

Factotum: Evelyn Leeper MT 1F-329 957-2070 mtgzy!ecl
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1. A number of people have complained recently that we neo-Labbies in Middletown are disenfranchised (look it up, Estes) from Bell

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Labs. The traditional Labs gets most of the Nobel Prizes but the real work of the corporation is done right here. Well, it is unlikely that we will be able to get the traditional Labbies to do anything practical, but we can go for the Stockholm trip ourselves. I propose we perform the following theoretical experiment in entropic exchange. Some of our members have read science fiction books. An overlapping set of members have green pieces of paper in their wallets and metallic disks in their pockets. This represents a highly ordered state of matter. I propose to get a bunch of such members together in MT 4A-217 on Wednesday, December 7. I intend to then monitor the exchange of books and green pieces of paper and disks of metal among our members and as we reach a higher entropic state I will measure carefully the exact changes of temperature in the room. I wish to use this data in a larger study which I will go into next week. I hope Stockholm will be paying attention.

2. Translation of the above: Middletown is having a book swap. For those who can't make it but do have books to get rid of, a few other suggestions for disposing of unwanted books had arrived to add to last week's list:

- Use them to even out tables with one short leg.
- Use them to snuff out small fires.
- Use them to ward off muggers (by throwing them with force).
- Stuff them between your desk and the wall so that small items won't fall in the crack.

[-ecl]

3. There is a tradition of telling ghost stories at Christmas time. I don't know how it got started, but it was one of the reasons that Dickens wrote A_C_h_r_i_s_t_m_a_s_C_a_r_o_l. In keeping with the tradition I

have always saved any ghost stories I could get for our last film fest before Christmas. Well, last year I showed my last two ghost stories. There just aren't that many ghost stories made. I figured I was going to have just a regular film fest this year. The odds are so low that I would acquire two ghost stories in one year. In fact, I got two and they are both well worth showing. On Thursday, December 7, at 7 PM we will show two strong mood pieces:

Our Last(?) Christmas Ghost Story Fest
CARNIVAL OF SOULS (1962) dir. by Herk Harvey
LADY IN WHITE (1988) dir. by Frank LaLoggia

CARNIVAL OF SOULS is a positively unique horror film. It was made for next to nothing in Lawrence, Kansas, and it proves how much can be done with a tiny budget. This is an eerie story of a woman whose brush with death seems to have put her in touch with intangible forces around her. They ran this film in my home town

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at 1 AM one morning following New Year's Eve. For years after that I used to talk about this great horror film nobody had ever seen. Finally it did start getting some v_e_r_y good critical comment. It spend years at the top of my video wantlist. Now it has shown up at last.

Ou second film surprised just about everyone when it came out this year. In fact, it is one of the best ghost stories ever made. Frank LaLoggia wrote and directed a powerful ghost story based on his reminiscences of childhood growing up in New England. The film supremely captures the feel of winter in New England. It combines a ghost story, a murder mystery, and a portrait of an Italian-American family. LaLoggia, who had made mostly low-budget horror films prior to this, proves himself to be a very fine craftsman.

4. The following books have been donated to the Holmdel branch of the library by Pat Palmer:

Card, Orson Scott WYRMS
Herbert, Frank & Brian MAN OF TWO WORLDS

5. Due to the numer of items we have for this week's issue, my 17-page Readercon con report will be postponed until next week's

issue. If you don't want to see it, then send us enough reviews and articles that we have no room then either! [-ecl]

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME: From the Big Bang to Black Holes
by Stephen W. Hawking
Bantam Books, April 1988
A book review by *Michael E. Lukacs*
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Capsule review: Hawking bells Schrodinger's Cat,
loads God's dice, and buries Arno Penzias in pigeon shit!

Rating: +3

Stephen W. Hawking is our generation's equivalent to Newton and Einstein, a brilliant mathematical physicist who is revolutionizing our views of the universe from cosmology to subatomics. I will not mention his disabilities. This is not a "He ran across Canada (very slowly) even though he had no legs!" story. Hawking has already been recognized by the establishment to the extent that among numerous other awards, he has inherited Isaac Newton's Chair at Cambridge. He is the best there is, with no headstarts needed. When such a world figure comes down from the mathematical and theoretical heights to write a popular press book explaining his theories it is an event of the first magnitude. (Imagine A_L_a_y_m_a_n'_s_G_u_i_d_e_t_o_G_e_n_e_r_a_l_R_e_l_a_t_i_v_i_t_y by Albert Einstein.) I doubt that this book would have happened if Hawking didn't need a lot of money just to stay alive.

