

Movies

'Phar Lap' better than usual horse film

By MARCY BASILE
Staff Reviewer

Take a horse that looks like a camel, teach it to run, name it "Lightning" and after it has become a national hero, make a movie about it. What a great idea — or so the makers of "Phar Lap" apparently decided.

"Phar Lap," the much anticipated movie from Australia, focuses on the training, and over-training, of a racehorse in 1930 Australia. Originally from New Zealand, the horse is often referred to as "the galloping camel" due to his laziness. Even the name "Phar Lap" begins as a joke. ("Farlap" means "lightning" in some Asian language.) The unusual spelling of the horse's name comes from the trainer's insane desire to have a horse with a seven letter name since the last few Australian champion horses had seven letter names. Pretty tricky, huh?

If you go to this movie hoping to see a movie as beautifully

filmed as "The Man From Snowy River" you won't be disappointed. Something about the Australian countryside lends itself to wonderful, scenic photography. Someone has to be a really awful photographer to mess up with that country. The race scenes are incredible, utilizing camera angles The Wide World of Sports hasn't even tried. In fact, the photography is the star of the movie.

Another plus of the movie is Tom ("The Man From Snowy River") Burlinson's performance as Tommy Woodcock, Phar Lap's groom. Woodcock controls Phar Lap, or Bobby as Woodcock called him, throughout the movie. From the time Woodcock finds Bobby in his stall wheezing after a long, strenuous workout, to the final scene in the movie, Tommy stays with the horse. (Bobby even went with Tommy and his wife for a walk — man, woman and horse.) A classic line is born from this strange man-horse

relationship, "That horse won't even fart unless Woodcock told him to."

Believe it. The horse refuses to do anything unless Woodcock has a part in it. Remember the story about the lion with the thorn in his paw and some really nice guy comes by and relieves the lion of his misery by pulling out the thorn? Remember how the lion was completely devoted to the man after that? That's the way Phar Lap is with Woodcock. No one else can go near Phar Lap without Woodcock being nearby. Man has never had such a devoted pet.

This unusual relationship seems ridiculous when you think about it, but in the movie it is somewhat believable. Considering the story of Phar Lap is true, the buidness between Woodcock and Phar Lap appears even more bizarre.

Anyway, the film opens with the lowering of a scrawny, camel-looking horse from the deck of a ship. Enter Phar Lap.

From the beginning, Phar Lap's trainer, Harry, believes his horse to be a winner. Unbeknownst to him, Phar Lap is lazy with no desire to exert himself any more than is needed. Not a good quality in a racehorse. But Phar Lap has bloodlines that won't quit, or so Harry tells Phar Lap's owner, Dave Davis, played by Ron Lieberman. Davis doesn't believe that a horse as doofy-looking as Phar Lap could possibly be anything more than dog food and tells Harry to sell him.

But Harry conjurs up a plan to save Phar Lap and begins training him. The training is rigorous but Phar Lap refuses to run. Enter Woodcock. Woodcock devises a training method which Phar Lap responds to. Enter winner.

Boy, does Phar Lap begin to win. And win. And win. Nothing stops Phar Lap from winning. The racing board adds extra weight to Phar Lap's limit in an effort to slow him down. No

go, Geronamo. They also block an attempt by Davis to scratch Phar Lap from a race. These guys are ruthless.

Eventually, Phar Lap fails, but not by his own choice. The racing board put so much weight on him that there was no way any normal horse could have finished the two mile race. Phar Lap finishes and is even invited to America.

"Phar Lap" is good if you want to watch horse stuff. If you want to watch people stuff, however, the movie will be uneventful. Most of the movie is racing scenes, perhaps a few races too many. The story line between Woodcock and his "girl" should have been developed just a tad more. The music is enjoyable, the scenery fantastic and the acting passable.

If you're in a "gee I think I'll go to a movie" mood and don't really want to think too terribly much, go see "Phar Lap." If not, find a camel and make your own.

Music

Give credit — it's due

By WALTER SMITH
Staff Reviewer

With Christmas only a few weeks away, everyone is rushing around to finish their holiday shopping. Or if you're like me, you may just be preparing to start.

In case you've decided to follow the advice of the record industry and are planning to "give the gift of music," your shopping can be simplified by the following compilation of records that can make the ideal present for the connoisseur of fine music.

