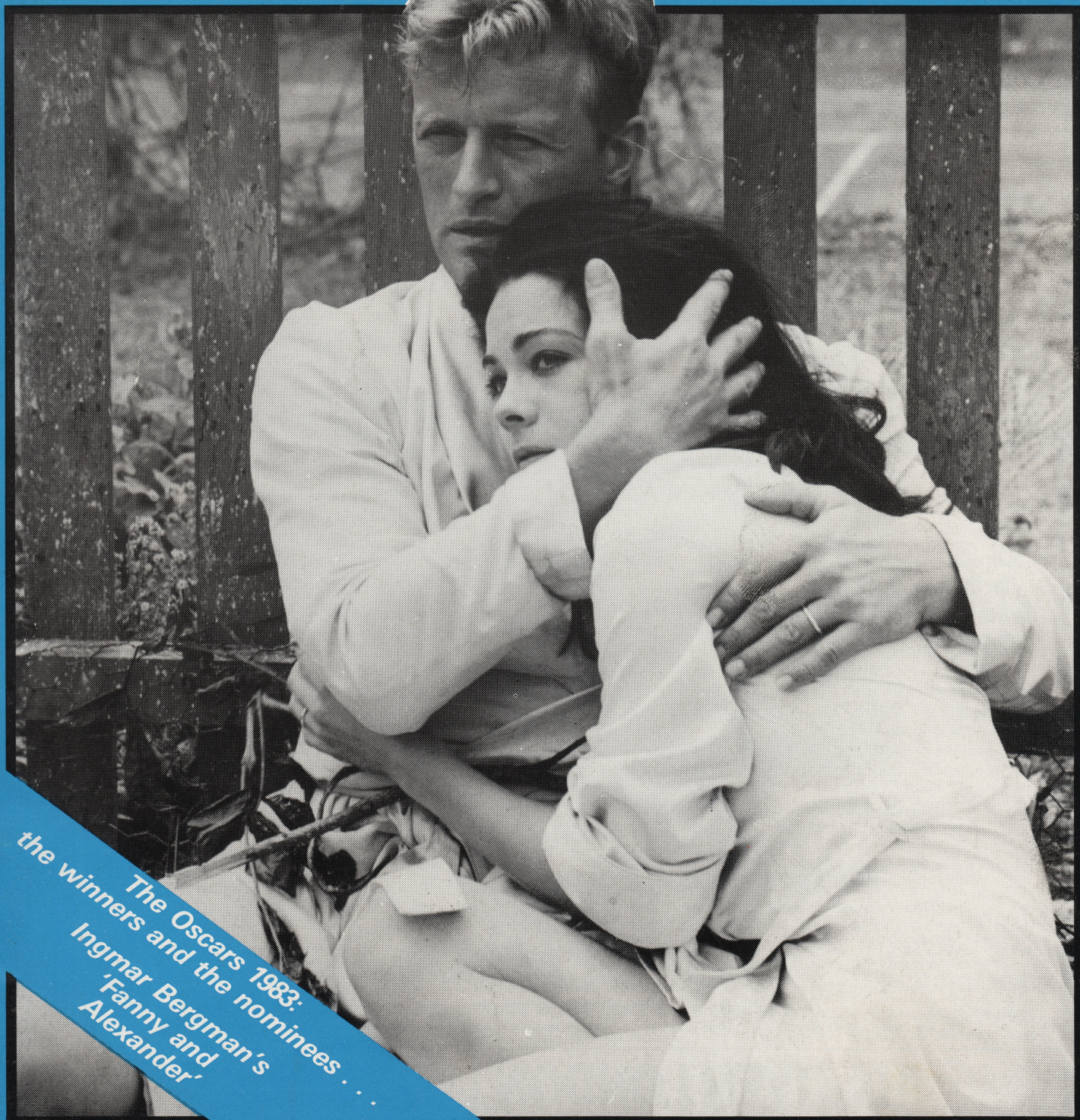


films

edited by robin bean

on screen and video



The Oscars 1983:
the winners and the nominees...
Ingmar Bergman's
'Fanny and
Alexander'

