

## F I L M

While Warren Beatty's film about the Russian Revolution, *Reds*, has opened to universal acclaim but slow ticket sales, the Russians are continuing on their version of the events narrated in John Reed's 'Ten Days That Shook the World'. At one time Beatty's film was to a conjoint production deal with the Russians but 'artistic differences' saw the pack break down ... Australia's biggest budget movie to date, *The Man From Snowy River*, created something of a furore in Oz when Kirk Douglas was brought into the cast to help make the movie an easier international sale. Douglas met considerable resistance to the idea of an American in this screen adaption of one of Australia's most famous poems ... the biggest



selling Australian movie to date, *Mad Max*, ran off with the Grand Prize at the Paris Science Fiction Festival. For a cost of \$350,000 *Mad Max* has now returned \$27 million. Not surprisingly *Mad Max 2* is now on release ... part three of the *Star Wars* story, *The Revenge of The Jedi*, began shooting last month in London. The now familiar cast are this time directed by tyro Richard Marquand from a script by Lawrence Kasden ... Edith Head, perhaps Hollywood's most famous costume designer, died last year at the age of 82. Her remarkable career began in the silent film era and continued on into such recent movies as *Carrie* and *The Man Who Would Be King*. Head won eight Oscars ... director Nicholas Roeg is at work on *Eureka*, described as a murder mystery, with Gene Hackman. Script is by Paul Mayersberg ... *David Lean* is set to direct *Passage to India* based on E. M. Forster's novel ... prize for most fated film of recent memory must go to Werner Herzog's *Fitzcarraldo*. The film is based on the true story of a South American rubber magnate who, at the turn of the century, built an opera house on a mountain top in Brazil. Actor Jason Robards was forced out of the film by a stomach virus. This meant the

## S H A R O N O' N E I L L O N S M A S H P A L A C E



scrapping of the footage Mick Jagger shared with Robards as Jagger could not spare the time to reshoot it with Robard's replacement, Klaus Kinski. The drying of the Amazonian tributary on which shooting was to take place and unruly native extras also delayed production ... *The World According To Garp* will feature Robin Williams in the leading role. Script is by Steve Fesich ... Milos Forman's *Ragtime* marks Jimmy Cagney's return to the screen after a 20-year retirement.

*I thought you were so perfect And you thought I'd stay forever Well, maybe ...*

Sharon O'Neill is on the phone from Sydney. Her soft voice sounds both cheerful and serious as she talks about her recent hit single. "Part of the reason it's very important to me is because it reflects my moving from New Zealand and very much sums up the whole situation under which the album was recorded. I'd left my home and friends and what the hell was I in for ... not knowing the musicians, the producer or anything. There was a general lack of communication similar to what happens in the relationship in the song."

Initially the shift to Australia was rather daunting for her. "There's such a huge following for live bands here that when I first arrived I thought 'You gotta go live; you gotta go live. If you don't they won't buy your records' and all that. But I didn't go live for very ordinary reasons like working on the album and the fact that, financially, I couldn't support a tour. But now I'm glad that I didn't because it did prove that you can sell records without being out there. I mean you won't sell as many but you can at least sell them."

Now, however, with the album notching up some respectable sales she is out on the road performing with her band. Does that mean we're likely to get a tour here over the summer?

"We'll probably make it to New Zealand later in the year. It all depends on the dates for recording the next album." She reflects a moment and then adds, "Which is a pity because the movie will have long been out by then."

She is referring to Roger (Sleeping Dogs) Donaldson's new film *Smash Palace* for which she wrote the music. *Smash Palace*, possibly the most emotionally intense piece of cinema ever to come out of this country, is due for local release this month. How does O'Neill feel about her first venture into film-writing?

"It was very interesting,

particularly in that it was done differently from the usual method. Normally the music is written after the film's been shot but in this case I wrote the music first. I had to rely on lots of discussions with Roger and of course I read the script. This meant that Roger and others had heard the music before filming. They said that being familiar with the music helped them in their approach to certain scenes."

O'Neill wrote five songs for the film as well as about 15 to 20 minutes of incidental music. But this should not suggest that *Smash Palace* is in any way a 'musical'. Apart from the themes that accompany the opening and closing credit sequences, only very brief snatches of the other three songs are heard on the soundtrack (although all five are due to be released on a 12-inch EP). What music there is in the film, proper is largely instrumental and mood-evoking.

