

House to Up in Smoke, from *The Goodbye Girl* to *An Unmarried Woman*, the year's hits are mellow, modest and, for the most part, undemanding of their viewers. Even *Saturday Night Fever*, with its gang bang and its gutter language, was at heart a working-class update of the Aitaire-Rogers musicals. It's the Warm Bath school of movie-making. Paranoia has been replaced by complacency; vaulting ambition has given way to a suffocating desire to please. The mavins of decadence—Fellini, Losey, Hopper, Penn, Peckinpah, Russell, Bertolucci—are taking longer between projects, or finding it harder to get work. In their stead is the new Film School Generation of directors—George Lucas, Steven Spielberg, John Milius, Brian De Palma, John Carpenter, and more, many more—who want (in the words of writer-director Paul Schrader) “to make the movies they saw as children.”

This isn't necessarily an ignoble impulse. For close to 50 years, Hollywood kept making the movies we all saw as children. The very phrase “Hollywood movie” conjured up the image of a certain kind of film: conservative, glamorous, fast-moving, heavy on the sentiment. Then, as the younger filmmakers tried to assimilate influences from the European movies of the early sixties, the “Hollywood movie” became more amorphous and ambitious. Now, it seems, we're back where we started. With the naughty words removed, just about any of 1978's hit movies could have been made, and been a hit, 15 or 25 or 40 years ago. Nostalgia is the sincerest form of scholarship. And film scholars (we're *all* film scholars) can appreciate the knowledgeable care with which they're made.

But there's got to be something more to American-movies than strolls down Memory Lane. And by “something more,” I don't mean a return of the nightmare movies; there, the sense of dangerous excitement quickly calcified into shtick, and the shocking scenes of violence degenerated into a showcase for the special-effects men. No: Hollywood's savvy young generation of hit-makers needn't choose between retooling the dream factory's assembly line and lobbing grenades into the audience. Those are both adolescent impulses—the first, that of the good student; the second, that of the juvenile delinquent. *Godfather III* is no more alluring a project than *R2D2 Meets Cheech and Chong*. Maybe Francis Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (scheduled for August 1979 release) will be the turn-around film. Or Paul Schrader's upcoming *Hard Core*. Or an unheralded film by some unknown kid from Cleveland. Whatever it is, it will have



Movie Movie: Say Hello to Hollywood

to be inspired by something outside the dark, comforting womb of the movie house.

One thing about year-end reviews like this: You can always look back, and shudder—or look ahead, and hope. A lot of people have pinned their hopes on *The Deer Hunter* (and a few people have already opened their shudders). Say this for *The Deer Hunter*: It's not a remake of a beach-party movie. Indeed, as you sit through the three hours of Michael Cimino's Vietnam epic, and sense the talent and intent in every frame, you may wonder whether it's meant to be the *best* war movie ever made, or *every* war movie ever made. *Sergeant York*, *Since You Went Away*, *The Story of G.I. Joe*, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, even *Coming Home* and a sneak preview of *Apocalypse Now*—it's all here, sketched in loving, painful, angry strokes. *The Deer Hunter* screams “epic” at you. It grabs you by the lapel and says, “Call me masterpiece.”

Some of my colleagues have already taken the film up on its dare. Perhaps they're impressed by its sheer audacity. Virtually every character, situation, feeling and shot is so rigorously overdone—the movie stares you down so solemnly—that you may be intimidated into taking *The Deer Hunter* on its own terms. You may, for example, take its depiction of Ukrainian-American family life—with the brutal, pot-bellied fathers, the stumpy Old World mothers, the young men who spend much of their time spraying beer over each other, knocking out their girlfriends, running naked through the

streets and shouting “Fuckin' A!”—as a series of archetypes, instead of crude stereotypes. You may believe that, in a Pittsburgh suburb, as late as 1973, an entire community would willingly send its boys off to Vietnam, and welcome one of them back a year later with the phrase, “We won.” You may be so eager for a 1978 movie that calls for strong emotions—feelings of fear and pity and rage—that you'll surrender to *The Deer Hunter*'s impact, and respond. Woody Allen's *Interiors* was the token Deep-Think movie of 1978; *Deer Hunter* is Deep-Feel.