About the book: It is too short. Too much of it is devoted to things that I already know (Doppler effect, Newton's laws, etc., etc.). Why do I feel bad about the above constraints? Because what Hawking writes about his own ideas and insights is precious. The book is very easily readable by the unmathematical. He vigorously avoids mathematical equations to the point that for one of the very few times in my life I wanted more. The ideas presented are as easy to read, but may require some thought to realize their full impact. In twelve words on page 59 he solves the paradox of Schrodinger's Cat, even though the paradox is never mentioned. Near the end of the book he rather explicitly destroys Aquinas' proof of the existence of God (Prime Cause) and reconciles the big bang with an eternal universe.

There are enough ideas in this short book to create hundreds of new hard science fiction stories, some of which might even be predictively accurate. I give it a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

ET, Go To the Opera!
Two opera reviews by Stephen Smoliar
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This past week provided me with exposure to two operas, both of which were fundamentally concerned with the extra-terrestrial. One was a production of 1_0_0_0_A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e_s_o_n_t_h_e_R_o_o_f, and the other was my acquisition of the compact disc of V_a_l_i_s. I do not know if it is "fair" to attempt to discuss these two works in a single article. However, given the element of commonality in their subject matter; I have come to identify these two experiences with each other in my own memory.

1_0_0_0_A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e_s_o_n_t_h_e_R_o_o_f is a collaboration of Philip Glass, who provided the music, David Henry Hwang, who wrote the text, and Jerome Sirlin, who was responsible for the theatrical design. There is no question that Sirlin's contribution is the most memorable. I have now seen his work on several occasions, and I have to acknowledge him as a true magician of projection equipment. In works such as, R_a_r_e_A_r_e_a, which he designed for George Coates, he can thoroughly transcend the confines of the performing area, leaving the viewer wondering if his eyes are deceiving him.

Indeed, a major reaction to anything Sirlin does is, "How did he do t_h_a_t?" Unfortunately, Glass and Hwang have provided so little to occupy the mind, that one can pretty much devote oneself to this question. Equally unfortunately, the staging of 1_0_0_0_A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e_s_o_n_t_h_e_R_o_o_f has forced Sirlin to show his hand rather soon ... say, within the first half hour of this 90-minute work. So after one has figured out the key to his tricks, there is very little left to do but endure Hwang's text.

In my opinion, this is asking too much. The text sounds as if it had been written with a sledge hammer. Everything is spelled out in brutal detail, usually three or more times over. Hwang has left absolutely nothing to the subtlety of imagination in his audience. As a result, the character who delivers his monologue becomes very boring very quickly. Since the focus of the story is that this character has been abducted by aliens who study others to learn more about themselves, one feels a little sorry that this is the particular fish they have pulled from the sea of humanity.

Behind all this we have a relatively innocuous Glass score. In the past I have observed that Glass tends to be only as good as his collaborators. E_i_n_s_t_e_i_n_o_n_t_h_e_B_e_a_c_h was a wonder of energy and tension; but I feel that this was due, to a large extent, to the extraordinary theatrical intuition of Robert Wilson. Fortunately, Glass knew how to create the musical environment for Wilson's ideas; and the result was some of the most memorable theatre I have ever seen. Hwang has really not given Glass very much to respond to; and, as a result,

Glass did not come up with much worth listening to.

There was, however, one virtue of the work which I must cite. In the recent past Glass' performing ensemble has exhibited an unfortunate tendency to try to blast their audiences out of their seats. Last year I wrote that I spent much of a "concert" screening of K_o_y_a_a_n_i_s_q_a_t_s_i holding my ears because the amplitude was unbearable. The presence of an actor on stage, even though her voice was amplified, obliged the musicians to cool it. So at least the overall balance was good, even if the result was not worthy of much attention.

One final remark: I have read references to the effect that 1_0_0_0 A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e_s_o_n_t_h_e_R_o_o_f was inspired by C_o_m_m_u_n_i_o_n, an allegedly non-fiction account of contact with extra-terrestrials. Having not read C_o_m_m_u_n_i_o_n, I do not know whether or not it constitutes an inspiration. Certainly, the teller of the tale in 1_0_0_0 A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e_s_o_n_t_h_e_R_o_o_f concludes by deciding NOT to tell others of the experiences. Since the author of C_o_m_m_u_n_i_o_n made the opposite decision, that constitutes at least one difference. However, since no acknowledgment to any sources was given in the program, I would be curious as to whether or not Hwang truly regards this work as original or if he is simply inheriting the unbearable ego of his mentor, Joseph Papp.

V_a_l_i_s is also very much a theatre work, although in this case the emphasis is much more on the use of video techniques. Having not seen a production, I cannot compare it with A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e_s as a performing experience. Given the disc, all I could do was focus my attention on the text and the musical setting, doing my best with the staging descriptions in the libretto.

