

## MOVIES

**'King of Comedy' Interesting, Offbeat, Yet Full of Voids**

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — "The King of Comedy" (Fox), Martin Scorsese's first film after "Raging Bull," also stars Robert De Niro, but its tone is quite different. Unlike its immediate predecessor, it shows some glints of wit and intelligence, a difference that it no doubt owes to its script by Paul D. Zimmerman, a former critic for Newsweek magazine now turned to honest labor.

De Niro, still showing a generous measure of the poundage he gained for the Jake La Motta role, plays Rupert J. Pupkin. Rupert makes his living as a messenger, but, even though he is already in his mid-30s and has made no discernable progress toward it, fame is what he has his mind set upon. More specifically, he wants to achieve fame as a standup comedian. He wants to be known as the king of comedy, a title he has already assumed in his own mind.

Rupert hones his routine endlessly in the basement of his mother's home. His mother, often heard but never seen, is played by Scorsese's mother in accordance with the fine Italian tradition of family solidarity. Rupert has set up one basement corner like the set of a talk show, with life cutouts of Liza Minelli and

of his hero and role model Jerry Langford (Jerry Lewis).

The best way to achieve his goal, Rupert readily perceives, would be to score a smash on Langford's show. One night he happens to be in a position to help protect the star from an especially aggressive woman fan, and he takes a polite acknowledgement followed by a polite brush-off as an open invitation to be buddy-buddy. From then on he pursues Langford tirelessly, laying siege to his outer office and even showing up at his home with a girlfriend (Diahnne Abbott), intent on making a weekend of it.

Finally, when the repeated rebuffs are enough to persuade even Rupert that he is not wanted, he teams up with someone as estranged from reality as he, a Langford fan named Masha (Sandra Bernhard), and they kidnap the hapless Langford, the condition for his release being Rupert's appearance on the show.

"The King of Comedy" is entertaining enough. It catches something of the crazy intimacy that the lowly imagine that they share with the celebrated, though this is something that is not especially hard to catch and which is always turning up in the movies, the medium that gave birth to it.

Jerry Lewis gives a fine, restrained performance as the put-upon Langford, and it is good to see him in a halfway decent movie again. Scorsese also gets good performances from the beautiful Miss Abbott, who does a fine study in progressive mortification as she slowly begins to realize that Langford is not a friend of Rupert and hadn't really invited them to spend the weekend, and from Miss Bernhard, who brings a quite convincing intensity to the role of the fanatical Masha.

De Niro, however, is a good deal less successful, and the fault lies more in the script than in his acting. As we know to our cost, the world is filled with unbalanced people, but, unbalanced though they be, they exist in a quite realistic context. Neither Scorsese nor Zimmerman succeed in giving us Rupert's context. How can he afford his gaudy but extremely well-tailored wardrobe on his messenger's salary? How can he hold a job? Why is he so indifferent to sex? And how did he get the way he is? We'll never know.

This lack of context also applies to Langford. He seems to live in monastic seclusion. Doesn't he have any friends, any relatives? You'd think that one of the most famous men in

America would have a few hangers-on at least.

Scorsese and De Niro, moreover, choose to stress the funny side of things, a wise decision, no doubt, in terms of making an entertaining movie, but one that begs the fundamental question with regard to obsessive types like Rupert: Is he indeed dangerous? We're supposed to believe he

is, it seems, but De Niro, who, as he showed in "Taxi Driver," is certainly capable of giving off an air of menace, does not do so here. Thus there's a gain in laughs, but Scorsese forfeits any claim he might have been interested in making about the state of our society today, nor does a quasi-happy ending have any satirical bite.

"The King of Comedy" is an interesting, off-beat movie despite its numerous shortcomings. There is an attempted seduction scene, both comic and menacing, but it's done with restraint, and the U.S. Catholic Conference has classified the picture A-II, adolescents and adults. The industry rating is PG, parental guidance suggested.

