



the right math answers was no problem, but I had a heck of a time with the five letters. Talk about your culturally-biased tests! A Jewish boy like me just did not think of the name "Santa." Eventually, after checking my answers multiple times and convincing myself that these were indeed the letters I was supposed to

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unscramble, I penciled in "Satan." This became the basis for a real chuckle and the head of the math department commented to me that he could not wait for Christmas to find out what Satan had left him. When I found out the name I couldn't think of was "Santa" I realized that I am just not someone who gives much thought to Santa Claus. That is why I am a bit surprised at the subject matter of this week's treatise.

I would like to make a few comments about that most seasonal of fantasy figures, Santa Claus. This may not come as a surprise to you, but, as I say, it is a real shocker to me. It happens though this year I saw two films on the subject of this so-called Jolly Old Elf. In each case it was part of a package deal; I would have chosen to see neither film by itself. But I did see both the new version of M i r a c l e o n 3 4 t h S t r e e t and T h e S a n t a C l a u s e.

It strikes me first that the two stories are very similar. I assume the reader knows the basic story of M i r a c l e o n 3 4 t h S t r e e t. It has certainly been filmed often enough. T h e S a n t a C l a u s e has some poor schnook accidentally killing Santa, but when he puts on the suit he finds that he transforms into Santa's replacement. He gets fat, grows a beard, and starts delivering gifts. In fact, the latter story borrows a lot from the former. In each we have the super-rationalist mother bringing her child up not to believe in fantasy and then the child is confronted with what really appears to be Santa Claus. First the child and then the mother are won over by overwhelming evidence. The major difference is that in one case Santa is a stranger; in the more modern story the child's father actually becomes Santa. But what is interesting is that the two stories have very different conceptions of what Santa is and how Santa works. Ironically, it is M i r a c l e o n 3 4 t h S t r e e t, the older story, that has that has the revisionist view of Santa and T h e S a n t a C l a u s e in some ways has the more traditional view. And you can see this by asking yourself the question in each film, who

delivers the gifts on Christmas Eve? In T\_h\_e\_S\_a\_n\_t\_a\_C\_l\_a\_u\_s\_e, we actually have a logical contradiction. We know that it is Santa who does the delivery because we see him doing it. And that is what we have always said Santa does. But that is clearly not how Santa works in M\_i\_r\_a\_c\_l\_e\_o\_n\_3\_4\_t\_h\_S\_t\_r\_e\_e\_t. That Santa Claus does not appear to deliver gifts at all. Instead he bends probability so things appear to be happening naturally. He is more Guardian Angel than Gift Deliverer. When the little girl wants a house he does not actually deliver it--he sets in motion a chain of events that culminates in the girl getting the house. If, indeed, he delivers gifts, it is unimportant to the plot.

And that is good because it allows a way out of the logical problem that T\_h\_e\_S\_a\_n\_t\_a\_C\_l\_a\_u\_s\_e poses. The question is who actually delivers the gifts in houses where the adults do not believe in Santa Claus. We have to believe that it is Santa, if we go with the traditional view of what he does. But at the same time, parents seem to

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believe that they are doing the delivering. They don't see any gifts showing up that they don't recognize. And it is a good thing too. If unexpected packages started showing up under trees these days, the first thing we parents would think of would be that it is the work of the Uni-bomber. T\_h\_e\_S\_a\_n\_t\_a\_C\_l\_a\_u\_s\_e does not resolve this problem, but the behind-the-scenes prime-mover Santa Claus of M\_i\_r\_a\_c\_l\_e\_o\_n\_3\_4\_t\_h\_S\_t\_r\_e\_e\_t sidesteps this issue entirely by redefining Santa. I could go on, but what the heck. You probably have more to do than get involved in a metaphysical discussion of St. Nick.  
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2. NELL (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: The familiar story of the feral child and civilization discovering each other is given a very polished and generally intelligent treatment by Michael Apted. Beautiful Smokey Mountain photography and some very good performances make the first two-thirds very

watchable. The last third is disappointingly familiar. Rating: +2 (-4 to +4)

In the back woods of the Great Smokey Mountains of North Carolina an old hermit woman dies. When a policeman (played by Nick Searcy) and a doctor, Jerome Lovell (Liam Neeson) come to investigate and tidy up the loose ends, they find a loose end nobody knew about. The woman had a daughter Nell (Jodie Foster) who had lived virtually without human contact and who spoke a completely unintelligible language. Nell has been raised to fear people and her reaction to these invaders is pure panic. Lovell brings in a second doctor, Paula Olsen (Natasha Richardson), little realizing that he is sowing the seeds of a three-way battle for the fate of Nell. One faction will want her to remain in the wild, one will want to study her in an institution, and both will want to keep her out of the hands of the media who want to exploit her. Deep in the woods Lovell and Olsen competitively initiate studies to understand Nell and the forces that made her what she is, to decipher her language, and to ease her terror of strangers.

