a romantic. As a young girl in the Soviet Union, she read the works of Victor Hugo, listened to the operettas of Lehar and Kalman, and attended all the foreign films she could. She regarded her own writing as in the tradition of heroic romanticism. Critics found her works to be unrealistic and implausible. Yet to her that was never the point: She was presenting, she said, a view of things as they might and ought to be.

Her ideas have had a profound impact. More than anyone else, she was responsible for the great expansion of libertarianism as a popular movement. Before Atlas Shrugged was published in 1957, the few defenses of capitalism that had been offered were primarily economic and technical. She introduced a strong moral case that elevated the debate on capitalism versus socialism to a significantly higher level. While she condemned as parasites businessmen who used state privilege to amass wealth and economic power, she turned Marx on his head with her glorification of the truly creative entrepreneur, whom she saw as the driving force of production. What little is worthwhile in a book like George Gilder's Wealth and Poverty comes straight from Ayn Rand. Yet when she made her last public speech last year in New Orleans, she refused to appear on the same platform as Gilder, whose defense of capitalism on altruistic grounds she found evil.

At her funeral in New York, the city she loved above all others as a symbol of human achievement, some 800 people flocked to pay their last respects. The room was brightly lit and festively decorated, and she lay in an open coffin, looking as though she were about to rise up and denounce someone. In the background there was music: Viennese waltzes, popular tunes like "With a Song in My Heart," jazz from the thirties and forties, and ragtime. She had had a profound effect on a whole generation of young intellectuals who are only now beginning to make their mark, and many of them gathered in New York to pay tribute. Ayn Rand was that kind of woman. There will never be another like her, and if she hadn't existed, no one could have invented a fictional character as fascinating, unorthodox, and powerful. If someone had, critics would doubtless have found it unrealistic, proclaiming that "life is not like that," and chiding us as hopeless romantics for thinking it ever could be.

FILM

VICTOR/VICTORIA, directed by Blake Edwards.

Double identity

STEPHEN HARVEY

VEN THOSE WHO GET EXasperated by Blake Edwards's bile-tinged entertainments would have to concede their distinctiveness-these films certainly do stand apart from the work of any other filmmaker now working, though whether that's a virtue or not is decidedly open to debate. 10, S.O.B., and the current Victor/Victoria all seem to have sprung to life in a disorienting temporal limbo. Their glossy surfaces—all popsicle colors, bouncy musical backgrounds, and bumptious farcical shtick-harken back to the studio-tooled products of the 1950s, but the jaundiced perspective they adorn has the fifty-year itch with a vengeance. Beneath the compoundfracture slapstick, the content of Edwards's comedies usually turns out to be much more disturbing to audiences than the substance of movies like Shoot the Moon, overpraised in some quarters as scathingly honest and emotionally unsparing.

Actually, Shoot the Moon was a model of sleek, calculated daring; Alan Parker knows exactly how to charm his public when he wishes, and just how far he can go in the catharsis department before turning them off. Edwards is too willfully idiosyncratic for that—he's going to vent his gallowshumor misanthropy no matter what, and if the audience can't or won't keep up, to hell with them. The same goes for his enshrinement of the missus,

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Iulie Andrews, whose inevitable command performances in his movies are not exactly prompted by stampeding popular demand. Not unlike Marion Davies's final blaze-of-autumn vehicles in the mid-thirties under the tutelage of William Randolph Hearst. Edwards's most recent trio of movies persist in the illusion that this is a great and beloved star whose appeal is evergreen, although the branches are getting pretty barren as far as the public is concerned. He assumes that her image is so sacrosanct that her public will get untold thrills by seeing it defaced in one manner or anotherallowing her to exude sullenness in 10, or bare her chest in S.O.B., or cavort in male drag for the purposes of Victor/ Victoria. The truth may be that Andrews is such a back item these days that most audiences don't care whether she does operettish trills or whistles "I Wish That I Could Shimmy Like My Sister Kate" while performing cartwheels across the length of the Panavision screen.

In Victor/Victoria, Edwards's blithe defiance of contemporary mass tastes is more blatant than ever before. Set in the Paris of 1934, this movie belongs to that least popular of current genres, the period musical. In between its tepid sieges of Coward-esque patter and le jazz hot trilled by guess who, Victor/Victoria is given to passionate polemics on the joys of androgyny, and broadsides against those nasty, small-minded types who, in this movie's anachronistic words, don't consider homosexuality "a valid alternative lifestyle." The first shot in the movie discloses Robert Preston in bed with a youthful gigolo; later on, Victor/Victoria makes much mirth out of that mountainous jock Alex Karras's prideful exclamation that his secret love's no secret any more. All of which is just the thing to induce nausea rather than guffaws in all those folks who thought Making Love was a sensitive exercise in restrained good taste.