**'High Road to China' Is Never Dull**

By Michael Gallagher

New York (NC) — "High Road to China" (Warners) may not be a film for the ages, but it's an adventure film that's never dull, and it has some nice surprises.

Not the least of these is Bess Armstrong's performance as a spoiled rich girl, Roaring 20s era, who hires a hard-drinking, disillusioned World War I ace (Tom Selleck) to fly her from Turkey to China to find her long-lost father.

Directed by Brian G. Hutton and adapted from Jon Cleary's novel by Sandra Weintraub Roland and S. Lee Pogostin, "High Road," is a kind of "Raiders of the Lost

Ark," done with heart and character and without the sophomoric clowning of Steven Spielberg's much over-rated tribute to the serial.

Its conclusion, in fact, owes something not to "Raiders" but to Akira Kurosawa's "Seven Samurai." Selleck and Miss Armstrong find her eccentric father (Wilford Brimley) in the midst of a war, marshalling some exploited villagers against a rapacious warlord.

Miss Armstrong, who was so good in "The Four Seasons," is a talented actress and has a warm and appealing presence. And television star Tom Selleck ("Magnum, P.I.") makes an impressive large screen debut.

Jack Weston is good as Selleck's mechanic-sidekick, but Robert Morley as a villainous business partner determined to do Miss Armstrong out of her fortune, might as well, through no fault of his own, be in some other movie. Brian Blessed scores as a vividly nasty Kahn.

"High Road to China" is a consistently entertaining film that foregoes the sex and extravagant violence that often mars adventure genre today. There is some violence, but it's restrained, and there are also some mild vulgarities. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-II, adults and adolescents. The industry rating is PG, parental guidance suggested.

## BOOKS

**Christian Perspectives On Nuclear Warfare**

"Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope," by Ronald J. Sider and Richard K. Taylor. Paulist Press (New York, 1982). 368 pp., \$6.95 paperback

"What One Christian Can do to Help Prevent Nuclear War," by Ronald Freund. Fides-Claretian (Chicago, 1983). 185 pp., \$7.95 paperback.

By Anne Bingham  
NC News Service

The larger book, "Nuclear Holocaust and Christian Hope," is packed with images and written in a style that would do a good revival preacher proud: "The satanic spiral of violence," "Jesus Christ does not want his followers to turn the cities of the world into crematoria," "If Paul's doctrine of the Church is valid, should not our loyalty to Soviet members of Christ's body exceed our loyalty to any secular nation?"

And just below the surface of the evangelical style is powerful indictment of the arms race that touches all the bases: nuclear attack and its effects on the social, political and biological world; the just-war tradition; non-violence and non-resistance; the possibility of civilian-based defense.

Obviously written to interpret the aims of the peace movement to Christians of the more

fundamental, conservative traditions, the book handles difficult questions without flinching. Often there are no answers, only other questions. The book does give careful, serious considerations to arguments against pacifism and, without condemning those who can't make the leap, assures those who can that one can reject war without falling into theological liberalism or rejection of the Old Testament with its apparent support of war and violence.

The authors avoid any naive cheerfulness about the prospects of pacifism's being effective: They confess that "a heavy foreboding has slowly settled upon us in the months that we have worked on this book... but our hope is rooted in God, not people. At the worst times of the past, God has broken into human history with a mighty demonstration of his transforming power... surely it is not naive to pray and believe that God will do the same in the 20th century."

Sider is associate professor of theology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary and president of Evangelicals for Social Action. Taylor is a consultant on outreach and peace ministries for the Sojourners Community and Evangelicals for Social Action.

The book includes more

than 70 pages of reference material, including an index and a list of scripture references. Appendices include a bibliography, organizations working for peace, audio-visual materials and curriculum materials for local congregations. Many Catholic titles are included.

The smaller book costs two-and-a-third more per page than the larger, for 10 times less insight. "What One Christian Can do to Help Prevent Nuclear War" would be more accurately titled "What Some Chicago Pacifists Are Up To and How They Got Involved and Oh Yes, Here's the Theory Behind it All." The book is a mish-mash of anecdotes about Chicago area activists (and a few national figures) interleaved with discussions of just-war theory, the effects of nuclear attack, issues of military spending, tax resistance, the draft — none of them given the treatment they deserve. The theory is done better elsewhere and the interviews are superficial.