Michael APTED is singularly appropriate to direct NELL. Two of the major themes of his film are how Nell's childhood has molded her into the enigmatic woman that she is and how the outside world and mainstream society are a corrupting influence. APTED is the creator of the 7 UP, 7 PLUS 7, 21 UP, 28 UP, and 35 UP documentaries, which are released each seven years, examining at seven-year intervals the lives of 14 people and how they develop. He also directed GORILLAS IN THE MIST, THUNDERHEART, and the documentary INCIDENT AT OGLALA, each of which has a theme of the

corruptive or exploitive influence of society on the innocent. Both themes are present in William Nicholson and Mark Handley's adaptation of Handley's stage play "Idioglossia." Nicholson, incidentally also wrote the screenplay for SHADOWLANDS. This story also looks at two approaches to science: one that tries to study in nature and one that prefers the laboratory approach, in vivo versus in vitro. In a violation of political correctness, unusual for APTED, the nurturing scientist, who sets up a pup tent and tries forming a relationship with Nell, is the man. The woman scientist's approach is to bring up a houseboat full of electronic

equipment and to observe Nell with surveillance cameras.

The telling of the story is deliberate, like a scientific case study. For viewers who are not interested in the puzzle of understanding Nell's behavior and her language, the film will be as slow-paced as watching someone fill out a crossword puzzle or paint a picture. The writing requires at least a modicum of curiosity about the reasoning of anthropologists and how they do their work. Apted takes a good long time before he starts talking down to his audience and moving the story in what are, unfortunately, some very predictable directions.

As time goes by Nell and her language become more understandable. It is not entirely clear why this verbal fruit cocktail starts sounding more comprehensible. It is possible that the listener's ear becomes more attuned to the language or that the more Nell is around people the more she might start to imitate their speech patterns. I suspect, however, that the film is really a little less than honest by simply having Foster's language written closer to spoken English in the later parts of the film.

Foster's acting in dramatic scenes is nearly perfect, though her ecstatic, dance-like jaunts though nature seem a bit idealized. Neeson is compelling and sensitive. Probably he is typecast as being sensitive after playing Oskar Schindler. Richardson comes in a fair third for acting honors, but it is really Foster's movie. Also watchable is the photography of the Great Smokey Mountains, by Dante Spinotti. And though it lacks the breathtaking spectacle of his work for THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS, his eye for the beauty of nature becomes an intergal part of the film.

This is not so much an original film as a familiar story done very well. Certainly it ranks among one of Apted's better dramatic films. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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3. THE JUNGLE BOOK (a film review by Mark R. Leeper):

Capsule: Disney Films borrows some character names from Kipling, but not any story. Spectacular Indian locations, beautiful photography, and a powerful score are wasted on a mediocre and cliched adventure film with little respect for the Kipling it was nominally based on. Rating: low +1 (-4 to +4)

An old cartoon shows someone asking "Do you like Kipling?" and getting the response "I don't know, I never Kiplid." Certainly there is not much Kipling going on in Disney's sumptuous second film nominally based on Rudyard Kipling's THE JUNGLE BOOKS. [Am I the only one who thinks the book's title was in the plural?] Indeed, while Kipling might enjoy the new film for its stupendous vision of India, with the exception of recognizing a few character names, mostly animals, he would find little in this film to remind him of his own writings either in plot or style. Besides Mowgli himself, the major characters of his Mowgli stories are all animals; in the film the animals are minor characters. The new film gives a (highly inaccurate) origin for Mowgli and then entirely skips over the period that the book covers and returns to Mowgli as an adult (now played by Jason Scott Lee). Mowgli has picked up martial arts someplace and is now ready to interact with the Man-pack. In fact when he does what we have has is much more the plotting of a Tarzan movie with the setting moved to India. But even if that is so, admittedly it is a highly watchable Tarzan movie.

