

FILM NOTES

Special Retrospective of Robert Wise, Director of the "Star Trek" Film

THE BODY SNATCHER (Filmed 1943, released 1945, RKO) Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi, Henry Daniell, Edith Atwater. Val Lewton produced seven remarkable, low budget mood thrillers in the early 1940's. Robert Wise had edited "Citizen Kane" and "The Magnificent Ambersons" for Orson Welles. With Lewton's "Curse of the Cat People" and this film he turned to directing. The script adapted Robert Louis Stevenson's tale of Burke and Hare, Edinburgh ghouls of the last century who purloined corpses for medical purposes.

THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL (1951, 20th Century-Fox) Michael Rennie, Patricia Neal, Hugh Marlowe, San Jaffe. George Pal's "Destination Moon" and this story of an alien's sojourn in Washington, D. C. did much to build the popular reputation of science-fiction as respectable, thought-provoking material. While Bernard Herrman's music sweeps you along, remember our troops freezing in the Korean "police action", Joe McCarthy and Richard Nixon's early anti-Communist grandstanding, Winston Churchill re-elected as Britain's Empire dissolves, and the lingering impact of Hiroshima, only six years fresh.

THE HAUNTING (1963, Argyle-MGM) Julie Harris, Claire Bloom, Richard Johnson, Russ Tamblyn, Lois Maxwell, Fay Compton, Rosalie Crutchley. Since doing "The Sound of Music", Wise has wanted to make another small, black-and-white film--based on Shirley Jackson's We Have Always Lived In the Castle. This bone-blanching version of Jackson's The Haunting of Hill House shows why his thoughts turn from his work in "West Side Story", "Sand Pebbles", or "Andromeda Strain". Seldom have psychological terrors and overt, phantasmal horror so perfectly blended. Few novels of inwardly twisted torment have been so superbly realized in external, cinematic form.

Other Main Attractions

BOBBIKINS Shirley Jones, Max Bargraves, Lionel Jeffries, Michael Ripper, Billie Whitelaw. This rare British musical fantasy about a talking baby proves special effects are not all flying waffle irons and animated cockroach models. Note the masterful sound editing dubbing dialogue to the infant's lip movements.

THE COMEDY OF TERRORS (1963, American International Productions) Vincent Price, Peter Lorre, Boris Karloff, Basil Rathbone, Joyce Jameson, Beverly Hills, Joe E. Brown, Rhubarb the Cat. Another Lewton alumnus, Jacques Tourneur, directed the subtle "Cat People", a classic film noir in "Out of the Past", and the Hell-spawned "Curse of the Demon". Here he stylishly handles Richard Matheson's original screenplay. The script indicates the imagination and love of language that filled Matheson's "The Incredible Shrinking Man", many "Twilight Zone" episodes, and AIP's Poe extrapolations. Sadly, Lorre and Rathbone appear for the last time.

THE DEVIL'S BRIDE (British title: THE DEVIL RIDES OUT) (1967, Hammer Films) Christopher Lee, Charles Grey, Nike Arrighi, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies. Hammer began its horror career in 1957 with Lee as its Frankenstein monster. This film and "Five Million Years To Earth" are the height of its 1960's product. Lee has long wished to produce a series of movies from Dennis Wheatley occult novels. While he did turn To The Devil A Daughter into film recently, this remains his only appearance as the Duc de Richleau, one of the few heroic magicians in horror pictures. Richard Matheson condensed Wheatley's lengthy novel into a taut script.

THE FIRST MEN IN THE MOON (1964, Charles Schneer) Edward Judd, Martha Hyer, Lionel Jeffries. Ray Harryhausen concocted the effects for this deliciously period adaptation of H. G. Wells. The moral vision in the novel is diluted, but not entirely lost by screenwriter Nigel Kneale, veteran of the Quatermass TV serials and films ("The Creeping Unknown", "Five Million Years to Earth").

FLASH GORDON CONQUERS THE UNIVERSE (1940, Universal) Larry "Buster" Crabbe, Frank Shannon, Charles B. Middleton, Carol Hughes. The gulf between this serial adaptation of Alex Raymond's comic strip and the gorgeous cinematic art of "2001" was closed by "Star Wars". George Lukas combined painstaking craftsmanship with the glorious, gut-level enjoyment of science-fiction that began in his watching such adventures as this. Contemporary politics surface only briefly as former Emperor Ming here becomes the Dictator Ming, still assaulting Earth from the rogue planet Mongo.

MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH (1964, Anglo-Amalgamated, American International) Vincent Price, Hazel Court, Jane Asher, David Weston, Patrick Magee, Nigel Green. AIP's Poe cycle began with Corman and Matheson's "House of Usher". Here the late Charles Beaumont and R. Wright Campbell spin the brief Poe prose poem into an extraordinary religious fantasia. Corman reached his heights as a director, while Nicholas Roeg's cinematography shows his work before he directed "Performance" and "The Man Who Fell to Earth."

THE PRISONER, final episodes, "Once Upon A Time" and "Fall Out" (1967, ITV) Patrick McGoohan, Leo McKern, Angelo Muscat, Alexis Kanner. Interviewed by TVOntario, McGoohan told how McKern, as Number Two, actually suffered a brief breakdown during "Once Upon A Time". The intensity demanded by creating a role around a few pages of repetitive dialogue cracked him. McGoohan further stated that the Village "was meant to be both (external and internal). The external was the symbol, but it's within us all, I think. Don't you? This surrealistic aspect of us. Your village may be different from other people's villages, but we all have one."

Q: "What would the former Prisoner be likely to do with his new-found freedom?"

McG: "He hasn't got it, which is the whole point. When that door opens on its own, and there is no one behind it, when all the doors in the Village open exactly the same, you know that someone is waiting there to start all over again. He has no freedom. Freedom is a myth."

Q: "Has the Prisoner, between the first and the last episodes, actually changed any?"

McG: "No, I think he's essentially the same. I think he got slightly exhilarated by the fact that he got out of this mythical place, and felt like doing a bit of a skip and dance, and felt very happy about going back home with his little buddy, the butler. We never did include a cut of him when that door opened...you never know whether his exhilaration was lost when he saw that sinister door unhook. That was left in abeyance--an unfinished symphony."

Q: "If you could leave one sentence...in the head of everyone who watched...?"

McG: "'Be seeing you.' It means quite a lot."

2001, A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968, MGM) Keir Dullea, Gary Lockwood, William Sylvester, Dan Richter. A computer and Pleistocene proto-man steal the show from conventional actors. However, Stanley Kubrick's extrapolation of Arthur C. Clarke is less a drama than a sight and sound ballet, infinitely elegant in terrors and wonders.

THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939, MGM) Judy Garland, Frank Morgan, Margaret Hamilton, Ray Bolger, Jack Haley, Bert Lahr, Billie Burke. Before taking over "Gone With the Wind" later that same year, Victor Fleming directed this other classic American fantasy. Harold Arlen's songs wistfully glided audiences away from the Depression, war in Europe, Africa, and Asia, and the other pangs of growing up on the wrong side of the rainbow.