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 Astaire-Rogers musicals. It's the Warm Bath school of moviemaking. Paranoia has been replaced by complacency; vaulting ambition has given way to a suffocating desire to please.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, potbellied 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-*