In the Kipling, Mowgli is a baby who has strayed from his village and nearly killed by Shere Khan, the great tiger. The Man-cub is raised by wolves. In the new film version, Mowgli is about five years old and already has facility handling elephants when he is separated from his caravan and thought to have been killed. Why he has never returned to civilization remains unexplained since he seems to have a city with a major fort just a day or two's walk away. However, he remains in his jungle until he sees and is attracted to Catherine (Lena Headly), the beautiful daughter of the commander of the fort (Sam Neill). She is already being courted by a handsome young soldier (Cary Elwes) who is a favorite of the commander, but of course the audience knows that he is a treacherous cad and a bounder to boot. When the nasty young soldier realizes that Mowgli must know the way to a legendary lost treasure city, all the expected happens.

On top of the plotting being sophomoric, it is didactic. Kipling's animals live by the Law of the Jungle, a complex and logical code which includes rules like not to kill Man as well as rules like when it is legal to take another's prey. In this version it is changed into modernistic rules of conservation. The major rule is "do not kill what you cannot eat." And the animals enforce these rules on humans. In fact, Mowgli is first stranded in the jungle

when Shere Khan attacks his caravan because the travelers had killed more animals than they could eat. (This is an heroic and selfless action for Shere Khan ... totally out of character.) The heroes of THE JUNGLE BOOK all seem to have late 20th Century American values while the villains are all politically incorrect.

Another interesting problem with the film is the placing of jungle so near the fort. (In fact, the fortress is Jodhpur's breathtaking Meherangarh Fort. Having explored the 15th Century fort myself--perhaps the term "walled city" is more accurate--I can tell you the name Meherangarh, or "majestic," is no exaggeration. But perhaps the film makes that obvious.) Even if the fort is supposed to be just some generic fort, the architecture is Rajasthani. You will probably see that style only in dry country a very long distance from any tropical jungle such as we see in other parts of this story. The decision to film the fort over-looking Jodhpur is purely an aesthetic one. This is a very beautifully photographed film. The clarity and detail of the shots and the use of color may be the best of any film I have seen this year. Disney Studios has a reputation for making high-quality prints. The score by the underrated Basil Polidouris only adds to the lush and rich texture.

The acting, as directed by Stephen Sommers, is generally acceptable though Jason Scott Lee is an odd casting choice for Mowgli. He does not look so much Indian as Oriental. Cary Elwes makes a reasonable villain who snidely personifies all that was wrong with the British Raj. Unfortunately, some of the worst acting comes from the animals who just followed direction without worrying about their careers--more is the pity. The apes in particular behave like fugitives from the Cheetah School of Bad Animal Acting. And I wonder what an orangutan is doing in the jungles of India. Rudyard Kipling treated the animals as characters but in this film the apes are sort of a Greek chorus and the rest are little more than additional fists for Mowgli to use against his enemies.

Taken as a Tarzan film or a sequel to the Kipling story, this is a watchable children's film. But putting Kipling's name over the title is gross mis-representation. The pity is that such care was taken with the visual aspects of a film so betrayed by the scripting. Parts of this film are terrific, parts are just awful.

On balance this one gets a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale. [-mrl]

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4. Montreal Film Festival (film reviews and commentary by Mark R. Leeper) (part 4 of 5):

The fifth day started with THE STORY OF YUNNAN. From this point on we did not learn anything especially novel about the fest, so the balance of reviews follow.

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#### THE STORY OF YUNNAN

Mainland Chinese films are generally a fairly bleak lot. On the whole life in China is fairly harsh. Between the living conditions and the politics, the people in their own films do not seem to lead very happy lives. It is unusual to find a Chinese film that is uplifting or inspiring, but THE STORY OF YUNNAN, directed by Zhang Nuanxing, is a sort of Chinese KEYS TO THE KINGDOM. Shizu, a Japanese woman, was living with her family in Manchuria when the Japanese lost the war. In the ensuing chaos she finds herself alone in a hostile country. She attempts cutting her wrists, but is stopped by a sympathetic Chinese soldier who sends her to a hospital. Two years later she is a hospital nurse and again meets the soldier. They marry, but the soldier is forced to leave the army for marrying a Japanese. He takes her to his home in Yunnan province, only to sicken on the way and die upon reaching his home. Shizu is now all alone in a village where the superstitious people blame her for the death and want to punish her to placate ghosts. [Bad subtitling make it appear they actually wanted to throw her in the fire, but I am assured by the director that was not her intent with the scene.] Things could not seem more bleak.

From this inauspicious beginning, Shuzi will build herself into the one most important person, a matriarch, in the community. She will help to banish superstition and bring enlightened ways to the mountain village. In a story told all too fast she remains in spite of suspicion of her background, government attempts to send her back to Japan, and the Cultural Revolution. Finally she is

reunited with her family in Japan and must make some final difficult choices.

