

TWILIGHT ZONE: THE MOVIE
Directors: Steven Spielberg, George Miller, etc.

The original *Twilight Zone* was a 1959 television series, in which Rod Serling hosted a collection of various offbeat tales — a series in the same genre as *The Outer Limits* or even *The Alfred Hitchcock Hour*. Now, riding the wave of television nostalgia, Spielberg and his associates, who include George (Mad Max II) Miller, have brought four of these original tales to the cinema screen.

Of course what worked on the small screen in 1959 doesn't necessarily make the transition to the big screen almost 25 years later. Cinema audiences are a little more sophisticated than the television fans of a quarter-of-a-century ago. Take the rather pat morality tale of the opening sequence, for instance, with the raving suburban bigot being forced to endure a taste of his own medicine at the hands of the Nazis, Klu Klux Klan and, finally, irony of ironies, from stoned American soldiers in Vietnam: this seems a little on the simplistic side. On the other hand the opening sequence, in which a casual sing-along while driving along a country road is transformed into a moment of bizarre horror, seems far more in line with the zeitgeist of the 80s.

Two contributions stand out. One is Spielberg's wry tale set in an old folk's home, where the residents are all given the chance to be young again, but finally opt for reality. The message that it's better to be young at heart may be trite, but Spielberg's handling of the material is so deft that it maintains a real charm and light humour throughout.

Joe Dante's segment deals with the less innocent aspects of childhood: an evil child exercises his power over a small group of people trapped in a decidedly gothic mansion. Richly satiric, with its targets ranging from junk food to television, this is a menacing comic book come to life, put together with a nice sense of sur-



John Lithgow, distraught airline passenger, 'Twilight Zone'.

realism and a real visual flair. And there's enough jolts to make your popcorn jump in your lap a few times.

EDUCATING RITA

Director: Lewis Gilbert

When I saw *Educating Rita* on the West End stage in early 1981, it was a sharply-drawn two-hander about a working-class girl's confrontation with a cynical, older university lecturer, played by Julie Walters and Mark Kingston, respectively.

Willy Russell's screenplay has opened out and modified his original play. To start with, Michael Caine is a good deal younger than Kingston, which brings the story more within the sphere of a conventional love story. Other characters are introduced. Some, like Maureen Lipman's portrait of Rita's dizzily insecure room-mate Trish, are crisply observed. Many, such as Caine's colleagues and students, are crude to the point of caricature.

Gilbert is a workmanlike director. His career has had some sensitive films like the 1961 *Greengage Summer* or *Alfie* (with Michael Caine) five years later, but there have also been a spate of jingoistic World War Two stiff-upper-lip epics and some latterday James Bond flicks. *Educating Rita* bounces along quite merrily, although the sentimentality and grudging class-consciousness outwear their welcome at times.

There are a few moments which seem to show a really serious and human issue trying to make itself felt: the first is when Rita's mum is stifling her tears at a pub singa-

long, realising how her life has been unfulfilled. The second is Trish's bitter recriminations in the hospital after her attempted suicide. More of this, and *Educating Rita* would have been a much tougher social document. William Dart

STRATA

Director: Geoff Steven

Only recently Peter Munz defined the dilemma of New Zealand visual arts as that of being either eclectic or parochial. As in painting, so in film, it seems. Yet, whereas it was the small-town "truth" of Steven's earlier *Skin Deep* that gave the film its charm and character, *Strata's* deliberate "international anonymity" works against the material's considerable potential.

Strata has the air of an unrealised project. The script is hinting so determinedly at wider issues, that it never homes in on the drama of the situation in hand. The two groups of characters (those around the volcanologist and the five refugees) never really interact and unconvincingly scripting even manages to get a tentative performance from such an old hand as Nigel Davenport. Local actors fare even worse, and the only character to register with any effect is Ctibor Turba's enigmatic Thomas.

Mike Nock's tinklings seem to be yet another misguided attempt to give the film an international gloss, but Leon Narbey's evocative shots of the volcanic terrain are breathtaking. Alas, the landscape is far more eloquent than the characters trapped on it.

Forth-Coming FILMS

Twilight Zone ... wunderkind Steven Spielberg got together fellow directors John Landis, Joe Dante and George (Mad Max) Miller to make a tribute to Rod Serling's classic 50s TV series of the same name. Each directs one chilling story in this four-part story. Starts Jan 27.

Wargames ... teen computer whizz David Lightman tries to break into the computer system of a video games company so he can play the games before they go on the market. Instead, he gets into the US Defence Dept's system and gets involved in a game called Global Destruction. Only it's not a game. Starts Dec.

National Lampoon's Vacation ... Chevy Chase stars as an average American Dad who plans his family's cross-country holiday to the last detail on his home computer. Nothing can go wrong. But it does — with a vengeance. Starts Dec 9.

Spring Break ... you know the sort of thing — Porky's goes to the Beach. Starts Feb.

Staying Alive ... Travolta is back in his *Saturday Night Fever* role and directed this time by Sylvester Stallone. If in doubt, go back to what worked. Starts Jan 6.

Trading Places ... the scheming employers of Louis Winthorpe III (Dan Aykroyd) send him into poverty and pick up from the streets black petty crim Billy Ray Valentine (Eddie Murphy) to see what befalls them in a "nature vs. nurture" experiment. The two meet and discover what has happened. Starts Feb 10.

Brainstorm ... a machine capable of recording every physical, emotional and intellectual sensation experienced by an individual by linking into the brain has been developed. Stars Christopher Walken, Natalie Wood (her last film), Louise Fletcher and Cliff Robertson. Starts Feb 10.

