

Film touched by tired storyline

By TOM MOORE
Staff Writer

Sentimentality is a little like a tight-rope walker prancing across a delicate line. One has to tip-toe very carefully because it's so easy to slip off into the land of sappiness. *Touched By Love*, a film about a young girl with cerebral palsy who is befriended by a nurse's aide, falls right into the world of sappiness—the film is so sappy that it's nauseating.

The dialogue is pure Hollywood cornball and there isn't much substance to the characters, with the exception of Karen (Diane Lane), the girl with cerebral palsy. The aide, Lena Canada (Deborah Raffin), remains a mystery character. We don't know why she volunteered to work in the center for handicapped children or why she is so drawn to Karen in particular.

For *Touched By Love* to work it needs stronger characters with whom

the audience can identify. The memorable movies that have dealt with the handicapped—*The Miracle Worker*, *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* and the television film *Larry*—all had strong characters that made you care about them, not cardboard stereotypes like those presented by *Touched by Love*. These classics also avoided the tired and obvious clichés in their plots. *Touched By Love* is so littered with clichés that it's easy to predict what's going to happen next because we've seen this story on television and in the movies too many times already.

Cinema

At times, *Touched By Love* leaves behind its sappy sentimentality and becomes unintentional parody. Scenes where crippled children swing

their wheelchairs to Elvis Presley's "Teddy Bear" and where a crippled boy carries on lengthy conversations with a friend who never moves or replies to him in any way are designed to be heartwarming; they instead provoke nervous giggles because of their similarity to *Saturday Night's* tasteless routines.

Diane Lane, though, gives a strong performance as Karen most of the time. She expertly captures the mannerisms of one afflicted with cerebral palsy, but at times her performance changes into a normal healthy little girl who sits in a wheelchair—it's almost as if Lane were playing two different characters. And this is director Gus Trikonis' fault; he should have kept Lane's performance more in line.

The film's bland characters, cliché-ridden dialogue and plot should cause *Touched By Love* to quickly disappear from America's screens.

Film's producers bypassed studios

Deborah Raffin, the star of *Once Is Not Enough* and *The Last Convertible*, and her husband Michael Viner were in Durham last week to talk with Duke's Freewater Film Society about the making of films and to promote *Touched By Love*, a film that Raffin and Viner believe in very much.

Touched By Love stars Deborah Raffin as Lena Canada, a young nurse's aide in a home for handicapped children. She befriends a girl with cerebral palsy and encourages her to become a pen pal with Elvis Presley. The film is produced by Viner, who, with his wife Raffin, went into hock to have the movie made.

Touched By Love is based on the autobiography *To Elvis With Love*. Viner read the book in galley form two-and-one-half years ago while flying to meet his wife. "I was totaled," recalls Viner. "I was crying so hard that I fell down in the aisles. And when I met Deborah, I pushed the package into her hands and said, 'You have to read this.'"

Viner and Raffin outbid the major studios for the property which they "envisioned as a made-for-TV movie," says Viner. "But Ray Stark (a film producer) convinced us that this was feature film material."

There were problems in getting the film financed. The movie studio "wanted certain people used in the film for a TV sale. And they wanted a certain director so they could get a foreign sale," Viner said.

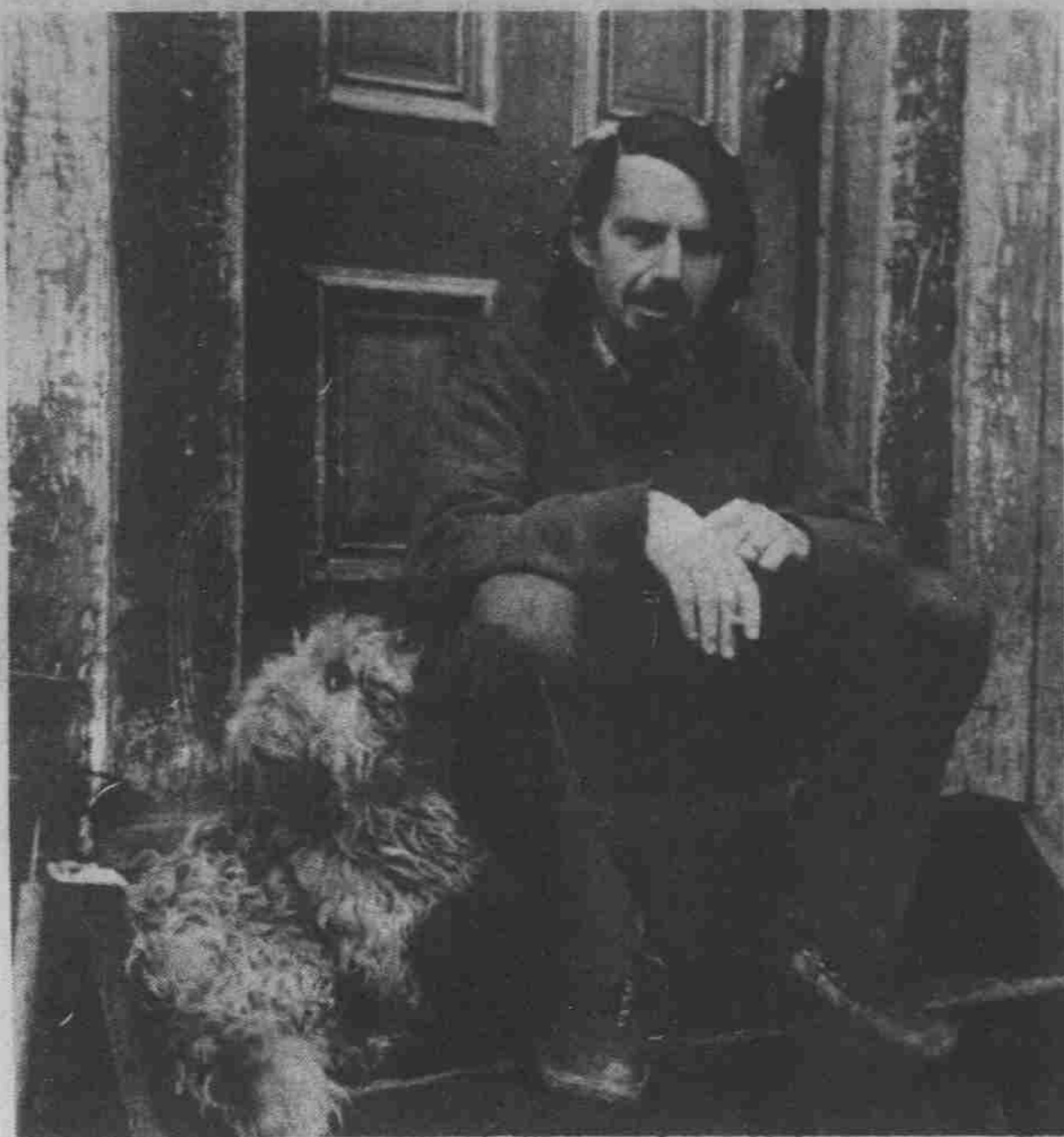
But Viner and Raffin's wishes prevailed and they got the people they wanted for the film. "Many Academy Award nominees and winners worked at a low rate on the film, because they believed in the project," Viner says.