Nuanxing in 97 minutes takes the viewer from a village with centuries-old rituals and customs to a Japan with cellular phones and huge department stores. Through the eyes of one woman we see the modernization of Asia. Her film is curiously positive on the former enemy Japanese. It is a Japanese, not the government, woman who brings modern knowledge to the village. The government is portrayed as being well-meaning if occasionally officious. Shizu's Japanese family are shown positively in spite of their participation in the Chinese occupation. Part of the intention of the film seems to be to mend fences with the Japanese.

The worst fault of Nuanxing's film is its sketchiness. To cover so many years in 97 minutes the film has to let one or two scenes cover three or four years. There is often a feel that scenes are rushed. Perhaps to save time or perhaps to make this film more acceptable with the government, after the first few days Shuzi is accepted a little too easily in her new village. The script is determined not to assign any fault and not to have villains. This film could easily use another 30 minutes of screen time. The film is at its best when it is showing village life. It shows customs

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like fertility dances that one rarely sees in Chinese films but which add texture to the picture of village life.

THE STORY OF YUNNAN is the director's statement of women's values. It is unique for a film from China. I give it a +2 on the -4 to +4 scale.

The film was accompanied by a short "Schrei der Erde" ("Cry of the Earth") by Arvo Blechstein. Blechstein created last year's Oscar-winning "Black Rider." This film is a tribute to French painter Jean- Francois Millet. It also has an ecological comment. It is, however, less involving and more serious than "Black Rider."

CYBERTEENS IN LOVE

In a near-future world recreational drugs have become passe. Those

who want drug-like kicks have electrodes surgically attached to their brains and tap directly into cyberspace. This is a very dangerous form of entertainment, worse than drugs, but with a greater and more exciting variety experiences that the mind can tap into. Of course a lot of this is only rumor in Child Support, the prison-like orphanage run by the state. Teenager Su decides to escape Child Support and her escape is aided by Kon, a stranger whose truck she uses. Before long she is getting to know Kon better and discovers he is up to his frontal lobes in the illegal "trode trade." But Kon's partners are up to something incomprehensibly big concerning something called the "eternatrode" that offers a kind of immortality in cyberspace. The head of the team, the mysterious and aptly-named Olderman is particularly intrigued by Su and her ability to see in her dreams visions of the mysterious "Shadowfaces," beings that seem to have a life of their own, but until Su came along only in cyberspace.

That is the basis for a visionary but curiously unengaging cyberpunk science fiction film. One of the features of the cyberpunk writing style is an interesting use of language and here the dialog is all written in a style given the cliched name of "futurespeak." In futurespeak the language is permuted in odd ways that take the viewer a few minutes to get used to. Show up late to a meeting and you might say "Sorry for my late self-delivery." Instead of "Kon, can I ask you something?" "I'm trying to sleep." the dialog comes out "Kon, question and answer phase." "No, I have my sleep lids on." As someone once said, prediction is difficult, particularly about the future, but I would hazard a guess that technology will get to the point shown in the film long before language would evolve as much as it appears to have done in this film.

CYBERTEENS IN LOVE is a low-budget quickie made on grant money. The film makes use of computer graphics where possible to create visual effects cheaply, though even now many of those effects are

passee. Beyond that it is a weak melodrama with a plot that could have come from a 50's exploitation drive-in movie but given a new lease on life by the addition of science fiction concepts. Those concepts all too often come out in the dialog rather than showing

them to us on the screen. Because of the obvious budget constraints we have a film that shows more promise than quality. That also goes for the acting talents of Justine Priestly as Su and Martin Cummins as Kon. Occasionally their acting rings hollow; more often they just fail to be interesting.

This is the first feature film in high definition Sony Digital Betacam format with a 9x16 aspect ratio. Generally the format is fairly good, but it still looks like video, particularly when there are near-horizontal lines in the image being filmed. The scan lines are still all too evident to give this image the quality of a celluloid one.

There are some concepts in the film, but the viewer has to meet them more than halfway. Stretches of the film are talky and dull. There are lots of ideas in the film but few are intriguing. I give CYBERTEENS IN LOVE a 0 on the -4 to +4 scale.

## CINEMA OF TODAY

This is a random collection of five short films that have been submitted to the festival. As far as I can tell they will be shown together no place else. And they are very different from each other, but the mind does tend to look for patterns even in random data and various pairings make for interesting contrasts. [Short films I generally rate as poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent.]