As you may have guessed from my badgering tone, I find it difficult to take the movie seriously. And yet I'm almost charmed by the seriousness everyone connected with the film has brought to it. Of the leading actors, only Meryl Streep radiates conviction with every movement (possibly because, as the only important female character, she's allowed to be lifelike instead of larger-than); but even the excesses of performers like Robert De Niro and Christopher Walken have their own fascinating intensity. Director Cimino may leave out crucial narrative points, and linger, fatal seconds too long, over each carefully composed shot; but that's also a measure of commitment to his own grandiose design. These weaknesses are *The Deer Hunter*'s greatest strength—because, in a year of timid moviemaking, they trumpet the film's daring to fail at being great. We can paraphrase the famous Thurber cartoon about the wine expert: *The Deer Hunter* is a naive domestic movie without any breeding, but I think you'll be amused by its presumption.

It may be that after seeing *The Deer Hunter* you'll say to yourself, “I've endured enough Seriousness for a while—now I want to go to a movie!” If so, I have just the thing: **Movie Movie**. Yes, it's the distillation of all the tendencies I've been complaining about. It's modest, gentle, sentimental, and it refers to nothing outside of old movies. *Movie Movie* is an evocative parody of the Warner Brothers programmers of the thirties; in fact, it means to recall a night at the movies in those dear dead days when everybody went. It's a double feature: The first film is “Dynamite Hands,” the saga of a poor boy's rise to the top of the boxing world; the second, “Baxter's Beauties of 1933,” is a Busby Berkeley backstage musical.

As written by Larry Gelbart and Sheldon Keller, directed by Stanley Donen, designed by Jack Fisk and performed by a cast that includes (in both “features”) George C. Scott, Trish Van Devere, Barry Bostwick, Red Buttons, Eli Wallach and Art Carney, *Movie Movie* is the apotheosis of all those Car-

of Burnett Show movie parodies—done with affection and intelligence, and a realization that behind the clichés was a knowledge of the storytelling craft, honed and compacted till it gleamed like an archetype. The *Movie Movie* people know what they're doing, as they should: Donen codirected *Singin' in the Rain*, and Gelbart coauthored *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. The entire production is a happy reminder of the ensemble spirit of Hollywood's Golden Age, when people were too busy making movies to worry about making Art—which is how, sometimes, they did.

Amid all the teen pix and nostalgia, five films were especially notable for their intelligence, their passion and compassion, their belief that even movie characters can be more than screen-deep. Not surprisingly, these films have generated squalls of controversy, butts and rebuts. All serious discussion is welcome; it beats arguing over whether John Travolta or Warren Beatty has the bluer eyes.

1. **Days of Heaven.** "Lovely to look at, but cold and empty," said the detractors of this Panhandle love story, as if it were a Halston Frigidaire. There is something of the art history exam to this series of gorgeous, meticulous images of farm animals, wind-swept wheat fields, rushing water, the occasional enigmatic face. There's also something more: a mind behind the eye, an intelligence that connects each image to one or more of the film's characters. The eye belongs to cinematographer Nestor Almendros, the mind to writer-director Terrence Malick—and the most interesting face to playwright Sam Shepard, righteous and tender in his movie debut. United States; Paramount.

2. **Autumn Sonata.** "Powerhouse performances—but a mother and a daughter just don't yell at each other like that!" Altman, Scorsese, Bertolucci and dozens of other directors are allowed to bend their stories toward the surreal; only Ingmar Bergman is required to toe the naturalistic line. As it happens, Bergman provides enough clues to suggest that this matricidal psychodrama needn't be taken literally: the stylized flashbacks, the increasing shrillness of the daughter's attacks, the use of claustrophobic close-ups in the film's last hour. Like *Long Day's Journey into Night*, *Autumn Sonata* is the most chilling kind of horror story—in which, just once, the members of a family dare to unleash every real or imagined antagonism. And since the "monster" (the parent) is a victim as well, it's also a primal love story. Ingrid Bergman and Liv Ullmann do give powerhouse performances. But



Days of Heaven: Best film of 1978 ✓

they're not exactly reading the Yellow Pages here; they're acting out a catalog of the nightmares every parent and child have had. Sweden; New World Pictures.