"Because of the editing of scenes and so on we did have to make some adjustments with the incidental music. But basically it involved improvisation over a written structure which in most cases was the *Smash Palace* theme." She laughs at the memory. "For the sax parts I just got Dennis Mason to go in there and blow his little heart out."

For a film so fraught with passion, O'Neill's music is restrained, often even calming in effect. Was such a counterpoint deliberate?

"Well the film has a very New Zealand sensitivity. It's trying to be real rather than sensational a la the *Starsky and Hutch* type of thing. I wanted to keep this feeling, this perspective, so I wasn't going to go all out with anything horrendous even for the heavy bits. I always tried to keep in mind the overall feeling of the film."

In the past O'Neill's forte has been slow to medium-paced ballads and her *Smash Palace* music, written last summer before her move across the Tasman, is no exception. In contrast the current album is decidedly rockier with an

emphasis more on guitars than her own keyboards. She rejects a suggestion that the overall tougher sound is due to a desire to crack the lucrative Australian market.

"I don't think it pays to think that way. Besides," she laughs, "nothing's definite anywhere. Some very weird things happen on the charts here too. We keep a cross-section of songs in the gigs and I still sit behind the piano for some numbers. I don't have any feeling of 'This is Australia and you've got to bang your head.' I don't need to compromise who I am, to play any particular kind of music just for Australia. Or wherever. I just do what I do as best I can and so far it's been treating me very well."

Along with the harder rocking sound, O'Neill's lyrics are becoming more varied and interesting. Not only is there an increased sharpness in her observation of personal relationships, but characters such as drug couriers and raunchy street prowlers stalk through her songs. 'Street Boys' from the current album is a dry reflection on the local-boy-turns-rock-star situation. Perhaps it reveals a certain cynicism in the songwriter?

"Not really ... but I don't think I would've written it if I'd stayed in New Zealand. It came out of the way the business is over here in Australia. It's more hair and tooth, more bitchy, more ... ah ... interesting. If you come to the fore very quickly here it's easy to blow it in your first 24 hours of fame."

It seems highly unlikely that O'Neill would ever 'blow it' in some such way. From her beginnings in groups, Chapt and Shiner, and her growing solo career, she has achieved a dedication and personal stability during almost a decade in music.

"I don't get bitter or anything. I'm still enjoying it which is why I'm still doing it." She pauses and it's almost as if the quiet determination is coming down the telephone line. "I'm still trying to reach ... I've still got goals. I'm not about to be put off." Peter Thomson

## F R A M E D

Arthur

Director: Steve Gordon

Yet another attempt to revive the classic 30s wacky comedy genre, and not an unqualified success, by any means. Dudley Moore over-dominates the movie, John Gielgud displays an eloquent line in sneering, and poor Liza Minelli does what she can with the part given to her. Nice soundtrack though, if you want to luxuriate in aural candy floss, and Christopher Cross, Burt Bacharach and Carole Bayer Sager are only too willing to provide it.

An American Werewolf in London

Director: John Landis

The *Animal House* clan go gothic. An entertaining piece with a fair degree of success in its mixture of genres, although it is

debatable that anyone ever made a comedy-horror film quite as successfully as Polanski in his *Fearless Vampire Killers*. Fringe benefits include the effective werewolf trimmings, and a nice turn from Jenny Agutter as Staff Nurse Alex Price, clutching her Mark Twain and sustaining an edgy relationship with the hapless David.

The French Lieutenant's Woman

Director: Karel Reisz

Harold Pinter's beautifully moulded script is the starting point for this film, effortlessly catching the reverberations of John Fowles' original novel, portraying as it does two parallel relationships in the worlds of illusion and reality. Underneath Carl Davis's Brahmsian score, Freddie Francis unfolds some truly lovely images (the wood scenes with Charles pursuing Sarah, the recreation of the

Victorian village) and Meryl Streep gives a poignant performance as the heroine of the film-within-the-film.

Flashbacks to real time are handled effectively, and always underline the parallels between the two sets of lovers. Surely this will be one of the very best films of this year.

Mommie Dearest

Director: Frank Perry

An outrageous farrago, but immense fun for all that. The film that coined those immortal lines, "No wire hangers!" and "Don't fuck with me, fellas." *Mommie* bubbles along at a cracking pace, and Faye Dunaway fairly boils in some scenes as she lashes out at her hapless daughter. Trite ending apart, here is a film with style and dash — not only sensationalistic, but sensational. William Dart

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