"Tall Stories": This is a light animated film with a little boy talking about his house and family while an older man talks about his home as a child and keeps playing "one-ups-manship" talking about how everything he had was better. The punchline is in finding out what exactly is going on. Rating: fair

"Ignotus": This is a nice, ironic little horror film from Spain. Two obnoxious punk rockers, lost on the Spanish countryside find an old village. They are taken for saints by the locals because their punk spikes look so much like the golden spikes of light on the heads of statues of saints. The locals worship them as they would saints and the rockers think they have lucked into something pretty good. But being taken for a saint is not necessarily such a good thing. This is a story with a Rod Serling feel. Rating: good

"Death in Venice, CA": The title says it all. This is a retelling of the Thomas Mann story with the site relocated in Venice, California. The effect is much the same as doing Shakespeare in modern dress. Something is lost in the atmosphere, something is

gained in supposed identification value and relevance. This is a long and introspective half hour. An author visits his sister-in-law and finds himself fixated on his nephew Sebastian. As a curious touch the main character is familiar with the writing of Mann, but does not recognize that he is living out one of Mann's most famous stories. Rating: good.

"The Train": Perhaps this one just caught me in the right mood. For a twenty-five-minute film Mike Mathis's film is one impressive piece of cinema. It is introspective like "Death in Venice, CA" but realistically rather than in a literary sense. It is a horror story, but far more believable than "Ignotus" and apparently could well be based on a true incident. "The Train" is told mostly in flashback two years after the events of the story. The main character, Eddie, was working with his brother Jim in a trainyard. Eddie should be doing his job, but untrained Jim is filling in for him and involved in a horrifying accident of a type that was common in 50s trainyards. Jim who feels fine, is told he has just minutes to live. He can die instantly and painlessly, or painfully over a fifteen-minute interval. Jim has just minutes to say goodbye to his life. Eddie has years to make peace with himself or not. This is a very powerful story and a deeply affecting film. Rating: excellent.

"Tick... Tick... Tick...": This is quite a nice little thriller. A man, a woman, and a bomb are tied up together in an abandoned shack. Obviously somebody is not happy with them. But can they figure out what is going on and can they escape before the bomb goes off? The film combines suspense and a puzzle for the viewer. Rating: very good.

## EROTIC FILMS

I had gone to this in the hopes that it would be similar to ARIA, a single cohesive film in which different respected directors would see what they could do given a single theme in this case working on a sensual story rather than showing what they see when they hear opera music. Well, I was half right. It certainly was major directors, but with each piece just a minute or two short of a half hour, this had the feel of a series of episodes made for cable. My major complaint is that of these three half-hour erotic tales, the first two are not erotic and the third is not a tale.

"The Insatiable Mrs. Kirsch" (co-written and directed by Ken Russell): This film is surprisingly tame given that it was directed by the uninhibited Mr. Russell. The story might almost be out of

Somerset Maugham. Simon Shepherd plays a writer escaping from the world to write at an exclusive hotel. There he finds himself completely fixated on the beautiful Mrs. Kirsch who seems like the most oversexed woman he has ever seen. She seems to eat only long and narrow food, like corn-on-the-cob and sausages, she frequents

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sex-shops, and much more. The author decides to take advantage of the situation leading to the obvious plot twist. The story is quite predictable. Rating: fair

"Vroom! Vroom! Vrooom!" (written and directed by Melvin Van Peebles): This one has a sort of "Twilight Zone" feel. Leroy is the lonely kid who never gets the girls. The other kids are all singing and dancing and waving body parts at each other, but Leroy is alone. Then Leroy saves an old witch-woman from being hit by a car. For this she grants him a wish. He would like a motorcycle and a girl, but he gets only one wish. The witch-woman, however, finds a way to grant both wishes with a single wish, but with bad results. Rating: fair

"Touch Me" (co-written and directed by Paul Cox): Sarah is an artist. Christine is a nude model. Sarah gives art classes. Christine models nude in Sarah's classes. Sarah has a student who thinks he is Toulouse-Lautrec. He faxes her poems with obscene artwork. Christine has a boyfriend who does not understand her. Sarah and Christine spend a weekend together in the country. They chase horses. They take showers and sit in front of a fire. Christine gets muddy and Sara cleans her off. Sarah gets another fax from her student. It isn't a great story, but it is the only one they have. There is a lot of very sensual photography but little dramatic resolution at the end. There also seems to be little theme except take love where you find it. Rating: fair

THE REVENGE OF ITZIK FINKELSTEIN

Itzik Finkelstein would like to be a big time wheeler-dealer. Unfortunately his big-time deals all fall through and the wheel has a flat. Itzik is a total failure and has a chip on his shoulder against everyone who has ever wronged him, which he thinks is pretty much everybody in his life. Itzik would like to take his

vengeance on the world, but what are the chances for a poor slob who couldn't hit the floor with his hat in three tries?

