

Carr reviews

Watch Douglas

John Lennon and Yoko Ono are booked onto Channel 5's Mike Douglas Show for this week...

two relatively low-grade English horror movies, "The Children of the Damned" (Monday) and "Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed" (Friday) scheduled for the edification of its viewers this week.

"The Wizard of Oz" will make its annual appearance on the tube Tuesday night at 7:30 on NBC.

And finally, the semi-finals of the Atlantic Coast Conference basketball championship will be on Friday night beginning at seven.

Since the rerun season begins this week, it might be appropriate to say a few words about how relentlessly wretched television has been this year.

Speaking of movies, the worst new trend in television, I think, has been the proliferation of made-for-television films. Sometime, when you find yourself watching one of these "action-packed" films, why don't you try turning down the sound and see how much action really takes place when there's no music and pseudo-snappy dialogue to keep them moving.

Leon Russell made a profound statement when he played at Duke last fall. "Don't watch too much TV," he told the audience. "It's bad for your head."

Bruce Mann

'Cuckoo's Nest' shallow

"This ward is society in miniature," smugly intones spineless Dr. Spivey of the state mental hospital, shoving into our ears the play's already so visually obvious symbolism - that the world is an insane asylum - and the Carolina Playmakers production of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" is off and running on its sentimental, procrustean, shallow way.

As dramatic literature, Dale Wasserman's adaptation of Ken Kesey's currently faddish novel simply remains a soap opera capsule, easy to swallow and digest but with little dramatic enrichment to offer. It allows no shades of gray. The subject under discussion is as black and white as a Rorschach inkblot design.

While the latter, an ostensibly jagged and meaningless abstraction, can theoretically deliver internal emotional information, Wasserman's work is too involved with surface coloration to seek revealing internal spectrums of its characters.

For example, the play, by its very symbolic metaphor, invites, nay begs, blatant allegorization - the voluntary committal patients represent those who tacitly assist tyranny through unquestioning subservience; Chief Bromden symbolizes latent minority groups under tyranny; and the chronics are the masses, lobotomized by sheer authority. The play is indeed that superficial.

expressed in her patients' cases. Director Richard Downing cannot avoid this embarrassing obviousness. It is part of the play's loose construction. But neither does he cash in on all the play's more vivid theatrical moments.

"Cuckoo's Nest" has played over a year at Off-Broadway's Mercer Theatre and for a very good reason - given a strong cast and an energetic interpretation, the play is entertaining and far less interminable an evening as the current Playmakers' product.

Credit should go to Jim Bissell as Randle P. McMurphy. He makes the most of his part. He's caustic, overblown, pompous and an incredible wonder of an actor who, whether interpolating Miss Ratched's name into profanity or leading the inmate-patients in a basketball game (with a chronic-vegetable as the basket) or boastfully demanding the audience of the ward's "bull goose loony," dominates attention.

The rest of the cast, though, doesn't

snap as securely into place. McMurphy's nemesis is Margot Corrigan's Nurse Ratched, less a terrifying, transcendent incarnation of tyranny than a rather attractive battle-ax.

As for the cast of patients... When Robert Long's effective lighting switches from pulsating spotlights on Chief Bromden (for his soliloquies) to the brightness of the sterile ward (a splendid symmetrical Tom Rezzuto set in institutional green with a nurses' station which more resembles an authoritative airport control tower), the contrast is blinding. But when the patients arrive on the scene, however, the contrast loses much of its power. For one thing, the patients cannot project the ages of their characters (even some haircuts here might have helped). For another, acting proficiency varies considerably - for example, one of the vegetables is outstandingly frightening while the other is totally unconvincing.

Glen Stancik's stuttering Billy Bibbit is

well-controlled and eerily 1984-ish at the end when he dissolves and betrays McMurphy. Doug Potts doesn't always have the supposedly impotent character of Dale Harding under control, though during his breakdown (the play is a series of individual, area-like breakdowns), he delivers a chill by modulating from frenzy to laughter in a split second. Chief Bromden, as portrayed by Mark Phialas, seems a bit too active to be a chronic, but his on-stage monologues addressed to his father are quite well executed.

One wonder, though, why Downing has the Chief deliver these live. As with other "Cuckoo's Nest" productions, recordings of the speeches played while the inert Indian stands like a statue seem more advisable. The element of surprise, the knowledge that the deaf and dumb Indian can actually hear and speak, is lost when he first speaks later in the play.

It's but another example of inability to take advantage of what little the play offers.

On record

Cooder album flawless

by Gary Miller and Ted Claghorn

"Into The Purple Valley," Ry Cooder, MS2052.

Ry Cooder has been around a long time and he is generally accepted as one of the best slide guitarists in the business.

But Cooder, like so many musicians who refuse to base their styles or songs on what is "popular," or what might sell, has created a relatively obscure figure other than in professional circles.

That is up until now. With the release of "Jammig With Edward," people are beginning to ask, who is Ry Cooder? The answer is contained in his newest solo album, "Into The Purple Valley."

Cooder's music is hard to classify, but most of the tunes have a country or blues twang to them. All the songs are either old traditional with no credited writer, or by noted country and blues writers. The selections include Ledbelly's "On a Monday," Johnny Cash's "Hey Porter," and Woody Guthrie's "Vigilant Man." Surprisingly, Cooder, a very talented writer, is not credited with writing any of the material.

Instrumentally, the album is without noticeable flaw. As no credits are given, it is impossible to say just how much Cooder is responsible for, but the dobro, slide guitar and mandolin, which are the solidifying sounds on every song, are obviously Cooder's work.

Cooder's voice, throaty and always a fraction off-key, seems tailor made for his style of playing and has a certain inexplicable charm that is all his own. He sings lead on every song and even does some fine "taling blues" on "FDR in Trinidad."

It is hard to say why this record is so

good. Cooder has obviously been very careful in picking his material, but the real charm lies in a certain personal touch he injects into the songs. Thus the songs come across as if they were written yesterday for today instead of many years ago. The feeling "Purple Valley" leaves with the listener is very reminiscent of sitting on the wooden benches and stomping with the music at Union Grove last spring.

The above are all rather poor attempts to find some sort of description for the general tone of the album. Most importantly though, Ry Cooder's "Into The Purple Valley" is fun to listen to, and that is about as much as you can ask of any record these days.

NCSA selected for play festival

North Carolina School of the Arts, which produced "She Stoops to Conquer" at the first American College Theatre Festival in Ford's Theatre, will be represented again this year. The production is Lillian Hellman's "Critic's Prize" play, "The Little Foxes," and the theatre, The Eisenhower at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

The play was one of ten selected from more than 300 university productions to appear in the fourth annual festival which begins April 17.

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