JON VOIGHT'S Self Discovery • JULIE WALTERS interviewed • RAYMOND DURGNAT on Social Structures •
MARILYN MONROE — the myth and the musical • Picture previews of Nicolas Roeg's EUREKA, the controversial
BAD BOYS, Bergman's FANNY AND ALEXANDER • plus 'films on video'

they wish to make 'a strong statement on the legal system'. In other words, they want to have their cake and eat it. To make sure we are in doubt as to their intentions they hire as their star the celebrated one-man vigilante committee Mr. Charles Bronson, whose original *Death Wish* stated the case effectively and with considerable force, and who has been ringing variations on the theme ever since.

This time he plays Leo Kessler, a sergeant in the Los Angeles homicide division, driven to distraction by the attitude of his new partner Paul McAnn (Andrew Stevens) a graduate in criminology whose cautious, not to say conciliatory ways with criminals become a thorn in Kessler's hide (I quote the synopsis). When he narrows down the suspects for the murder of a friend of his daughter's and then for the brutal slaying of the girl's flatmate, to Warren, one of her co-workers, the young man is able to elude the sergeant's trapping questions and to make him lose his temper.

Then Warren finds out the identity of Kessler's daughter Laurie and begins a series of obscene phone calls to harass her, with the result that her father plants incriminating evidence in Warren's apartment. His action is discovered and Kessler discharged from the force in disgrace.

You don't have to be a fan of Bronson's to

predict the outcome and at the Press Show I attended a round of clapping from one of the more emotionally inclined journalists as the final shot is fired demonstrated that J. Lee Thompson's message had struck home in at least one quarter. He has come a long way in the facility with which he can glamorise violent crime since the underrated and effective way he showed the murder business for what it is — sleazy and tragic — in *Yield To The Night* a long generation ago.

Now every killing of each beautiful girl has to be dwelt on in loving close-up, and lest there be any lingering doubt about its glamour, Warren strips naked to pursue his victims: Gene Davis has an excellent physique on which we have considerable leisure to dwell and gives a telling performance as the psychopath, which is more than can be said about the star of the film. Never has Bronson's limitation as an actor been more apparent; a puffy scowl in all he can muster to cover every emotion. Lisa Eilbacher plays gutsily in trying circumstances as daughter Laurie, and Andrew Stevens, with a generous share of mother Connie's good looks, represents moderation as if he really cares. The film to me represents one more horror for the headsman's axe.

ERIC BRAUN

The Executioner's Song

Directed by Lawrence Schiller; Produced by Lawrence Schiller; Screenplay by Norman Mailer; Director of Photography, Freddie Francis; Editors, Richard A. Harris and Tom Rolf; Art Director, Keigh Hein. A Film Communications Inc Production, distributed by Virgin Films and Video. American. Colour. Cert. 15. 130 mins.

Gary Gilmore, TOMMY LEE JONES; Brenda Nicol, CHRISTINE LAHTI; Nicole Baker, ROSANNA ARQUETTE; Vern Damico, ELI WALLACH; Larry Samuels, STEPHEN KEATS; Johnny Nicol, JORDAN CLARKE; Earl Dorius, RICHARD VENTURE; April Baker, JENNY WRIGHT.

TELLING THE story of notorious American criminal Gary Gilmore, *The Executioner's Song* isn't a particularly great film but it still gets to us because of its subject matter. Gilmore was the man who, in 1976, achieved a perverse kind of fame when he demanded that his death sentence be carried out, making him the first person to be executed in America for ten years. Not long after being released on parole after serving 12 years for armed robbery, Gilmore cold-bloodedly murdered two gas pump attendants. It was his death-wish which singled him out from other killers. Was it an act of courage to choose the firing squad rather than live out his life in prison, a final moral request, or cowardice in seeking a quick and easy way out?

