



Size and Sweep

MOST war films talk too much according to combat veterans, and while *"The Longest Day"* is a highly impressive account of the D-Day operations, it is flawed by some unseemly loquaciousness. For instance, two hardened, thoroughly trained members of a Ranger battalion spend their moments before hitting a nearly impregnable section of the Normandy coast in discussion of the nature of their mission and its value in the general strategic scheme of things. In another episode, Henry Fonda as Brigadier General Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., begs permission from his superior, General Barton (Edmund O'Brien) to land with the assault waves. For some reason, the name of his illustrious father is brought into the ensuing conversation, along with a reference to the latter's heroics at San Juan Hill.

In view of the fact that Cornelius Ryan wrote the screenplay and was assisted by such knowledgeable authors as Romain Gary and James Jones, it is difficult to account for several moments of preposterous dialogue. Between them, John Wayne as Lt. Col. Benjamin Vandervoort and Robert Ryan as General James Gavin provide what amounts to a basic orientation course on the airborne landings in Normandy, all in the few minutes before the operation gets under way. Perhaps it was felt that the complexity of this war subject would be too difficult for many members of the audience unless supplied with a running commentary and explanation.

However, the scope of the production is such and it explores so many levels of combat and decision that most annoyances prove to be momentary. Yes, one can carp at how nicely done is Irina Demich's hair as she assists in the blowing up of a train behind the beaches; and it is true that Peter Lawford's British commando leader is somewhat too insouciant for entire credibility; and the behavior of the German commanders seems so befogged and stupid as to dim the Allied accomplishment; but history has nevertheless been captured.

The beach battle scenes are magnificent and chilling, a glider landing in the dark is tension-filled, and the battle of troops of the 82nd Airborne Division for St. Mere Eglise has remarkable authenticity. There are individual performances that stand out because they seem right, among them Robert Mitchum's as General Cota, and that

of Jeffrey Hunter as the heroic Sergeant Fuller. In fact, Hunter's is one of the most convincing enactments of a heroic act ever seen on the screen. Richard Todd is also good as a British leader of the glider troops, and Richard Burton has a fine moment as a wounded pilot.

Three directors—Andrew Marton, Ken Annakin, and Bernhard Wicki—labored hard and long to make vivid and comprehensible this enactment of history's most awesome amphibious assault, and while they are given their due credits on the screen one wonders why producer Darryl Zanuck found it necessary to claim recently that he was responsible for 65 per cent of the direction of *"The Longest Day."* If such was his contribution—in addition to the back-breaking logistics of the production—the screen should have so stated the fact.

SCANT mention is made of the intriguing figure of Barabbas in the Gospels of the New Testament. In St. John he is merely referred to as a robber, in St. Luke as a murderer involved in sedition "made in the city." It was the custom during the Passover festival to have released to the crowd one condemned prisoner, and some students of that Biblical period have suggested this as part of a ritual known as "the mock king ceremony." Pär Lagerkvist in his novel *"Barabbas,"* which helped win him the Nobel Prize, imaginatively constructed the life of Barabbas after his release and reached the conclusion that the "robber and murderer" eventually became a follower of the one who had saved him, and died, too, on a Roman cross.

Lagerkvist made the fate of Barabbas harsh, but the telling of the short novel was gentle and distinguished. In the Dino De Laurentiis production of *"Barabbas,"* the telling is hardly gentle and hardly distinguished. The events of the novel are followed for the most part, but on a screen of enormous size, and in what might be called wanton color. Anthony Quinn plays the Biblical figure as a dim-witted, but sturdy fellow, and achieves about as much conviction as would seem possible in this kind of thing. Jack Palance as a champion gladiator is all gleeful menace as well as fearsomely imposing in breastplate and helmet; Arthur Kennedy and Vittorio Gassman contribute better than average spectacle performances.

However, the problem of this Tech-

nicolor, Technirama Biblical extravaganza is similar to other films of the vein. It attempts to overwhelm with its size and sweep, and it goes in for more than its share of what I guess is obligatory sadism. The gladiatorial school of *"Spartacus"* was a second-rate institution compared to that in *"Barabbas."* And the gladiatorial battles in the Roman arena are exceedingly inventive in their raw and refined brutality. Hardly an opportunity has been missed to fill the screen with gore, and one therefore tends to doubt the Christian devotion of those who made it.

Yet, it must be said that the direction of Richard Fleischer is painstaking and often effective, and that the sets and costuming provide some vistas of imposing grandeur. As for religious meanings, these as usual tend to wash away amid all the color, the pageantry, and the strident sound.

WE have another British director of distinction in John Schlesinger, who with *"A Kind of Loving"* has vaulted to the top of the heap with such as Jack Clayton, Carol Reisz, and Tony Richardson. The path he follows has grown faintly familiar, for his hero is a young man in a Lancashire town who faces problems of adjustment to marriage and society. Unlike his predecessors in *"Room at the Top"* and *"Saturday Night and Sunday Morning,"* Vic Brown (Alan Bates) is neither a climber nor a rebel. He is a young draftsman who courts a pretty typist in his firm, and then follows a course of disillusionment into marriage. There is nothing very untypical about him, nor much of anything too untypical that happens to him.