On all counts, we are dealing with much more substantial material here. V_a_l_i_s is based on a novel by Philip K. Dick, adapted into an opera libretto by the composer, Tod Machover. Dick definitely had a much better way with words than Hwang exhibited, and Machover exhibited good judgment in selecting appropriate words for his theatrical setting. He was also able to take a reference to P_a_r_s_i_f_a 1 fundamental to the plot and incorporate it into his score with a subtlety which was definitely appealing. Thus, there is no doubt in my mind that listening to a recording of V_a_l_i_s is a far more satisfying experience than a full theatrical dose of 1_0_0_0 A_i_r_p_l_a_n_e_s_o_n_t_h_e

_ R_ o_ o_ f. Having said that,
however, I would like to point out a couple of things which were not all
that appealing.

I am probably betraying my age by saying that one of these
shortcomings was a lack of instrumental sounds. Machover has conceived
a timbrally lush score; and when he incorporates an _ h_ o_ m_ a_ g_ e to Wagner, he
does much better than pull off cheap tricks. Unfortunately, integral to
that HOMAGE are some synthetic emulations of string sounds; and I could
not help but wish that those sounds had been real ... particularly since
the Wagnerian tenor was both real and appealing. Having raised this
point, I must recognize that incorporating more musicians into such a

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production would probably have broken a budget which must have been
stretched to begin with. Nevertheless, I, personally, hope for greater
integration of instrumental and orchestral music, letting each resource
do what it does best rather than hanging itself on attempts at imitation
which are ultimately unsatisfying.

My other major misgiving was with many aspects of the setting of
the text. Much of it was quite stilted, and I found this quite
unfortunate. Dick's passages "read" with a rather natural, matter-of-
fact voice. It is the events he describes which are extraordinary, not
his act of relating those events. Thus, I found much of the expression
of the text to be incongruent with the text itself. There are, I
suspect, traditionalists out there who would argue that there has not
been a reasonable setting of English text since Benjamin Britten,
particularly in circumstances of opera; but I would dispute this.
Recent collaborations between Paul Dresher and Rinde Eckert, such as
_ S_ l_ o_ w_ F_ i_ r_ e, which I wrote about last season, are evidence that there are
still new and imaginative ways in which English text may be set.
However, in the immortal words of "Wild Man" Fisher, "It's a hard
business"; and the only way anyone is going to make any progress is to
keep trying. Besides, at least Machover went to the trouble to _ s_ e_ t his
text as part of the theatrical experience, which is more that Glass did
for Hwang.

THE WAGES OF FEAR
A film review by Mark R. Leeper
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Capsule review: A classic of tension and suspense that lives up to its reputation. This tale of trucking nitroglycerine over dirt roads had members of the audience leaning forward in their seats and gasping at what they saw on the screen. Rating: +3.

In Central America four men carry nitroglycerine over bumpy roads and pray that nothing sets their cargo off. _ T_ h_ e_ W_ a_ g_ e_ s_ o_ f_ F_ e_ a_ r (1953) is one of those film I had wanted to see for years but I really did not

expect to like it a lot. First of all, I had seen Clouzot's D_i_a_b_o_l_i_q_u_e and was not greatly impressed even though it is considered a sort of semi-classic. I'd seen too many similar films, mostly from Hammer Films. Now, I had seen S_o_r_c_e_r_o_r, William Friedkin's remake of T_h_e
W_a_g_e_s
o_f_F_e_a_r and thought it was an okay exercise in suspense. In some ways it was a better approach, telling more of the history of the four drivers, though it suffered from an overblown budget that got used on things like car chases unnecessary to the plot. I had also seen a similar film--I've forgotten the title--about trucking rocket fuel. So I knew that seeing the original, robbed of its novelty, could be a disappointment. Au contraire. T_h_e
W_a_g_e_s
o_f_F_e_a_r is a white-knuckle sort of suspense film.

Somewhere in Central America there is a town, probably one of many, that is a slow death trap. To leave takes money--a lot of money. But no job in town pays well enough to earn that kind of money, at least no job left. Those who cannot get jobs with the big American oil company are doomed by poverty to stay in the little town until they work themselves to death. But suddenly there is work. Four truck drivers are needed to haul nitroglycerine to a burning oil well and the oil company will pay \$2000 for a day's work for anyone crazy enough to go on what might be a suicide mission. Carrying nitro, every twist in the road, every pothole, every unforeseen bump, every mudhole becomes a death trap. This is film noir with a vengeance; every yard of unpaved road becomes an enemy trying to find one unwary moment to go for the kill. (If that sounds over-dramatic, see the film.) Each man reacts differently to the pressures: one is coldly efficient; one is sloppy and foolhardy, taking foolish risks; one is heroic; and one crumbles under the weight of fear.

