

As I See It

Channel Hopping

By Pat Costa



Flipping the channel selector, I've observed:

- That teenage girls such as those that participated in the Miss Teenage Pageant on CBS a week or so ago look awfully good in the "giving intelligent answers to stupid questions" department.

They make their counterparts in the Miss America and Miss World competitions, to name but two, appear shallow and not too smart by comparison.

In the talent competitions the teenagers are about on a par with all the other pageants' entries — just plain awful.

- That a recent episode of "The Bold Ones" featuring Hal Holbrook as "The Senator", presented a sensitive, logical and most credible treatment of a case simulating the Kent State University student tragedy.

Findings of a fictional commission headed by Holbrook, which sought to find precisely who was at fault, came much closer to being realistic than

did the actual grand jury on the case.

- That "Marcus Welby" when it is good, is very, very good. When it is bad, as witness last week's story about a girl with paralysis, it is horrid — to say nothing of being disjointed, pointless and rambling.

- That weather programs have not improved in 20 years. I'm so sick of highs and lows and ridiculous squiggles on ubiquitous maps.

Frankly, I don't care to have any pleasantries with my weather. Living in this climate is bound to make one believe that any and all weather is serious. Severe heat, severe cold, strong winds, depressing and constant rains and gloom to say nothing of unseasonal snow storms would seem to indicate that a certain amount of gravity should accompany our reports.

Pretty girls, handsome young men or clowning, would-be actors dispensing the weather forecasts in bits and pieces to make us stay tuned in is merely adding insult to injury.

Can't anybody do anything better?

'Hair'... a Professor's Viewpoint

Clarence A. Amann is associate professor of English at St. John Fisher College. The following review of "Hair" grew out of the controversy that attended the play's being cancelled in Rochester and the subsequent announcement by a public school teacher that he would take his English class to view the play in Toronto.

By CLARENCE AMANN

The tribal-rock musical "Hair" is a genuinely sophisticated work of contemporary art that needs an audience sophisticated enough to deal with it on its own terms.

It is, by design, both sensually explicit and ideologically negative. It is strong and forceful; it may be either destructive or constructive, personally. It cannot be in itself instructive. It is not meant to be.

It presumes education to a mature contemporary sensitivity. It cannot instruct. It can only reinforce or redistribute certain habitual emphases already "learned" by a viewer-participant. Therefore, it demands a level of proven maturity. I cannot recommend it to the ordinary or even the "above-average" student of high school age.

To say this is a long way from condemning it wholesale, or in fact at all! And parents who rightly take exception to it as high school fare, will do well to understand and proclaim certain distinctions. "Hair" has a very great deal to recommend it, as a work of art, as a human experience, given the audience it takes to "groove" properly to it. By no stretch of the academic process, can this be taken to embrace the average high school mentality. Nor is this to demean that mentality.

The tone of Hair and its overall thrust is to celebrate sensual, corporeal life on the

one hand, and the large-minded, universal, uninhibited expression of "love" on the other. It's informed by an insistence that any and all discrimination be precluded, discrimination in both the good and the bad sense. It wants to deaden the cerebral and re-sensitize the visceral, the "gut"-emotional. It's a worthy, if risky, aim and determination. And the risks can only be managed by those maturely willing to admit a fragile hierarchy of intellect, emotion, and will that needs frequent readjustment to prevent distortion, perversion in any direction.

To suggest that adolescents of high school age are capable generally of handling this "experience" is naive. They are not — not even those who are above, average intellectually. Emotional maturing must not be forced. So, it's not a question of morality primarily; it's a question of psycho-emotional maturity first. (It may, surely, later become a moral and ethical consideration.) When will we stop imposing upon our young people unreal challenges to "adult" thought and action, a maturity they can't handle?

The thrust of Hair is a gross put-down of all facets of the Establishment — government, church, education, even the family, but especially, the military. It makes no distinctions, allows no qualifying. So, the audience must make them — yet not so much that the force of the criticism is lost. That takes a delicate discrimination and an earnest self-knowledge on the part of a participating viewer. It takes also a maturely humble willingness to withhold pretense of "full understanding" of oneself. It takes, in consequence, a courageous distrust of one's own "convictions."