Viner isn't satisfied, however, with the way *Touched By Love* is being promoted. It is a film that has to be sold very carefully, he said. "The 30-second TV spots they're using don't tell what the film's about. You can't take a slice from the film and get the movie," says Viner.

—TOM MOORE



Lane and Raffin in 'Touched By Love' ...a story of a special friendship



Poetry reading

Noted poet Robert Creeley will give a reading of his poetry today at 8 p.m. in room 111 Murphy Hall. A reception will be held at the Carrboro Art School following the reading.

Creeley's works include *Le Fou*, *For Love: Poems 1950-60*, *Words*, *A Day Book*, *The Gold Diggers*, *Presences: A Test for Marisol*, *Away*, *Selected Poems* published by Scribners, *Hello and Later*.

This event is free and is sponsored jointly by the UNC English department, the Art School, the National Endowment for the Arts and the North Carolina Arts Council.

46th American Dance Festival opens with traditional celebration of roots

Internationally heralded as the mecca of American dance, the 46th American Dance Festival will be highlighted by premieres by Paul Taylor, Pilobolus, Erick Hawkins and Kei Takei. The ADF also commissioned most of the music for the new dances to be performed in Durham June-July.

The ADF will open this season June 17 with the traditional celebration of the "Roots of American Dance." This summer's program, "A Salute to Vaudeville Dance," will be headlined by many of the era's leading performers. Dizzy Gillespie, dancers Honi Coles and Scobey Stroman and the Rutgers/Livingston Jazz Professors will perform June 23.

The ADF's performance schedule will be highlighted by performances by the Nikolais Dance Theatre (June 19-21); Crownsnest (June 24); the Erick Hawkins Dance Company (June 26-28); Kei Takei's Moving Earth (July 1); the Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation (July 3-5); and performances by the Paul Taylor Dance Company (July 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12); the Chuck Davis Dance Company (July 15); the Bella Lewitzky Dance Company (July 17, 18, 19); and the Pilobolus Dance Theatre (July 21, 22, 24, 25 and 26).

This year the ADF will be the scene of a week-long Body Therapy Workshop, the first of its kind in the nation. Duke University medical specialists will join experts in the techniques

of Alexander, Bartenieff, Feldenkrais, and Todd/Swiggard to investigate the research potential and underlying principles of movement for dance and other forms of physical training, injury prevention and health maintenance.

Last year's successful Town Hall series will be repeated this summer. The public discussion series brings together nationally acclaimed humanists and choreographers to explore the significance of modern dance in American culture. Participants this summer will include social anthropologist Judith Linne Hanna; historian Newil Harris; literature professor Benjamin DeMott; *New York Times* dance critic Anna Kisselgoff; psychologist Martha Davis; philosopher Gerald Myers; and choreographers Paul Taylor, Alwin Nikolais, Bella Lewitzky, Moses Pendleton and Erick Hawkins.

Now in its 10th year, the Dance Critics' Conference, which is headed by *Village Voice* dance critic Deborah Jowitz, offers professional journalists a three-week program designed to deepen their understanding of all aspects of dance.

The Choreographers and Composers Workshop for Young Professionals provides composers and choreographers with a chance to work and experiment together in order to enhance their understanding of each other's art.

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