



## DEATH WARMED UP

Director: David Blyth

The opening ten minutes of David Blyth's new film have all the virtues one associates with the director's *Circadian Rhythms*: the early scenes of rushing along Auckland's motorways and ominous 'fencers' have been replaced by Michael Hurst's spring through Auckland Domain and the acts of violence which follow. Michael Glock's brilliantly high tech sets and Mark Nicholas's score make their effect felt and the first exchange

between Gary Day and David Weatherly suggest that Michael Heath's script is going to deal us a nice line in tongue-in-cheek high dramatics.

As the film progresses, alas, this sense of cohesion dissipates. Too many questions remain unanswered about this latter-day Kiwi Dr Moreau. Bruno Lawrence slobbers with the best of 'em as chief mutant and David Letch is the ultimate in tight-lipped villainy, but their energy alone cannot carry the film.

*Death Warmed Up* tries for a black humour that doesn't always come off. Droll touches such as a nurse being splattered with gore during an operation are infinitely less amusing on repetition, and Jonathan Hardy's cameo as an Indian dairy-owner comes across as an unfunny and irrelevant piece

of racism.

Most of the flaws in *Death Warmed Up* were also present in Blyth's first feature, *Angel Mine*. Hopefully, the director will eventually find a more worthy vehicle for his evident cinematic flair.

## BLAME IT ON RIO

Director: Stanley Donen

The promotional slogans for Michael Caine's new film would suggest that it is very much in the vein of his 1983 hit, *Educating Rita* — "From *Rita* to *Rio* Caine is having girl trouble again". To cheer up, or perhaps warn the armchair set, it also promises that "you're never too old to be crazy".

Although it all sounds rather silly, *Blame it on Rio* has a certain gangling charm and the presence of Stanley Donen, whose previous

work includes films like *Charade*, *Lucky Lady* and the brilliant *Two for the Road*, ensures that it has an agreeable sophistication and sureness of style. It doesn't achieve the heights of *Two for the Road* as Larry Gelbart's *Rio* script, itself a few notches below his previous writing for *Tootsie*, lacks the superb literateness of Frederick Raphael's script for the earlier film.

Perhaps *Rio* is a little too cynical for its own good. Michael Caine's problems as a middle-aged husband seduced by his friend's young daughter might seem a classic case of male wish-fulfilment, but Michelle Johnson's buxom lass certainly goes into it all with her eyes wide open. It's very much the playing of Caine and Johnson that gives the film its class, Donen borrowing a device

from Caine's debut *Alfie* as both characters comment on the action and their attitudes directly to the camera.

One final word. Donen started his career in the palmy days of the MGM musical — *Nancy Goes to Rio* and all that. Looking around the opulently lush Brazilian settings of *Blame it on Rio* with nearly every scene dominated by exotic tropical birds, one can detect the same spirit.

## GREYSTOKE

Director: Hugh Hudson

Hudson's first film since the phenomenally popular *Chariots of Fire* takes Edgar Rice Burrough's classic tale as yet another opportunity of examining the difficulties of becoming British.

*Greystoke* offers two alternative visions of life: the first, set in

the jungles of Cameroon, has a lithe Christopher Lambert amongst his Primate family, everything caught in a series of elaborate tableaux, stunningly conveyed by John Alcott's camerawork. The other part of the film concerns Lambert's confrontations with Edwardian British society.

This is an elaborately conceived film of cultural parallels that do not always succeed. Too much (the brief scene at the West African mission, Lambert's relationship with the marvellous Andie MacDowell) remains tantalisingly sketchy. Ralph Richardson as the old Earl, in a performance that manages to be both noble and feisty, seems to attain the precision that the film itself doesn't quite achieve.

William Dart

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have been better off with R.E.M. than Lionel Ritchie.

"I see what you mean. Someone like Muddy Waters would have been a far better representative if that was what they wanted (Muddy, unfortunately, has been indisposed of late — RB). I don't feel like we're apologists or representatives of America but we live here and I think most of our musical inspirations come from here."

You're a very American band.

"Yeah — it's funny, we didn't plan it that way. I mean, I listen to a lot of English music — and African music for that matter."