Admittedly, there are some problems with T_h_e
W_a_g_e_s
o_f_F_e_a_r. It takes a little too long for the plot to get underway. The final moments of the film are hackneyed. There are scenes so absurd as to be humorous. For example, an oil company foreman demonstrates the power of nitro by throwing some on the floor of his office. But it is a film that works, and works well enough to get audible gasps from the audience. T_h_e
W_a_g_e_s
o_f_F_e_a_r is a classic that deserves to be. Rate it a +3 on the -4 to +4 scale.

WE THE LIVING
A film review by Mark R. Leeper

Capsule review: The history of this film is more intriguing than its plot. A melodrama based, without permission, on an Ayn Rand novel was first supported, then banned by the government of Il Duce. Set in post-Revolutionary Russia, the film tells the story of young Kira and the men in her life. Not much historic scope but a lavish film. Rating: +1.

In 1942 Italy was at war with the Allies in more ways than one. Without permission or legal rights they thumbed their noses held by the enemy. They started writing their own F_l_a_s_h_G_o_r_d_o_n comic strips, hiring for the task two young unknown Italian cartoonists, one of whom was Federico Fellini, who later was to have some association with the film industry. Also without permission, and certainly in direct opposition to her philosophy, the state appropriated film rights to Ayn Rand's semi-autobiographical first novel, W_e_t_h_e_L_i_v_i_n_g. Goffredo Alessandrini adapted the anti-Communist novel into a film. N_o_i_V_i_v_i(W_e_t_h_e_L_i_v_i_n_g) played for about five months before a reportedly furious Mussolini decided the film was an argument against any totalitarian government and had the film banned. In 1968, after much effort, lawyers for Ayn Rand found a copy of the film in a vault outside Rome. Ms.~Rand, not happy with the original film, re-edited it and redubbed parts. W_e_t_h_e_L_i_v_i_n_g is now having its first United States release.

It would be nice to report, as is usually the case when an old "lost film" is discovered, that it is a wonderful classic that we are all culturally poorer for for having been deprived of all these years. It may have been true of Gance's N_a_p_o_l_e_o_n; it is patently not true of W_e_t_h_e_L_i_v_i_n_g. The re-released film is only a moderately enjoyable melodrama made with some of the faulty conventions but also some of the cinematic artistry of the period. That means it's no C_i_t_i_z_e_n_K_a_n_e, but it stacks up really well next to A_l_i_e_n_N_a_t_i_o_n.

In post-Revolutionary Russia, Kira's family of ex-aristocrats returns to the city they will always call Petrograd and take up residence in a few rooms of what used to be their house. Young Kira (played by Alida Valli) has no respect for anyone who works for the new Soviet government. She rebuffs the advances of her cousin Victor, a loyal Party member, and instead has a monthly rendezvous with Leo (played by Rossano Brazzi), the son of a famous counter-revolutionary. The police are looking for Leo and Kira is nearly pulled into trouble with him. Yet unbidden, people in high places seem to intervene in her behalf. One of Kira's unbidden saviors is Andrei (played by Fosco Giachetti), an inspector for the GPU security police, who seems anxious to reunite the two lovers. This is the beginning of a story that spans

several years in the lives of Kira, Leo, and Andrei, a story involving politics and crime, love and death.

_ W_ e_ t_ h_ e_ L_ i_ v_ i_ n_ g was made at a time when great care was taken to compose scenes visually. A vast number of Soviet propaganda posters were somehow obtained (or perhaps invented) for the filming. Yet not everything makes sense as it was filmed. One wonders how in an economy of shortages, Kira is always able to wear lipstick and eye makeup flawlessly applied. In one scene the characters come into a warm building from the snow, yet the snow on their shoulders refuses to melt.

Ayn Rand's stories always seem to be overblown melodramas, having larger-than-life characters who refuse to capitulate to the demands of society. And the stories usually culminate in the hero making an impassioned speech of Rand's personal philosophy that society tries to tear down the individual as a sort of dubious benefit to an undeserving multitude. This version of _ W_ e_ t_ h_ e_ L_ i_ v_ i_ n_ g is no exception, however the speech seems to make little sense in the context of the film. And the speech scene is quite noticeably one of those scenes that were re-dubbed. One wonders if in the original the speech was so noticeable a non sequitur.

_ W_ e_ t_ h_ e_ L_ i_ v_ i_ n_ g is diverting fare, but falls well short of being a classic. Still, it is valuable as an artifact of World War II history as well as film history and a reminder of what films used to be. Rate it a +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

