

# Films

## Childhood's End

THE LAST WALTZ

Directed by Martin Scorsese

Near the end of Martin Scorsese's film about The Band's final stage performance, Bob Dylan—short and taciturn beneath his heroic white fedora—finds himself on stage with the venerated Dutch uncles of rock. The song wishes the listener happiness and prosperity but most of all it hopes that he or she remain forever young. It's a suitable coda for a movie that symbolically punctuates the end of the '60s—a decade that existed, among other things, on a dream of perpetual youth.

A sort of rock'n'roll equivalent of the *Airport* movies, *The Last Waltz* is a cameo-laden documentary about the lavish last stand of The Band, four Canadians and an American who started out in Toronto 16 years ago and chose to play their last date before 5,000 people at San Francisco's Winterland Ballroom in November, 1976. Directed by Scorsese (*Taxi Driver*, *New York, New York*), allegedly because he was young enough, at 36, to have sympathy for the music, it combines a standard assortment of multi-camera, fast-cut, wrinkle-close performance shots of The Band and artists made famous by the '60s such as Neil Young, Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan, with occa-

**Mitchell, Young, Rick Danko and Levon Helm (of The Band), Dylan, Ronnie Hawkins (whom The Band once backed), and Robbie Robertson (of The Band): good times rolling**

sional ill-advised production numbers filmed in the jarring quiet of an MGM sound stage. Bracketing all this are bits of off-stage interviews with The Band. (In one, Band drummer Levon Helm plays sly dumb-as-dirt cracker to Scorsese's fidgety Ratso Rizzo questioner; hilarious.)

Where the movie scores is in the quality of the sound. Scorsese has used a sophisticated 24-track recording system and the music is wonderful. Joni Mitchell, all cheekbones and gaunt translucent skin, and looking vaguely displeased with the excess of it all, sings her *Coyote* in a sort of languid scat. Even hook-nosed Bob Dylan proves that despite a recent round of inane and alarmingly egocentric interviews he can still rattle an audience down to its Earth shoes. The finest moment, however, is a rare appearance by our own Neil Young, a disheveled Hamlet singing *Helpless*, backed by The Band and the silhouetted sweet soprano of Joni Mitchell. Pure pleasure.

But what makes this small document worth more attention than previous limo-groupie-sweat rock movies is Scorsese's attitude to his subject. In a subtle departure from tradition he uses no orgiastic crowd shots, no scenes of backstage wenching or dope-sucking. Even the interviews are largely irrelevant; The Band, as well as the other aging and reclusive stars, are no more human to us in the movie than they are in life. Scorsese kisses off the '60s and his youth by treating the decade's most rec-

ognizable symbol, its music, as an artifact. He separates it from its birthplace in the streets and lovingly presents it as pure form, each act unsentimentally placed before us for dispassionate judgement. A rock 'n' roll Louvre.

But then, if you've never argued over the name of the Northern Ontario town in Neil Young's *Helpless* or don't know what mends you up on *Cripple Creek*, take a pass on *The Last Waltz*. You had to be there.

TOM HOPKINS

## Not so proudly they serve

COMING HOME

Directed by Hal Ashby

How many years is it since the Vietnam war? *That* many? Well, only now has Hollywood brought out the first major film to try to come to grips with what that war has done to the American people. Not the damage on the battlegrounds, but in the homes where the psychic wounds assert themselves—wounds for which there is no easy cure or adequate compensation. *Coming Home* might not have been made even now but for Jane Fonda's passionate commitment to the theme; even so, Nancy Dowd claims that her original screenplay was severely impaired in the final rewriting by Waldo Salt and Robert C. Jones.

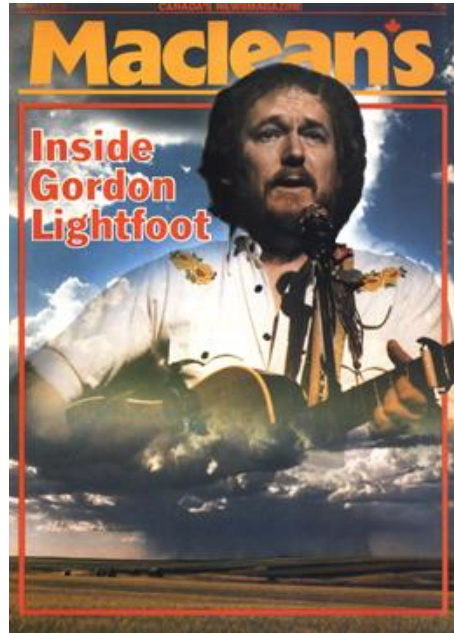
*Coming Home* concerns Jane Fonda, the typical overprotective wife of a gung ho American marine officer, Bruce Dern, who is sent to Vietnam. While he becomes slowly disillusioned, Jane goes to work in the Los Angeles Veterans Administration Hospital's paraplegic ward. She befriends Penelope Milford, the mistress of a non-com serving under Dern, and moves into a bohemian beach apartment next to hers. Soon she feels herself drawn to Jon Voight, an especially embittered paraplegic vet-

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