizations but special attention has to be drawn to Donald Pleasance, who's appearing in

anything that remotely resembles a Canadian film. Pleasance contributes one of the nuttiest pieces of overacting I've ever seen on film. He plays the town doctor who gives his two-cents worth concerning Frank's head injury and explains why he's not responsible. Shabbily dressed to look like a cousin of Columbo, Pleasance does the most amazing things with his lips and a cigarette. It's as though he's mugging for the camera and Collinson hasn't noticed — it's difficult to believe he ordered this. Even when he's in the background, Pleasance appears to be doing a cross between Inspector Clouzot and Claude Chabrol. While he could be accused of blatant overacting, I prefer to think of it as a witty performance by an astute actor who recognizes the fact that he's in a stinker and wishes to surface with his career in tact.

Even though David Pursall and Jack Seddon's screenplay fails to appeal to the intellect, *Tomorrow Never Comes* is a visually impressive film. François Protat's cinematography conveys both the heat of the situation and the heat of the day, a feat which should not be underestimated considering the entire shoot was plagued with numerous problems, including inclement weather, from beginning to end.

Lee Rolfe

Peter Carter's HIGH BALLIN'

d. Peter Carter, asst. d. Tony Thatcher, sc. Paul Edwards, ph. Rene Verzier, sp. ph. effects Richard Helmer, sup. ed. Eric Wrate, sd. Jim Hopkins, sd. ed. Douglas Branton, a.d. Claude Bonnière, m. Paul Hoffert, l.p. Peter Fonda, Jerry Reed, Helen Shaver, Chris Wiggins, David Ferry, Christopher Langevin, Mary Pirie, Kay Havtrey, Alan Crofoot, John Friesen, Les Carlson, Cec Linder, Eric House, Myrna Lorrie, assoc. p. Stanley Chase, William Hayward, p. Jon Slan, p. manager, Marilyn Stonehouse, p.c. Jon Slan Productions Inc (1977), col. 35mm, running time 100 minutes, dist. Ambassador Films Limited.

The advertising copy for *High-Ballin'*, which was prepared by the

U.S. distributor American-International Pictures, does not inspire confidence in the merits of this picture, nor does it give any indication of its Canadian origins and location. Indeed, the poster is clearly designed to exploit the similarities between this film and Hal Needham's immensely profitable *Smokey and the Bandit*. It is certainly true that with this film producer Jon Slan and director Peter Carter firmly place themselves on the commercial or "Hollywood North" side of Canadian film, but this should not be seen as a condemnation. The test of a film like this should be whether it succeeds as entertainment and not its nationality.

The action-adventure genre is much more vulnerable than most other types of movies to either pretentiousness and verbosity on the one hand or triviality and mindlessness on the other, and recent examples of these can easily be found. Carter himself fell victim to the pretentious style in the boring *Rituals*. It did, however, teach him an important lesson, which he consistently attempts to apply in the present film; in the absence of a budget that can allow the plethora of stunts and effects of a *Jaws*, a *French Connection* or a *Smokey and the Bandit*, the best way to make an action film that works is to return to the virtues of the western, and aim for straightforwardness and simplicity. If the story is strong enough, these features should be enough — theoretically — to engage the audience.

The question is, does *High Ballin'* work on these terms? The unoriginal script, by Paul Edwards from a story by Richard Robinson and Stephen Schrenk, gives little grounds for optimism. A group of independent truckers, led by Duke Boykin (Jerry Reed), are being harrassed by a gang of high-jackers under the command of a gun-toting tough named Harvey (David Ferry), and bankrolled by the local cargo magnate, King Carroll (Chris Wiggins). Into their midst comes an old friend of Duke's, a reticent and upright ex-motorcycle stuntman with the enigmatic name of Rane (Peter Fonda), who, after some initial hesitation, agrees to help Duke and his buddies. If this sounds familiar, it should, because what Edwards, Ro-