The Executioner's Song doesn't — can't — answer these questions; as far as I know Gilmore never explained his decision to anyone. But the writer Norman Miller (basing the screenplay on his massive Pulitzer Prize-winning book) and the producer-director Lawrence Schiller may have gotten closer to the truth than anyone else who knew him. Schiller, a photojournalist and TV producer, met Gilmore during his stay of execution (and acquired the all-important rights) and Mailer sifted through hundreds of interviews. They may not have discovered what it was like to be looking through Gary Gilmore's eyes — to coin a phrase from the punk song by The Adverts — but they must have found out what other people saw when looking at him and living with him.

Although the movie has no clear-cut standpoint, neither condemning nor glorifying Gilmore's actions, it seems to be suggesting

that he upheld his right to die because of a moral self-knowledge — that he would always be a criminal. The way Tommy Lee Jones plays him, he is a man who gets a second chance but blows it because of something inherently evil in his nature. When the picture picks up the story, after his release on parole, he seems to have a certain decency, particularly in his love for a simple girl (Rosanna Arquette) who has been married many times and has two kids. She says that she doesn't want to sleep with him but he woos her. In this scene Jones makes all the poetic nonsense about his feelings for her as his guardian angel, which could be a put-on, sound genuine. He has a hard, pockmarked, brutish face but there's warmth in his eyes; it is this quality which makes him a difficult actor to cast but one that fits this role well.

When love turns to blows and Gilmore sinks back into crime, the film is at its best. Schiller tightens the suspense to a steel cord and we dread what we know is going to happen — that Gilmore is going to kill two men without reason or remorse. (He robs them but doesn't need to kill them). The first murder we don't see: Gilmore leads his victim into the men's room, forces him to lay face down on the floor, points his gun and fires. We hear the shots but we don't see the bullets going in. Nor do we see them going in the second time, but we do see the innocent man's body gushing out blood and his poor, distressed wife clinging to him. It is meant to appall us and it does. Up until this point the movie has been showing us Gary's story, his better points, but now it wipes them away — to show a cold, brutal killer. When he goes to the firing squad at the end, not everyone will condone the method or idea of capital punishment, but there seems to be justice in it — justice which, perhaps, Gilmore knew should be seen to be done.

The Executioner's Song has been cut down to a 130-minute film from a four-hour television programme. Although it isn't in conventional TV style (it has fair splatterings of blood, four-letter words and nudity), it must still have lost a great deal in transit. The last third, in which Gilmore is sentenced and serves

his last days in prison, seems too loosely structured, as if most of the lost footage was taken out there.

The use of a character to play Schiller's role in the real life Gary Gilmore story — renamed Larry Samuels and played by bearded Stephen Keats — isn't very successful. The idea of someone wanting to make a film about a character in a film gives it a jazzed-up feeling, a bit of back-slapping, since we know that the film being talked about is the film we are in fact watching. And Keats seems even more ambiguous a character than Gilmore himself. When he stands witness at the execution, is it money we see in his eyes or a deeper compassion? There's an effective touch, though, when he doesn't quite block off his ears in time to avoid hearing the gunshots. These shots — and the fact that Gilmore requested that they be carried through — ring out in our minds long after the film is over. Like the best movies of its kind, *The Executioner's Song* certainly leaves you thinking.

SIMON BUTTON

The Evil Dead

Written and directed by Samuel M. Raimi; Produced by Robert G. Tapert; Executive producers Samuel M. Raim and Bruce Campbell; Director of Photography, Tim Philo. Editor, Edna Ruth Paul. Special Make-up effects created by Tom Sullivan. Supervisor of Photographic Effects Bart Pierce. A Renaissance Pictures Production Ltd and Robert Tapert Production of Samuel Raimi Film. Distributed by Palace Pictures. American. Color. Cert. 18. 85 mins.

Ash, BRUCE CAMPBELL; Cheryl, ELLEN SANDWEISS; Linda, BETSY BAKER; Scott, HAL DELRICH and Shelley, SARAH YORK.

THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE in Gruelling Terror: You are about to see a film designed to pull scream after scream from the base of your spine and from the depths of your soul! I quote from the posters which date back in effect to the original version *The Cat and The Canary* — and I must admit I couldn't like it more. The glaring headlines, I mean; and what is more, for once they are justified. Well, almost. I didn't consciously utter even a tiny scream, and neither did those around me, who added up to maybe three senior citizens, as I viewed *The Evil Dead* at another dear old Odean scheduled for demolition — this time Malcolm Webb's picture palace in Hounslow is on the hit list and will surely have bitten the dust by the time this review appears, ironically, Sam Raimi's film is of the ilk to have won his approval, reared as he (Malcolm) was on a diet of Grade Z movies with titles like *Invasion of the Planet Venus by the Crab Men From Outer Space*. In those days movies were unable to live up to their portentous titles. today, with the relaxation of censorship (for '18' read 'H') and the advance of the special effects departments they really can. And in this case, they do.

The setting is familiar; a group of young people stranded in a deserted house, deep in an eerie wood. The spirit of evil inhabits not only the house itself but the wood; the very trees and bushes have taken on the character of those who have died there and an encounter with horrendous forces that dwell in cellars and walls is the signal for personalities to change from Jekyll to Hyde before our very eyes, to melt, transmogrify, disintegrate in a manner that, even if we don't actually scream — which is as well, in view of the cacophonous shrieks and gibberings going up there on the screen — we do experience an escalating series of nasty turns, some of them being involuntary averting of one's head from the explicit mayhem that

Cheryl (Ellen Sandweiss) . . . imprisoned and hungry, in 'The Evil Dead', directed by Samuel Raimi containing 'an escalating series of nasty turns . . .'

achieves the authentic effect of nightmare to keep you riveted to the spot, no matter how hard you try to escape.

The boys and girls involved are not a particularly attractive bunch; neither are their amatory groupings of much interest, while the lady who persists in wandering alone deeper and deeper into the heart of the Wicked Wood almost seems to be asking for what she gets — in this case gang rape from a mass of trees and branches with very nasty habits. To make it more confusing, the girls are in a couple of cases so alike it becomes difficult to tell which face is turning into which, or which murderous venomous hag is straining to burst her chains in the cellar, particularly as the acting talents involved can most kindly be described as sub-zero. But it matters not; the special effects are terrific; the Tennessee locations, with the opening swamp sequences shot in Michigan, provide the perfect setting for what amounts to a progression to ultimate annihilation, so personalities really don't matter. What does it that the three young men who set out to produce a new type of horror film — Raimi, Tapert and Bruce Campbell, who also stars as Ash, the most clearly defined of the two young men — babes, indeed, with a combined age of less than sixty, have succeeded brilliantly, and obviously on a shoestring, in achieving their aim, to 'shock, jolt and amuse the experienced horror moviegoer.'

Who could ask for anything more? After all, *The Evil Dead* soon rose to the top of the charts in the company of movies which must have cost twenty times more. We await their next feature *Relentless* with baited breath.

ERIC BRAUN

Basket Case

Directed by and original screenplay by Frank Henenlotter; Produced by Edgar Evans; Executive Producers Arnie Bruck and Tom Kaye; Director of Photography, Bruce Torbet; Music by Gus Russo; Make-up by Kevin Haney and John Cagliione Jr. Distributed by Alpha. American. Colour. Cert. 18 (X). 90 mins.

Duane Bradley, KEVIN VAN HENTENRYCK; Sharon, TERRI SUSAN SMITH; Casey, BEVERLY BONNER; Hotel Manager, ROBERT VOGEL; Doctors, DIANA BROWNE; LLOYD PACE and BILL FREEMAN.

IN THE sleazy part of Manhattan a young man walks through Times Square carrying a large wicker basket and checks into an exceedingly squalid hotel. It soon becomes apparent that there is something exceedingly nasty and violent in the basket, with appalling table manners. Years before a doctor has performed an exceedingly gruesome operation to separate the young man from his alter ego-twin, a misshapen creature with a startling resemblance to Mr. Cube. So now young Duane carries his relative everywhere and encourages him to carve up the people responsible for the separation, in an exceedingly blood-curdling way.

To show his gratitude Mr. Cube slakes his sexual appetites (as crude as his eating habits) on brother Duane's girlfriend and then turns on his devoted sibling to despatch him in an exceedingly exhibitionist and indeed ludicrous way.