WILLIAM DART BEST OF '83

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S SEX COMEDY

Woody Allen is in Bergman territory once again as he presents a gently ironic comedy of manners set in a New York country house at the turn of the century. Immaculately played by the three couples, with Mia Farrow and Mary Steenburgen particularly impressive, Allen's film manages to encompass everything from a Mendelssohn score to an unexpected reference to Spielberg's *E.T.* The only question is: How long do we have to wait for Allen's *Zelig*?

CREEPSHOW

George A Romero takes time off from his Living Dead trilogy (the Zombie equivalent of Lucas' *Star Wars*?) to make this portmanteau of grim tales. A clever script from Stephen King and some marvellously broad performances (most notably from John Carpenter's wife Adrienne Barbeau) underline the edge humour of the piece.

ATOMIC CAFE

Atomic Cafe is a documentary collage of propaganda footage from the 50s and 60s about the atom bomb. It's the blackest of comedies — one alternately chuckles, squirms and shivers at the film's mixture of the naive and the horrific. The soundtrack is a gem. Where else could you hear Lowell Blanchard's 'Jesus Hits like an Atom Bomb' or Jackie Doll and his Pickled Peppers singing 'When they Drop the Bomb'.

HEAT AND DUST

Heat and Dust seems to be James Ivory's most successful film to date in portraying the delicate inter-relationship between British and Indian cultures in colonial India. The film has a precision and sense of balance that is unerring — from Ivory's handling of the different chronological strands of the plot to the beautifully observed performances of Julie Christie and Greta Scacchi.

BEST FRIENDS

Norman Jewison's film is an unexpectedly literate comedy in the same genre as Hawks' *Bring up Baby* or Cukor's *Pate and Mike*. Goldie Hawn and Burt Reynolds banter stylishly, while Jessica Tandy and Audra Lindley provide sharp cameos as the eccentric mothers-in-law.

PATU

For all its unavoidable inconsistency of film quality and occasionally cavalierish disconcert for identifying its protagonists, Merata Mita's film has already earned a place as a historical document. But *Patu* has a fervency that goes beyond such literal significance — the director catches on to a New Zealand ethos and crystallises it in a vision that is disturbing at times, yet not without some feeling of hope for the future.

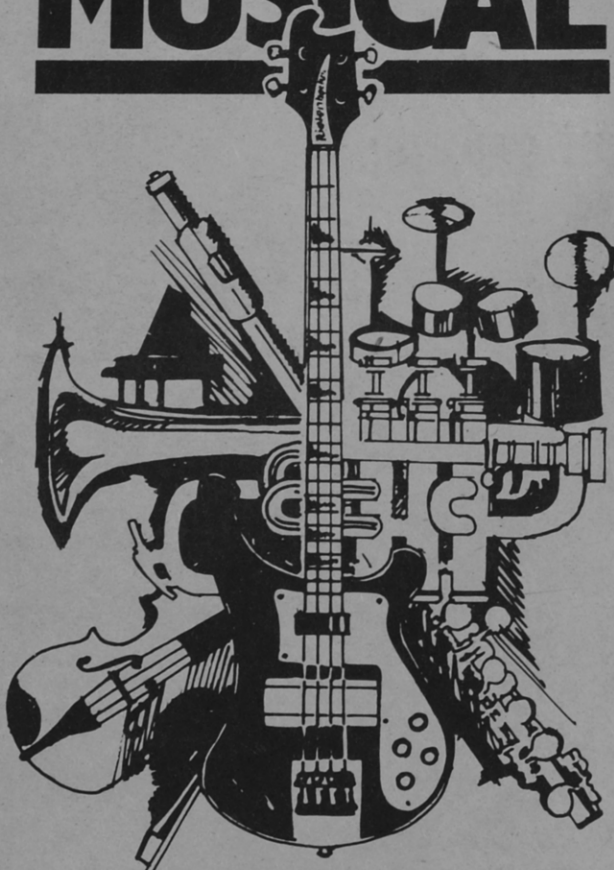
ONE FROM THE HEART

One from the Heart is Francis Coppola's heady celebration of the supremacy of style. A tale of love lost and gained in the glitter city of Las Vegas (all magically recreated in Coppola's Zoetrope studios) it can even boast its origins in Goethe's novel, *Elective Affinities*. Add to this a fine score by Tom Waits (with assistance by Crystal Gayle), and you certainly have one of the quirkiest films of the year.

MERRY CHRISTMAS MR LAWRENCE

It's cultural conflict time again, but this time around it's in a Japanese Prisoner-of-War camp, fastidiously directed by Nagisa Oshima. The film showcases two accomplished performances by David Bowie and Tom Conti, as well as a splendidly theatrical one by Ryuichi Sakamoto, in a manner half-way between Bette Davis in her heyday and traditional Kabuki theatre. Sakamoto wrote the score too and it ties with Tom Waits's *One from the Heart* as being the best of the year.

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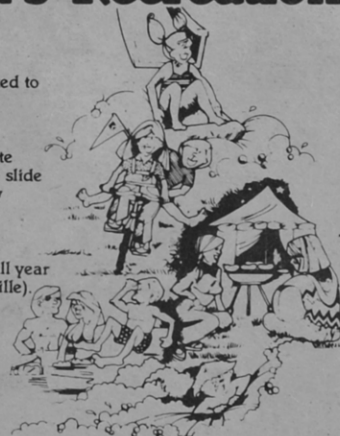
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- 19 New Plymouth, White Hart
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- 23,24 Wellington, Quinns Post

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- 5 Arrowtown Hall
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- 17,18 Greymouth, Golden Eagle
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