His girl becomes pregnant, he marries her, and moves into his mother-in-law's house. The mother is not unusual either; she is possessive toward her daughter, small-minded about her house. Quite understandably, Vic comes to the conclusion that he and his wife must have a place of their own. Yet, this is no ordinary movie stuff, mainly because it is played and filmed with the most rigorous belief on everyone's part in the story's reality. It is all painfully, poignantly alive and true. Every detail of background and performance has the right ring. The girl, June Ritchie, even looks right. Her mother, Thora Hird, is unfortunately all too recognizable. If there is a slight vagueness to the character of Vic, it is perhaps due to his passiveness as he is drawn into the maw of middle-class English respectability. Mr. Schlesinger, aided by a fine Willis Hall and Keith Waterhouse screenplay, has made a first film of power and sensitivity.

—HOLLIS ALPERT.



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BROADWAY POSTSCRIPT

O Brave Newley World!

IN THESE days when musicals are getting colder, louder, and faster, it is a pleasure to come across something like "Stop the World—I Want to Get Off." This new British musical hit, created by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley, glows with theatrical imagination and ambles at its own pace with no apparent concern about commonplaces any objective observer might feel obliged to note.

For if one takes the magical mixture apart, the elements that have gone into this imported concoction can seem deceptively ordinary and borrowed. Furthermore, almost everything in the show is repeated so often that at times it appears to be a stage adaptation of "Old MacDonald Had a Farm."

Yet, if one puts oneself in the warm and skilful hands of its director and star, one finds oneself entertained, charmed, and even moved. Dressed as a clown, Mr. Newley enters Sean Kenny's gaily designed circus-tent arena (of which the audience forms the other half) and attempts a few half-hearted tricks which draw a negative response from the pretty young girls who are both his audience and his collaborators. There is for him, alas, no escaping the necessity of clowning through something a little more real, something that will define him and us; in short, a human life. So he mimes his way quickly through infancy and childhood to a point where his adult life begins to be specific. We then meet the clown-faced Mr. Littlechap, who employs a music-hall comedian's delivery—including that special variety of entertainer's willingness to use corny, and frequently dirty jokes and to play on the sentimental vulnerabilities of susceptible audiences—to describe how this ordinary Englishman gradually lets life "lumber" him into a restrictive conformity, and how each conformity leads him to success and social position. Poignantly at the end he complains to us that he has completely lost any identity of his own as he sings "What Kind of Fool Am I?"

Along the way, Mr. Littlechap also has a number of comeuppances which cause him to shout, "Stop the World!" But he always swallows the rest of the sentence in nasalized clown-talk that suggests he is rejecting drastic commitment. Like most of us he personifies the comic view of life, a view that incidentally becomes increasingly essential as the dangers of total destruction mount.

The score is catchy with the music seeming more married to emotional states than usual. "I Want to Be Rich" is a determined march; "Typically English" sounds all tea-and-crumpets, which makes its punch line all the more effective; "Lumbered" achieves full concussion by spelling out the title word letter-by-letter in mid-refrain; "Meilinki Meilchick" uses the novelty of the Russian phrase to permit a Britisher to express a maudlin sentiment; and "Once in a Lifetime" expands pleasure into ecstasy.

But the triumph of this musical lies less in the craft and substance of its text than it does in its utterly theatrical performance. Mr. Newley uses his versatility almost apologetically as he shuffles, jokes, and sings his way through incidents which keep taking him back to the center of the maze. What at first seemed repetitious to the audience gradually emerges instead as patterns that echo the futility of seeking variety.

No less expert is Anna Quayle who impersonates Littlechap's "typically English" wife, and the typically Russian, German, and American girls with whom he dallies. The most amusing is the latter, all breathless, innocent, and dumb.

Above all is the performers' fidelity to the notion of making everything happen out of the plain materials at hand: the circus tent, some visible lighting equipment, some simple melodies, and the other quail who attractively play at being whatever is required at the moment. By doing this it becomes "Total Theatre," in which the artist creates out of the theatre and its traditions, instead of out of applied psychology.

"Stop the World—I Want to Get Off" unashamedly borrows traditional techniques (just as Marceau borrowed from the purer Decroux, so Newley has borrowed from the purer Marceau) and melodies ("Going to Build a Mountain" sounds dangerously close to the traditional "Won't You Come Home, Jim Dooley?") and jokes ("We must throw out these old conservatives and put in some new ones" is but a variation of a familiar device). And it assumes the responsibility to carry through a theme once started even when it knows that it is going on too long. In short it has character, which is to say that it knows what kind of musical it is.

—HENRY HEWES.

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