So it becomes unsettling, or its artists have failed. And as an "unsettling" experience, it exacts a mature handling and a philosophical patience with oneself and with contemporary art forms. To say nothing of earnest and talented, if "revolutionary" contemporary artists!

By and large, a high school audience cannot be expected to suddenly be trained to make these distinctions. So, the experience will end for them as

a totally confusing experience at best; more likely it will end for them a totally negative experience, counseling a rejection wholesale of all that is currently American and conventionally moral. The musical is that effective. In spite of the talented and exciting hard rock music, the tone and lyrical import is ultimately pessimistic and depressing concerning the human animal and his "promise."

The musical succeeds in accomplishing what its artists aim at — it "persuades" the audience that there is little or nothing left in which to root a positive Christian optimism. Despair ought to be the corollary consequence. And a *carpe diem* hedonism till death sets in.

Except for the mature viewer who knows the skills of the talented hyperbolist, "Hair" is rooted in an exaggeration of "the state of things." It does not "tell it like it is," at least, like it all is. The trouble is it seems to. And that's also a legitimate part of the technique for the artist who wants to threaten and frighten an audience with the prospect of things sure to come, unless one yields to the suggestions of the "vibrations of now."

Nor does it matter that the artist precludes any dilution of a nihilistic aim. He may even believe he has told it as it is; he may want to counsel "carpe diem and die." His very celebration of life and joy (passing) and of a delicate, threatened potential for same, is there, subtly presented, in spite of himself, as it were, to belie his dire presentiment of despair.

High school students shouldn't need "Hair." Their natural naivete ought to be preserved until they can preserve it for themselves in the face of the sordid facts of life they'll meet soon enough, too soon. Hopefully, then, their Christian optimism, better founded than their forerunners', will sustain them.

Let parents educate themselves to the real need for genuine "revolution" — in attitudes and values and priorities, and humbly acknowledge the desperate cry for these as it issues from artists and young people alike.

At Home with the Movies

WHERE ANGELS GO (1968)
Thursday, Dec. 17 (CBS)

A sequel to "The Trouble With Angels" (see preview for Sunday, Dec. 20), this film features Stella Stevens as a mod, swinging nun (who teaches her high-school girls bomb-making, among other subjects) and Rosalind Russell as her conservative superior at a Pennsylvania girls' academy. At the end, they see each other's point of view, predictably.

Most of the action takes place during a cross-country journey to an interfaith youth rally, the trip being filled with confrontations between the two nuns on how best to implant religious ideals in their students. Arthur Godfrey appears as a progressive bishop and Van Johnson is a swinging priest who heads a boys' school.

Critics thought it was too fluffy to be taken seriously. The Catholic film office rated it A-1, unobjectionable for all, and called it "light, unsophisticated entertainment."

WHO'S MINDING THE STORE? (1963)
Friday, Dec. 18 (CBS)

If you like Jerry Lewis slapstick comedy, this is the place to get your order filled. Lewis is let loose in a department store, and there are many zany sequences, especially one in which a large vacuum sweeper gets out of control.

Critics felt that someone let the story line get out of control — the mother of Jerry's sweetheart (Jill St. John) got him the job to get him out of her daughter's life — but scripts don't mean too much in Lewis films.

NCOMP rated this film A-1, unobjectionable for all.

This is a summary and evaluation of prime-time films offered by the network to its affiliate stations. Check your local listings to ascertain if your channel is scheduling the network offering.

THE LOVE GOD? (1969)
Saturday, Dec. 19 (NBC)

Don Knotts is the "hero" of this comedy, thus the question mark in the title. But despite Knotts' image, this one is not for the kids.

He plays the editor of a bankrupt birdwatchers' magazine who is duped into selling his fourth-class mailing privilege to a pornographer. Knotts is brought to court on obscenity charges and much of the testimony has to do with his sexual prowess.