If all this doesn't make you throw up it may reduce you to paroxysms of laughter, and if you enjoyed *The Baby* or *Eraserhead* it may please you exceedingly. Me, I found the whole thing exceedingly crude, quite dreadfully acted and tedious. In a word, excessive.

ERIC BRAUN



The Wicked Lady

Directed by Michael Winner; Produced by Menahem Golan and Yoram Globus; Screenplay by Leslie Arliss and Michael Winner, additional dialogue by Gordon Glennon and Aimee Stuart from the book *Life and Death of The Wicked Lady Skelton* by Magdalen King-Hall; Director of photography, Jack Cardiff; Editor, Arnold Crust; Art director, John Blezzard; Music, Tony Banks; Stunt Co-ordinator, Marc Boyle. A Golan-Globus production for Cannon, distributed by Columbia. British. Colour. Cert. '18'. 97 mins.

Lady Barbara Skelton, FAYE DUNAWAY; Captain Jerry Jackson, ALAN BATES, Hogarth, SIR JOHN GIELGUD; Sir Ralph Skelton, DENHOLM ELLIOTT; Lady Kingsclere, PRUNELLA SCALES; Kit Locksby, OLIVER TOBIAS; Caroline, GLYNIS BARBER; Aunt Agatha, JOAN HICKSON; Moll Skelton, HELENA MCCARTHY; Doll Skelton, MOLLIE MAUREEN; Lord Kingsclere, DEREK FRANCIS; Jackson's girl, MARINA SIRTIS; Ned Cotterell, NICHOLAS GECKS; Uncle Martin, HUGH MILLAIS; Lord Marwood, DERMOT WALSH; King Charles II, MARK BURNS and Nell Gwynne, TERESA CODLING.

CENSORSHIP and *The Wicked Lady* seem to have an attraction for each other. The 1945 version with Margaret Lockwood and James Mason directed by Leslie Arliss for Gainsborough ran into censorship problems in the States due to Ms. Lockwood's décolletage, and the offending scenes were reportedly reshot for that market so that 'decency' could prevail. No such problems faced the film in Britain, where it became the highest grossing British film of that year. Now comes Michael Winner's remake which immediately ran into trouble with the British censor who wanted to make extensive cuts in a whip fight between two ladies (Faye Dunaway and Marina Sirtis). Winner immediately mounted a massive campaign against the censor . . . and won. The extraordinary thing is why the censor should have wanted cuts since it is a sequence crucial to the story and the title character, and is in no way sensationalised; it really is a very much matter-of-fact in the way it is handled and

totally justifiable. Winner won the admiration of the top figures in the British film industry. Whether the film will equal the box-office success of the original is yet to be seen, but it is an ambitious and praiseworthy work, skilfully executed and lavish in its 17th century detail.

Based on Magdalen King-Hall's *The Life and Death of the Wicked Lady Skelton*, it basically is the story of Lady Skelton (Faye Dunaway) who marries the groom to be of her best friend, becomes bored with life in the country and after humiliation in a card game during which she stakes her broach on the turn of a card, and loses, decided to retrieve it . . . by becoming a highwaywoman. This 'new life' attracts her and only the trusted family servant (an excellent performance from John Gielgud) suspects her 'double life'. She promises to repent, then decides to poison the old boy, but it takes some doing. In the meantime, she has met up with famous highwayman Captain Jackson (Alan Bates), whose rough charm is as appealing to her as her life of crime for fun. Though when she finds him with another woman she betrays him to the authorities and he is sentenced to be hanged at Tyburn. It is at this point, as he dangles from the rope, that the realistic whip fight breaks out, allowing Jackson's followers to cut him down and everyone gathers around the fighting females as if watching a cockfight. Revenge, unmasking and retribution face the Lady in a fast moving climax.

The most outstanding feature of *The Wicked Lady* is a stunning recreation of the period, which sweeps you into a bygone era with a wistfulness that is quite captivating. The attention to detail, to costumes, the sumptuous interiors is meticulous, aided by the outstanding photography of Jack Cardiff — you almost feel you could freeze one of his