Coupled with the large type, heavy Chicago emphasis, obvious padding (the thing has a foreword, preface, prologue, introduction and epilogue), the whole project makes one suspect it was a hurry-up production to get at least one anti-nuke title on the publisher's list before Christmas. I wish they'd taken the time to do it up right.

**Channel 21 to Air Church Peace Debate**

A one-hour television news special on the nuclear war issue produced by National Catholic News Service will be aired in Rochester 11 a.m., Sunday, April 10, by WXXI, Channel 21.

The non-commercial program, "Religion in America: Fighting for Peace," traces religious involvement in war and peace issues from revolutionary days to the present. It culminates with an examination of the efforts of the American Catholic bishops to produce a major pastoral letter on the subject in May.

Among religious leaders interviewed in the program are Rev. Dr. Martin Marty,

**ABC to Give Rare View Of Vatican**

"The Pope and His Vatican," an ABC News Special, promoted as "an intimate look at a day in the life of John Paul, a day which includes prayer and the Mass, a working breakfast and dinner, audiences with clergy and foreign dignitaries, and a speech at a youth rally in Rome," will be shown 7-8 p.m., Easter Sunday, April 3, over Rochester's Channel 13, WOKR.

The program also includes a look at the selection and confirmation process for bishops and the canonization ceremony for St. Maximilian Kolbe of Poland.

Correspondent for the show is Bill Blakemore, Rome bureau chief. ABC crews followed the pontiff for more than a year to prepare for the program.

professor of religious history at the University of Chicago Divinity School; Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Committee of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations; and Msgr. John Tracy Ellis, professor of Church History at Catholic University of America.

The program contains key portions of the debate on the

proposed pastoral letter at the general meeting of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops last November.

NC's newly created broadcast news department produced the program. The NC broadcast department is developing a weekly half-hour religious news show expected to begin regular production soon.

**Capsule Movie Reviews**

"Betrayal" (Fox) — This screen version of Harold Pinter's play about a triangle, directed by David Jones and adapted by Pinter himself, is a pretentious and anemic exercise, which, in the usual Pinter fashion, hints at profundities that lie too deep for words, but never delivers the goods. There is some compensation in the performance of Patricia Hodge, who with warmth and sensitivity manages to make you care more about the erring wife than you might otherwise. Jeremy Irons, however, overacts shamelessly, and Ben Kingsley is unable to bring his immense talent to bear effectively on a role that is close to non-existent. There is one instance of obscene language. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-II, Adults and Adolescents. The industry rating is R, Restricted.

"Britannia Hospital" (U.A. Classics) — A crude, muddled attempt at satire from director Lindsay Anderson; written by David Sherwin. A venerable hospital, celebrating its 500th anniversary and preparing for a visit from the Queen, becomes reduced to chaos as various factions within and without clash in an internecine struggle that Anderson obviously, all too obviously, intends as a metaphor of the condition of Britain herself and the world in general. Because of its nudity and violence and general air of cynical amorality, it has been classified by the U.S. Catholic Conference as O, Morally Offensive. The Motion Picture Association of America rating is R, Restricted.

"The Pirates of Penzance" (Universal) — This film adaptation of the hit New York stage version of the Gilbert and Sullivan classic has a fine cast headed by George Rose whose rendition of "a modern major general" is easily the best moment. Linda Ronstadt is also very good as Mabel and so is Kevin Kline as the pirate king. Good entertainment, though the movie is still too much stage-bound — the settings, for example, are stylized — and those who are not fervent Gilbert and Sullivan enthusiasts may start squirming in their seats about halfway through. The direction and adaptation are by Wilford Leach. The U.S. Catholic Conference has classified it A-I, General Patronage, and the Motion Picture Association rating is G, General Audiences.