It was rated M (for mature audiences) by the motion picture industry and A-3, unobjectionable for adults, by NCOMP, which observed:

"Director-screenwriter Nat Hiken approaches his spoof on the obscenity courts, civil liberties, the communications media, religion, and our sex-obsessed society with leaden sensitivities that make healthier alternatives to the 'Playboy' life look as silly as the film itself."

THE TROUBLE WITH ANGELS (1966)
Sunday, Dec. 20

Based on a book of recollections by Jane Trahey, now a leading advertising executive, this film is about a battle of wits between two new arrivals (Hayley Mills and June Harding) at St. Francis Academy for girls and its mother superior, played by Rosalind Russell.

Both mischief-makers, the two girls get into one jam after another, while the mother superior patiently bides her time. At the end of the film — which covers the girls' entire education at the school — one of them decides to enter the convent.

NCOMP rated it A-1, unobjectionable for all, and commented: "What distinguishes this film from many others like it is the fact that it was made with imagination and that it achieves its intended aim of meaningful entertainment. . . . The story is exaggerated, as most school-day memories are, but it is done in good taste and pleasant humor."

BETTER A WIDOW (1968)
Monday, Dec. 21 (ABC)

Virna Lisi stars in this "Italian comedy" that is set in a Sicilian town where two Mafia factions are at loggerheads over the planned installation of a British oil refinery.

Peter McEnery plays an English engineer who is caught in the middle — and caught by Virna. NCOMP rating: A-3, for adults.

WHITE CHRISTMAS (1954)
Tuesday, Dec. 22 (NBC)

Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye are show-business performers who come to the rescue when they learn that their retired general (Dean Jagger) in the war is having financial problems making a go of his Vermont winter resort — particularly because it doesn't snow.

Lots of musical numbers, Rosemary Clooney and Vera Ellen are the love interests, there's the title tune at the end — and snow. NCOMP: A-1.

Wednesday, December 16, 1970

Birgit Nilsson... The Incomparable

By FRANK CROCIATA

Impressarios often resort to overstatement of talent to sell an artist. Soprano Birgit Nilsson came to the Eastman last Monday for her second recital in as many years, heralded as "a miracle." This is understatement for she is much more. Her voice, as marvelous an instrument as has ever been heard, is a marvel of control, a victory of her mind and musicianship over every excess.

By the miracle of her genius, Miss Nilsson, who is without peer as a dramatic soprano, is as effective a recitalist as she is an actress. Her incredible presence transforms a song recital into something urgently dramatic.

Miss Nilsson's program was quite scholarly, and she sang it with unwavering brilliance. She began with Beethoven's Opus 65, the concert aria "Ah, Perfido." Her performance was vital and impassioned, as was her performance of Wagner's "Five Wesendonck Lieder." Both are songs on a grand scale and almost symphonic. Miss Nilsson's conception of the set was breathtaking. Before intermission she sang three songs of Richard Strauss.

After intermission Miss Nilsson turned to Scandinavian songs of Sibelius, Ture Rangstrom, Carl Nielson, and a folksong setting by Adolph Linblad which Miss Nilsson charmingly translated and dedicated to a

"Swedish Nightingale" of another generation, Jenny Lind.

The outstanding moment of this set was her performance of the second of two songs by Sibelius, "Reeds, reeds, murmur, Waves, waves, break!" She concluded her printed list with an aria from "La Wally" of Alfredo Catalani one of Puccini's better imitators. Her performance gave the aria a grace and expanse that it didn't quite deserve. She was given a spirited ovation and responded with "Vissi d'arte" from Puccini's "Tosca," and "Vienna, City of My Dreams."

Today (Dec. 16) is Beethoven's 200th birthday. Anyone who has anything to do with serious music, or any of the arts must stop to acknowledge a debt to this imposing figure. The world of artistic achievement is huge, before and after Beethoven, but it was he that proclaimed artistry to be wholly above human concerns of physical survival.

There is a great deal of activity directed at performing the entire body of Beethoven's compositions in this bicentennial year. Violinist Issac Stern, as part of the Stern-Istomin-Rose Trio, is performing all of the Beethoven Trios in a cycle at New York's Philharmonic Hall. Asked if, after this concentrated study, he found Beethoven to be as great as advertised, Stern replied, "better."