Then, as luck would have it, a mystical cult from the bowels of the Earth decides that the world must be destroyed to be saved. They send an all-powerful invisible monk to give Itzik the power to kill with impunity. The time has come for Itzik to wreak his terrible revenge.

THE REVENGE OF ITZIK FINKELSTEIN is a slyly written comedy from Israel with more than a little similarity to Peter Cook's BEDAZZLED. Not too surprisingly Itzik's hate-tour of the villains of his past is less than the killing spree that he at first envisioned. Instead Itzik has an opportunity to reevaluate the values he has been given by others that he thinks have led to his sorry state. As his attitudes change, his self-image and others' images of him change.

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Argentina-born director Enrique Rottenberg emigrated to Israel in 1963 and has produced films previously but is directing for the first time. He co-authored the screenplay with Estaban Gottfried, basing it on the story "La Venganza de Beta Sanchez" and moving the setting to Israel. Gottfried appeared in the film in the role of the invisible monk. The film won seven Israeli Oscars including Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Screenplay.

Moshe Ivgi's Itzik Finkelstein can be very funny, but some of the more verbal humor seems to be lost in the subtitling. He does however show considerable personality. Gottfried's monk is well-written but flatly played.

Not all of the screenplay's humor is in the best of taste, and often humor is more vulgar than funny. Then again, perhaps more humor would come across to people more fluent in Hebrew. I would rate this one a low +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

THE TOTAL BALALAIKA SHOW

Aki Kaurismaki is a Finnish director generally known for very downbeat films like ARIEL. He did try his hand at comedy, however,

with somewhat spotty results with THE LENINGRAD COWBOYS GO AMERICA. That film told the story of a hapless rock band either from Finland or someplace very cold in the Soviet Union touring the United States on the cheap. The band is actually played by a Finnish comic rock group called the Sleepy Sleepers, but the film seems to imply the characters might be Russian. Their trademark is pompadours that stick out a foot in front of their heads like unicorn horns and pointed shoes that stick out just as far.

A sequel was made (word of mouth is that it is not very good) and the third film featuring the Cowboys is a concert film. This one magnifies the incongruity of the first film by matching the rock band with the Red Army Chorus and Dance Ensemble. The Chorus and Dance Ensemble was always a bit of an incongruity itself. As a branch of the Soviet Army, they were responsible to preserve beautiful Russian folk singing and dancing and to bring them to the world. Even people who hated the Soviets would buy records of their Army Chorus and Band because the music was good. The whole existence of the chorus was a bit of an anomaly, sort of smoothing over the conjoining of Slavic traditions to Soviet militarism.

This film opens with a solemn diplomatic scene. It is apparently the signing, under a watchful poster of Lenin, of a contract for the Red Army Ensemble to have a concert with the Leningrad Cowboys. We then flash to the concert itself, which took place on in front of an audience of 50,000 on June 12, 1993. The resulting film is full of ironic humor with more than a little touch of sadness. There is a little hint of lost traditional values in seeing Russian women in traditional folk finery doing traditional Russian dancing

to the sound of "My... my... my... Delilah." A buffoonish Cowboy and a squat folk singer in full Soviet military uniform arm-in-arm sing "So Happy Together." This is more than a concert, it is a comment on the closing of the cold war and the coming of new values, with little respect for the old.

The Red Army seems more able to enhance the popular music than vice versa. For traditional songs like "The Volga Boat Man" and "Kalinka" the Cowboys are able only to clown around a little awkwardly on stage. The Russians lend far more to the popular

lyrics contributing the sound of a full orchestra and chorus to music usually carried by five or six performers. Their clowning is more like adding snatches to the old Soviet National Anthem to "Gimme All Your Lovin'" Some how they also add poignancy to "Those Were the Days."

This is a short film, only 55 minutes, with a good sense of humor and a lot of perhaps overly familiar music. Perhaps the music is just not as important as the subtext. On the scale of short films, I would rate it a very good. [-mrl]

[To be continued]

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Holidays are an expensive trial of strength. The only satisfaction comes from survival.

--Jonathan Miller

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