3. **An Unmarried Woman.** "A fairy tale for sentimental feminists. Jill Clayburgh becomes a liberated Ms., but ends up as That Cosmo Girl." It's a natural inclination of the Committed to want to turn movies into wall posters. But writer-director Paul Mazursky has never been a believer in Better Living Through Ideology. He recognizes that people—in particular the middle-class soul-searchers of *Bob & Carol & Ted & Alice*, *Blume in Love* and *An Unmarried Woman*—are extremely complicated human mechanisms. They contradict themselves and frustrate the people they love. They're sad and, as Mazursky sees them, very funny. If Mazursky wants to mix his canny observations of Life In These Fragmented States with a little old-fashioned fantasy, he's entitled. And so is Clayburgh's Erica. As a reward for working at being a grown-up human being, why shouldn't this unmarried woman find an Alan Bates at the end of the rainbow? (The award for Best Supporting Actress goes to Lisa Lucas, as Clayburgh's daughter. No contest.) United States; Twentieth Century-Fox.

4. **Pretty Baby.** "It romanticizes life in a New Orleans whorehouse, and leaves everything else dead." I defer to my more skeptical colleagues' knowledge of Louisiana bordellos; and I agree that some of the supporting players, under the watchful eye but tin ear of French director Louis Malle, speak their dialogue in a stilted fash-

ion. But let's not make the mistake again of demanding that an Impressionist painter sketch a picture of the *demimonde* so it looks like a police lineup on the six o'clock news. At the center of Malle's mural is an odd, tender and believable love affair between two outsiders: an eccentric photographer and a 12-year-old hooker. As the mismatched lovers, Keith Carradine and (especially) Brooke Shields turn Malle's period portrait into a most moving picture. United States; Paramount.

5. **Get Out Your Handkerchiefs.** "Vile, sexist, misogynistic . . . blecchhh!" Though it was seen by no more than 2,000 people at this year's New York Film Festival, Bertrand Blier's sex comedy set enough tongues wagging to assure that controversy would greet the film's theatrical premiere this month. It's about a man (Gérard Depardieu) who'll do anything to please his wife (Carole Laure)—and that includes forcing a lover or two on her strong, pliant frame. At issue is whether Depardieu is a loving husband or a klutzy manipulator. He may, of course, be both (as I think he is), and Blier may be daring us to disapprove of this charming *naif*. I suggest you let your guard down and simply enjoy this amoral tale, with its quartet of engaging performances. After the movie's over, you may ponder its meaning and—be my guest—get outraged. France; New Line Cinema.

The bottom half of the Top Ten comprises the cream of this year's crop of genre movies—traditional Hollywood themes and styles, but with some twist that radicalizes or transcends their origin. 6. **Blue Collar** is Paul Schrader's version of the John Garfield working-man melodrama, but full of anger and despair at both the bosses and the unions. 7. Walter Hill's **The Driver** will remind you of the murky *film noir* gangster movies—and of their existential European counterparts. 8. **Halloween** may be only an exercise in Hitchcockian style, but what style! John Carpenter is the most accomplished new director since Martin Scorsese. 9. **Movie Movie** you know about. 10. **The Buddy Holly Story** (directed by Steve Rash) is old-fashioned in its theme, style and characterizations; it makes believable a kind of movie we thought could engross us only on *The Late Show*.

Acting Awards. Actor: Gary Busey, *The Buddy Holly Story*. Actress: Jane Fonda, *Coming Home* and *Comes A Horseman*. Supporting actor: Richard Farnsworth, *Comes A Horseman*. Supporting actress: Lisa Lucas, *An Unmarried Woman*. ●