But then, *Victor/Victoria* is two hours plus of celluloid mixed-metaphors, as baffling as it is fitfully exhilarating. For all its thoroughly modern sexual politics, this film relies on a host of

archaic movie antecedents, both acknowledged and implicit. The script is a credited remake of a 1933 German movie musical, Viktor und Viktoria, concerning a down-and-out chanteuse who attains show-business glory but complicates her private life by posing as a female impersonator. (Viktor und Viktoria was previously remade in England in 1935 as First a Girl with the delectable dancer Jessie Matthews in the title role; "First a girl, then a boy, always a joy" went the ad campaign for that one.) The look of the movie is captivatingly retro in more ways than one—art director Rodger Maus's snow-sprinkled Parisian alleyways have the tasty marzipan verisimilitude of all those movies which used to conjure up ooh-la-la on the Paramount soundstages. Victor/Victoria is likewise peopled with the phantoms of some of Hollywood's more treasured archetypes. There are caustic Continental waiters with gummy accents, out of Lubitsch and Wilder; and in the person of a beetle-brained, platinumwigged Lesley Ann Warren, as James Garner's neglected moll, we have that favorite caricature, the sibyllant bimbo-wheedling and pouting through a mouthful of bonbons like Jean Harlow in Dinner at Eight, previshly screeching malapropisms through her uptilted nose like Jean Hagen's Lina Lamont in Singin' in the Rain. Edwards's most persistent homages, however, are to his own past work—a haplessly klutzy private eye in the Inspector Clouseau tradition, velvety 360-degree tracking shots around Andrews delivering a torch song in her imperturbable bluewhite manner, à la Darling Lili.

With the inescapable casting of Edwards's personal vedette in the central role, Victor/Victoria's deliriously intricate plot requires a suspension of disbelief that borders on the surreal. In the early scenes, before she bobs her hair and dons a tux, she's supposed to look a haggard twenty-nine, a thorny challenge mastered by this eerily changeless star. Once her hair has been brilliantined and her lipstick lightened to a pale pink hue, what she really resembles is Sandy Duncan transfigured with David Bowie makeup. The climax of Victoria's cabaret turns comes when she rips off her bespangled wig of the moment to reveal her closely sculpted pate. The onstage audience gasps and applauds the ostensible illusion that she is a boy, when logic would dictate that what they're witnessing is an unsung pal of

Djuna Barnes making a spectacle of herself. Andrews's most nonplussed admirer is a Chicago gangster scouting new talent for his deco speakeasy. James Garner's part consists primarily of a series of befuddled reaction shots, and no wonder—this character may be confused as to the sexual identity of the creature who's captured his heart, but it's the actor who's understandably at sea when it comes to making any sense of the script under the circumstances. (It should also be mentioned that to give the impression that Garner is still on the sunny side of forty, he sports even more pink greasepaint than his transvestite costar.)

Still there's something disarming about Edwards's headlong perversity. It's a measure of this director's scrambled sensibility that by far the most appealing and straightforward performance in the film is given by Robert Preston as Victoria's mentor, a middle-aged gay entertainer whose philosophical sprightliness gets him through any farcical crisis. Toddy is the one character in the movie who is sure of his place in the cosmos and comfortable with it, and as an actor Preston gives the same impression. He doesn't embroider the part with effete flourishes to protect himself from being too closely identified with what he's playing—he sails through Victor/ Victoria with that unflappable gusto that has been Preston's trademark since The Music Man. While Garner and Andrews toil grimly to preserve their former selves in a celluloid aspic, Preston amiably radiates the assurance that his gifts have only ripened with age.

Such serenity in the face of the onslaught of time is not exactly a Blake Edwards hallmark. The more his movies strain for an air of blithe contemporaneity, the more outmoded they seem, like a breathless dowager wriggling into a formfitting polyester pantsuit. S.O.B.'s most dated element was its heavy-handed trendiness—the notion that raunch was the key to luring all those post-Last Tango in Paris movie patrons. Victor/Victoria wants to startle and titillate us moderns with the revelation that androgyny can be fun, an idea that had more currency in those go-go unisex days of a decade ago and more. But it's the movie's musical numbers that really betray Edwards's out-of-sync quest for novelty. I'm not referring so much to our coloratura stars' versions of Henry Mancini Muzak, which as usual belong to no period but Andrews Standard Time. Rather, it's the "decadent" whoops-a-daisy antics of Lesley Ann Warren's girls and Robert Preston's boys that are pale shadows of Bob Fosse's retrospective riffs on the twenties and thirties in the likes of Cabaret and Chicago, themselves nearly a decade old.

inadvertent pathos Edwards's work arises from the struggle of the director pushing sixty who wants to prove how with it he still is. Yet the very real delights in Victor/ Victoria come out of his mastery of those timeless staples from a nearly vanished school of moviemaking. Nobody choreographs a slapstick ballet with more cool comic dispatch than Edwards. A fugitive cockroach let loose in a bourgeois Paris bistro occasions a speeded-up exercise in mayhem worthy of Mack Sennett, transformed with the Olympian detachment of Lubitsch by Edwards's serene visual elegance. And when it comes to confecting a klieg-lit toy city more intoxicating than the real thing could ever be, Edwards knows more than a hyperthyroid upstart like Francis Coppola is ever likely to learn. It's probable that Edwards will never resolve the conflict between his arthritic quest for novelty and supple show-biz aplomb, but it's that odd contradiction that gives his movies their exasperating fascination. By mixing together so many discordant elements out of six decades of movies, including some of his own, this director has once more made a film of defiant originality.

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