Don't bother looking for Prince's or Springsteen's latest releases because they won't make the list, even though they both are pretty good albums. Because of the exposure that they and others like them received, you should know whether or not you and/or your gift-receiver would like them. Also, in the interest of space, any albums that I reviewed this semester won't make it either, even if I raved about them.

Instead, the list will consist of records that are worthy of praise, but didn't receive it for one reason or another (see MTV story). The most equitable method of arranging these "best of the underrated" is alphabetical.

Alphaville — Big In Japan — This group's premiere 12-inch single demonstrates a very lush, but danceable, sound. Their upcoming album should be good.

The Art of Noise — (Who's Afraid Of?) The Art of Noise — "Beat Box" provided the needed diversion on all the best dance floors this year. Trevor Horn produced them with his usual electro-dancewave flair.

Aztec Camera — High Land, Hard Rain — If electronics doesn't interest you, then the acoustically mellow melodies of this U.K. group might.

The Group — Technology — This 12-inch dance single was produced by Thomas Dolby and you can hear it in the mix. Someone named Mrs. Julie Fletcher plays drums.

Malcolm McLaren — Madam Butterfly — "What do you mean, 'A dance version of the aria from Giacomo Puccini's Madam Butterfly?'"

New Order — Power, Corruption and Lies — This quartet provides a unique blend of electronic sounds that will captivate you. The Fantin-Latour still life painting on the cover is a pleasant touch.

The Parachute Club — The Parachute Club — If you can find it, buy it. It contains their semi-hit "Rise Up" as well as "Boys'

Club." The best white soul-funk-disco that I've ever heard.

Propaganda — Propaganda Presents The Nine Lives Of Dr. Mabuse — Trevor Horn has been fairly prolific this year as a producer. This 12-inch offering is strangely sinister in its message, but most propaganda usually is. "Femme Fatale" sounds like it just defected from an unnamed Eastern-bloc country.

R.E.M. — Reckoning — Athens, GA, seems to produce more than its fair share of musicians. R.E.M. just might be the cream of the crop this season with this album.

Scritti Politti — Wood Beez b/w Absolute — This 12-incher is the first from this group as well. If they can follow it up with an LP of equal quality, then we might be witnessing the birth of another success story.

Soft Cell — This Last Night In Sodom — This, the last album of the now-defunct Soft Cell, is perhaps their best. It's a cyclical return to the sounds of their beginnings.

Tin Tin — Hold It — Another premiere single from a promising group. If the album comes out before Christmas, then get it; if it doesn't, then this is certainly better than nothing at all.

Is it Empty V?

By WALTER SMITH
Staff Reviewer

Yes, Virginia, there really is music beyond MTV.

Isn't Music Television a godsend. We get to watch all the popular performers in the privacy of our own homes. What more could we want; after all, we've been informed that we are better off now than four years ago.

But unrest does exist. Some bands don't feel they are reaping their fair share of the rewards; they are the victims of corporate prejudices, racial or otherwise. Are these claims substantiated, or are they the claims of untalented musicians trying to drum up some free publicity?

While the spectrum of cable subscribers ranges from those who are venomously spiteful of the dronings of MTV to those who are irreversibly spellbound by those same dronings, the average viewer probably looks at it as a simple diversion. There's no harm in using it as a music/video backdrop to mask the roaring silence of a dorm room or apartment. Or is there?

MTV dictates the musical tastes of America. Under the

guise of offering idle entertainment to the masses, it has become the most influential advertising medium in the music industry. If new bands hope to capture the attention of America's music-buying public, a video is almost mandatory, even if they don't really have the financial resources to do so.

This theorem of "you need money to make money" is further complicated by the corollary of "you need to fit the program format." If a video doesn't appease the MTV big decision-makers because it doesn't fit the programming style, the chances are good that it won't be seen on the air; if it's not seen, then the band might not be able to sell you an album that you really might like to have.

That's unfair to you as well as to the band. One need not meekly accept the bland offerings of MTV as being the totality of the music world.

Art may imitate life, but music need not imitate MTV. Act now and expose yourself to new and different types of music before we again face an insidious musical homogeneity like the one that plagued America during the 70s.