

Movies

'Stranger Than Paradise' is stranger still

By MARCY BASILE
Movie Reviewer

Currently, the top "art" film in the nation is a minimalistic venture entitled "Stranger Than Paradise." Named by many New York and Los Angeles critics (who were able to view it last year) as one of the top films of 1984, it finally showed last weekend in Houston.

The film can almost be seen as an exercise in film viewing. Director Jim Jarmusch uses obvious and sometimes irritating techniques to elicit a response.

He uses grainy, often scratched, black and white film as a consistently depressing backdrop. And the lack of color frees the viewer's attitude toward the film's numerous one-take scenes. Without color cluttering up the screen, the characters look as depressed as the scenery around them. Color

just wouldn't have fit.

He also uses an original method to move from one scene to another. Since the shots are all done in one-take style (i.e. the actors stay on one set with a still camera) a natural break occurs. Herein lies the genius of Jarmusch. Without being overtly obnoxious, he cuts to a black screen while the audio continues. Consequently, the black screen leaves the audience with the image Jarmusch wanted left in their minds — whether good, bad or indifferent. The continuing audio completes the imaginary scene.

"Stranger Than Paradise" is a three-act comedy of little dialogue and almost as little action. Jarmusch takes a stab at the idiotic, everyday things about life that no one thinks about. Under Jarmusch's scrutiny nothing is sacred — not even boredom. For example, to

a bored person, sitting around playing solitaire is not funny. To Jarmusch, sitting around flipping cards at ever growing stacks is hysterically humorous and he wants his audience to realize that.

In the first act, "The New World," the audience meets Willie (John Lurie), a Hungarian who resembles a former boxer (i.e. flat nose and scarred eyebrows). Willie came to America 10 years ago, settled in New York and changed his name from his Hungarian "Bela." He lives life to the American fullest. He owns a television, a refrigerator and a week's supply of TV dinners. He doesn't work — he gambles. He's a happy man. Until his cousin Eva (Eszter Balint) stops in on her way to Cleveland. She speaks Hungarian and calls him Bela. Willie hates her — at first.

Eva proves to be a little more

than Willie bargained for. She asks questions about his TV dinners ("What kind of animal did that meat come from?") and his cigarettes ("Do Chesterfields taste the same in Cleveland?"). She plays her "Screaming Joe Hawkins" tape on sound level 10 in Willie's one room apartment. Eva doesn't take flack from anyone — especially Willie. She dresses like she wants, eats what she steals and leaves for Florida when the urge strikes (which is the only time her expression changes).

The third person in this happy trio is Willie's compadre in crime, Eddie. The best way to describe Eddie is to say he's an American version of Willie — only shorter. Oh, yeah. Eddie likes Eva from the minute he first meets her.

Act Two is aptly titled "One Year Later." Eva (now in Cleveland) lives with an aunt from Hungary. Neither are happy

campers. Eva peddles hot dogs and her aunt complains. Then Willie and Eddie show up on a surprise vacation. Eva takes them to a Kung Fu movie and to see a frozen Lake Michigan. Eddie can't figure out how they could have travelled so far and seem to be in the same city.

The final act, "Paradise," finds the trio in Florida on a spur of the moment attempt to escape the grayness of the north. Unfortunately, Florida is the same pale black. Despite this one small detail, the gang does buy the necessary sunglasses that dub them as tourists.

So why the title? Well, as near as I could figure, "Paradise" is mundane. Nothing in Florida differs from Cleveland or New York except the frozen lake and the sand. It's the people that make cities what they are — strange worlds to be explored. ♪

Music

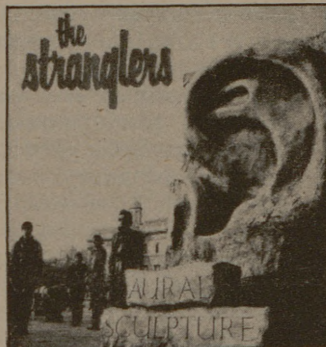
By WALTER SMITH
Music Reviewer

The Stranglers can never be labeled as inert. During the years since the band's inception in 1974, these Britons have produced all kinds of music, ranging from the raw, pre-"Sex Pistols" guitar thrashings of the '70s to the complacent, reserved electronics of their previous album, "Feline." "Aural Sculpture," the latest release and self-proclaimed masterpiece, defines a new Stranglers' sound that successfully blends the energy of their early work with the delicate orchestration of their recent musings into a thoroughly pleasing sound.

In the pompous prologue on the record sleeve, the band basically banishes the current music world to the scorching depths of Hades in order to make room for their aural sculpture — art enjoyable to only those with the intelligence to comprehend. Overlook their "holier than thou" attitude, then this LP is quite enjoyable.

On "Aural Sculpture," the Stranglers develop a very lush, layered sound. Rich keyboards and stark horns are the dominant elements in "Ice Queen" and "Under the Name of Spain."

Although some lyrics are too



"AURAL SCULPTURE"
THE STRANGLERS
EPIC RECORDS

esoterically removed to make sense, the majority of the cuts clearly tote their socio-political messages. "North Winds Blowing" follows in the current fashion of anti-war songs — although it's a statement that can be ignored only by the ignorant.

The band performs its share of paranoid-baiting in "Skin Deep," a song warning that all your supposed friends are really the proverbial wolves in sheeps' clothing.

"Stella" is the new album from Yello, one of Europe's

strangest silicon sensation. The band consists of Dieter Meier, who provides the lyrics and the vocals, and Boris Blank, who composes and arranges the music; session musicians fill the remaining slots on this LP.

Because the duo is responsible for different musical tasks, a duality of sound exists on the album. Blank creates an often cold and obscenely mechanical sound — music with a *film noir* effect, as exemplified by the sinister instrumental "Ciel Ouvert." Meier's deep guttural singing style (speaking style, as in "Desire") is juxtaposed with the music, rather than integrated with it, because of his distinctly human voice.

While this effect is oddly intriguing, it makes the music unsettling to listen to for lengthy periods of time. English does not seem to be Meier's native tongue, and something in the lyrics probably is lost in translation. But one couldn't be absolutely sure since Yello sometimes overuses a fuzzy, overdriven effect that masks the vocals beyond comprehension. "Angel No" is one such track that uses the effect, combined with a sizzling female vocal line, to produce an excellent dance number. "Vicious Games," another neo-disco number, is the strongest



"STELLA"
YELLO
ELEKTRA RECORDS

song on the album.

This LP doesn't accompany a film release, but perhaps it should since it seems to be a soundtrack without a movie. Yello created a set of songs that cries out desperately for visual imagery to cohesively unify the songs. Unless you're on hallucinogens (doctor's order, of course), then "Stella" doesn't work as an album, although it does have good songs. ♪

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Return of the Judy's

By WALTER SMITH
Music Reviewer

The Judy's are back. If you missed their recent concert at Dr. G's, then now's your chance to experience personally the wild stage antics of singer/songwriter David Bean. Dane Cessac on percussion and Jeff Walton on bass complete the roster for this fun-rock dance band from Pearland, Texas.

After reuniting last year, these guys have continued to thrill audiences with their special brand of music. When they take the stage sporting their matching tacky sweaters, they launch headlong into their songs, taken from their previous album and EPs. You probably can expect to hear new material as well.

Their show is at 8:00 pm tonight at the La Fiesta Ballroom, 1601 Groesbeck. Tickets are available for \$6 at the door and at Music Express and at Hasting's Books and Records. ♪