

# 'The Angel Levine' A Modern Fable

## CATHOLIC PRESS FEATURES

New York—Newspaper ads for "The Angel Levine," show Harry Belafonte in a black leather jacket, and above him the headline:

"If he's an angel, imagine what God is like."

People who don't have a vivid imagination, however, need only drop in on a New York play called "Steambath," where they will discover that God is a Puerto Rican attendant in a Turkish bath.

These two latest attempts to provide audiences with unorthodox glimpses at the nature of God suggest that God is not dead but merely using a stage name.

In "Steambath," directed by actor Anthony Perkins, God's stage name is Morty (in Spanish, "morte" means "death"), and, indeed, the Turkish steam-bath setting is meant to represent Purgatory, since all the people who wander in and out of the bath have recently died. Dressed in a T-shirt, white duck shoes and a beret, "God" is played by Hector Elizondo as a deity who enjoys mopping up in the bath because he finds lowly jobs "therapeutic" and who monitors the world on a closed-circuit TV set.

Life magazine's reviewer termed "Steambath's" god "the most unlikely almighty in the history of anthropomorphisms" (giving human qualities to non-human things), but admitted that "bit by bit, for all his humdrum activities, you accept his divinity."

The Life reviewer, Tom Prideaux, suggested that "Steambath," written by Bruce Jay Friedman, was intended as a rebuke to those who want God to meet their specifications.

"Most human beings select their God as snobbishly as they select friends. They want a Major Deity, however dimly conceived, to possess a suitable social status and skin color and to be fit not only to pray to but to introduce at the club."

If Morty would be unacceptable to many believers, the God Who sends Harry Belafonte back down to Earth as "a Jewish angel" to "save" Zero Mostel would be all but excommunicated.

Mostel plays a Job-like Jewish tailor who is beset with pain, loss of his business in a fire, and a wife who is dying. He pleads with God to send him some kind of help — and the "help" turns out to be a black hustler (killed in traffic while trying to run away after stealing a fur coat) who has been sent back to Earth as an angel "on probation."

It is only when the Jewish tailor shows signs of believing that this uncouth, rough-talking black man might indeed be an angel that the tailor's wife shows signs of recuperating. When he doubts, she relapses.

According to United Artists, which is distributing "The Angel Levine" (so titled because Belafonte plays a character named Alexander Levine), the film "is a modern-day fable of the need to believe and be believed in."



A trouble-beset Jewish tailor (Zero Mostel, left) who blames God for his ill-fortune, is confronted by a black, Jewish angel (Harry Belafonte) sent back to Earth to rekindle the tailor's belief in God's goodness, in a scene from "The Angel Levine."

Brother Thomas Allen, film reviewer for The Long Island Catholic of the Rockville Centre, N.Y., diocese, said the film "demands sensitivity and intelligence on the part of the audience to accept its vital message."

This vital message, Brother Allen suggested, is the fact that "just about the only divine manifestation that any of us will receive in this material vale of tears" will be in the form of "a real person," complete with physical and moral-qual-

ties we may not particularly welcome.

The National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures saw "The Angel Levine" as a "brilliant, difficult film about mankind's need for belief and commitment for the sake of human survival."

## Lesson for the 'Groovement'

By the Mission Singers

Tell it All, recorded by Kenny Rogers and the First Edition, is a statement against the temptation to be too simple-minded in one's approach to problems. A lot of people, young and old, in the government and out of it, could learn to be a little more honest with their lives.

But, as we see it, the song is mainly about the young folks. It's a critical song, but a positive one. It sees a lot of the inconsistencies in what young kids are doing today; but instead of condemning, as so many people do so often, it prods and challenges the kids to be more truthful and consistent.

What about the college kid at this summer's National Students Association Convention who said that any student who wants to bring about reform "merely" by organizing for the election of sympathetic government representatives is a "dirty fascist"? Isn't this college kid as simple-minded and stupid as those people who automatically condemn long-haired hippies?

The fact is that we're at a delicate time. We need to better understand one another. Our society is becoming too polarized, and unless we find ways of getting along, there will be real civil war.

At the same time, we can't stop protesting the continuing and expanding war, or the overt and covert prejudice that blankets our country, or the kinds of school systems that get in the way of education.

No, we can't stop pointing out the abuses that our world is being subjected to. But we can start being more fair about our way of making this Earth more livable. We can start giving more credit to people who appear to be on the other side. We can start being more honest about our own limitations.

Tell It All claims that our great and noble cries for peace and brotherhood are probably not as uncomplicated as we would like. We scream at our elders for their hang-ups and prejudices, yet we seldom are willing to examine our own intolerance.



Kenny Rogers and the First Edition

## THE MUSIC BAG

"TELL IT ALL"

Tell it all, brother, before we fall.  
Tell it all, brothers and sisters, tell it all.  
How much you holding back from me when you say you're givin' all?  
And in the dungeons of your mind, who got you chained to the wall?  
Did you plant your feet on higher ground to avoid life's mud and stone?  
Did you ever kick a good man when he was down, just to make yourself feel strong?  
Tomorrow just might be too late, now is the time  
To get your jumbled mind straight and seek a new design.  
Did you ever walk before a crippled man, pretending you were lame?  
And what made you think one feeble hymn to God was gonna make Him call your name?

(Published by Reprise)

Who is that person hanging on the dungeon walls of our minds? If we're going to make a better world, we've first got to find out more about ourselves. We've got to admit more honestly that we are searching as much as anyone else.

Tell It All tells us that not every way is a good way to

reach a goal. To offer a prayer for a crippled man and then to pass him by is nothing but a hypocritical sham. We owe it to ourselves, other people and the world we're trying to make better, to be honest about our motives, to "tell it all." And we'd better do it now.

(Catholic Press Features)

## COURIER / Entertainment

As I See It

### Clark Talks Too Much

By Pat Costa



British art historian Kenneth Clark apparently never heard the old saw, "one picture is worth a thousand words."

Or perhaps he did and felt it didn't apply when the words were his.

At any rate, the only thing wrong with the NBC preview of a new series titled, "Civilization," is the man who wrote it and narrated it. That man is Clark. There is too much of him, at least in the preview.

The preview seen recently over Channel 8 was to introduce a 13-part series to begin next month over educational television channels.

Produced by the BBC, the series details Western man's achievement and ideas from the past 15 centuries. Thus paintings, sculpture, architecture, philosophy, poetry and music are all to be covered in the series.

In the preview there was a look at Charlemagne's chapel and Chartres Cathedral in France, St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome and Thomas Jefferson's home in Monticello. Rodin, Michelangelo and Botticelli were among the artists represented.

The series which has won in-

ternational acclaim is marred by too many words. What's worse Clark appears enamored of his own voice.

As one who will select the English movie over the American made one almost every time in order to savor the English language being spoken by an Englishman, I found Clark difficult to understand, his pronunciation often bizarre and his inability to keep the end of his sentences from trailing incomprehensibly away, maddening.

What does it take to produce a Carol Channing spectacular? What great sums were paid to Fred MacMurray, Art Carney, and Sirs Ralph Richardson and John Gielgud? The price of settings and costumes? Musicians? Scriptwriters?

Such terrible, awful, meaningless tripe as this special consisted of undoubtedly cost a fortune.

Taped in London, titled "A Mad English Tea Party" and using the British as satirical targets, the show was almost bad enough to make one believe that television should stick to news coverage of current events and subjects of educational nature.

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