Some critics have been comparing you to the new English big guitar groups like U2 and Big Country. What do you think of those groups?

"Umm ... I ... like U2. Big Country, y'know, I don't know enough about them. I sometimes have my doubts about the new optimistic or whatever bands with their preaching lyrics but I'd rather be lumped in with them than Journey or Styx."

Was the finished sound on *Murmur* a happy accident or did you know specifically what you wanted?

"We knew what we wanted when we went in. We weren't sure whether we were capable of it — it was the first time we'd been able to record in a studio where we could sit for more than three hours. But I think at that point the band had a focus — we knew what we wanted to do, we had the songs and we knew we wanted to short-circuit the typical

rock 'n' roll thing of having the first album sound like the live show, we didn't want to present a jigsaw puzzle. It didn't come out nearly as good as it should have. If we'd had another week in the studio it would have been about 10 times better, but ..."

Was there ever a problem playing those songs to audiences who had only heard the record?

"No. Basically the energy level when we play is pretty high. You lose some of the subtleties, it's more of a rock 'n' roll celebration. I know it shocked some people because it was that much rowdier but the songs translate well and extra energy is good for a live show. We basically built our reputation live and the records came out later. We're real comfortable on stage, as far as taking chances, trying new things, being a good band."

The Reverend Howard Finster designed the cover of *Reckoning* and the video for 'Radio Free Europe' was filmed at his place. From what I've read he sounds a pretty amazing character.

"Well I'm an atheist, so it's nothing to do with God, he's an amazing man, he almost makes me believe him. He's an 65-year-old, self-ordained minister who had a vision of the Virgin Mary or something that told him to make holy folk art to bring God into the world. He only sleeps about 15 minutes a day, in cat-naps, and he paints, draws and sculpts almost round the clock. And if a kid comes by his house with a broken bicycle he'll fix the bicycle because he thinks that bringing any good

thing into this troubled world will bring God closer to the Earth. Some of his ideas are hard to stomach, like he believes he's from another planet and he was sent here to heal the Earth. But you almost believe him, he's such a wonderful man. He's actually building a church himself, by hand. He's just an interesting person and if nothing else we felt an affinity towards him because he's an eccentric Southern guy who's on his own and being successful."

How did you meet him? Through Michael's art connections?

"We've all met him because he gives speeches around Athens, at his exhibitions and so on — even in New York and Europe. We met him through seeing his shows and it came about that we thought we should go down to his place and shoot a video there. We did it and got to know him and he did the record cover and designed one of our T-Shirts."

He's got a couple of records of his own, hasn't he?

"Yeah. It's a really neat kind of country thing, where he plays the banjo and sings these songs that come to him in dreams."

The *Reckoning* artwork could be seen as bloody-minded. For instance, nowhere are the songs listed in their correct running order, not even on the insert.

"Yeah, sometimes we maybe bend over a little too far backwards but I'm just tired of seeing these records with covers that look like they've been made by a corporation in Los Angeles, like every other cover. The idea is that when you listen to one of our records

it's like opening a door to a place you've never been before, normal rules don't apply. We get away with it with the record company. Sometimes it makes it confusing for people to figure out what the hell the song's called, who plays on what, but that's okay, the music should sell the record."

You're still based in Athens. Do you see a day when you'll have to move to somewhere like New York?

"Not really. I don't like big cities, except for business. I think if I was living in a big city it would make it too hard for us to sit around and play, do what we do. I prefer to stay in a real small, quiet town, a kind of backwater. It gives you time to create, to live. It's pretty ideal for us."

For all he loves the small town life Buck also enjoys touring and he professes a keen desire to visit this part of the world as soon as possible — which looks as if it's not going to be until around January next year. If the two live tracks I've heard from a British EP are anything to go by the performances will be worth waiting for — the blistering, careering half-intelligible version of '9-9' in particular adds a new dimension.

If some of what Buck says reads a little naively then that's not the way it strikes the ear. He's confident, intelligent sounding — sounds like the sort of man whose judgement you'd trust. In fact, R.E.M. sound like a band you can trust.

Russell Brown

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