

UNC grad turns producer

Butler: bodybuilding just like any other sport

By HANK BAKER
Staff Writer

To many people, the sight of muscle-bound body builders showing off their wares has only a freak-show appeal. This sport of developing one's muscles up to this degree is a little too out-of-the-ordinary for comfort. But George Butler means to change this attitude. At one of the Fine Arts Festival's premiere showings of Butler's film *Pumping Iron*, Butler said that "people should look at bodybuilding as any other sport."

Butler, a native of England and graduate

of UNC, is a slender man of medium height, quite unlike the subjects of his film. He received a master's degree in creative writing and went on to various jobs for *Newsweek*, *VISTA*, and *Sports Illustrated*. But it wasn't until 1972, when *Sports Illustrated* sent him and novelist Charles Gaines to cover the Mr. East Coast Contest, that Butler got a chance to show off his interest in body building as a sport.

The article that resulted from the contest was probably the first favorable article on bodybuilding to appear in a major magazine in the U.S. This and other articles led to the idea for and writing of the book *Pumping Iron—The Art and Sport of Bodybuilding*.

"We spent three or four years traveling around to various contests and getting to know people so that we could do the book," Butler said. Once the book was finished, though, finding a publisher was quite a task, he said. After being turned down time after time, Simon and Schuster agreed to publish it.

While writing the book, however, Butler

also was trying to scrape up money to make a film on bodybuilders. "I had as hard a time getting money to make the film as Charles and I had getting our book published." He tried twice, in 1972 and 1974, to get backing for his film, but with no success. Finally, in 1975, with the help of film-maker Peter Davis (*Hearts and Minds*) and others, Butler found some cohorts and also a coproducer in the person of Jerome Gary. Then he went to get money from wherever he could. "Most of the financing came from up-and-coming young executives willing to take a chance. The studios wouldn't touch the project," Butler said. "We did the film on a \$500,000 budget and with a nonunion crew, which helped cut down on costs."

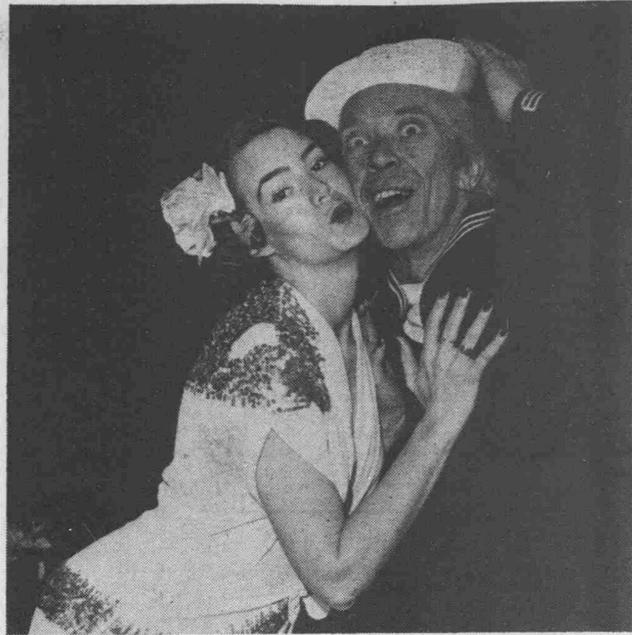
Butler was not out to make a simple documentary film. "I wanted to make *Pumping Iron* as much unlike a documentary as possible. We developed scenes in the film that would move it along dramatically. Many scenes were set up. In fact, after we had been shooting all day, Arnold (Schwarzenegger) and I would sit around and talk about what we would do the next day."

Also, the South African Mr. Olympia Contest (THE World Bodybuilding Championship Contest) was restructured for the film, Butler said, so that more contestants could come and compete, thereby heightening the drama.

How difficult is it to make such a film? "I was pleasantly surprised at how cooperative all our cast was," Butler said. "The guys are naturals in front of a camera."

"It's usually hard to make a sports film because the camera can't always follow the action, and you have to deal with players' contracts, which can end up costing an incredible amount of money. It's different with bodybuilding. There's no contract hassle, and the cameraman can get up as close as he wants to his subject without disturbing him. In fact, the guys got so used to having the cameras in front of them that they just ignored them after a while."

Each bodybuilder has a distinct personality of his own. He isn't just a hulk," Butler said. "In *Pumping Iron* we took a subject that everyone thought was ludicrous and showed the grace and naturalness of it." Judging by the favorable response the film is getting, Butler seems to have been successful in his goal.



Barbara Shepherd and Frank Raiter star in *History of the American Film*.

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Bogart, Garland, Brando at UNC?

By PAM BELDING
Staff Writer

History of the American Film is a comedy that parodies and spoofs the lives of famous stars portrayed on the Hollywood screen throughout 50 years of movie tradition. But it's not a film. It's a play produced by the Playmakers



ICY PEARL

Repertory Company which premiered last night at 8 p.m. in the Playmakers Theatre.

The actors portrayed the lives of Loretta Young, Jimmy Cagney, Henry Fonda and Bette Davis in situations made famous by Hollywood. In one memorable movie, Cagney shoved a grapefruit half into a costar's face. *History of the American Film* recreates that moment on stage.

The actors recreate scenes from movies such as *Casablanca*, *A Star Is Born*, *Little Caesar*, *Psycho* and *Citizen Kane*. Legends such as Judy Garland and Humphrey Bogart are brought back to life, but the play doesn't neglect living legends such as Marlon Brando, Richard Burton, Elizabeth Taylor and Charlton Heston.

The play is based on themes common to great American films: boy meets girl, boy loses girl, and boy wins girl back; success isn't happiness, but liquor doesn't provide solutions; wartime tests

and brings out the best in people; and sometimes a person must defy the system to be true to himself.

Guest director Bill Ludel from New York is directing the play by Christopher Durang. Ludel has directed two other plays by Durang. He said "The play is about the American Dream and its failure. It's always a special thrill to be directing a new play, particularly one by Durang. He is not only a talented playwright; he's a good composer and lyricist as well."

History of the American Film is a play chosen for the Eugene O'Neill Playwrights Conference as was *Isadora Duncan Sleeps with the Russian Navy*, another Playmakers production.

The play will run through April 2 and again April 5 to 9. There will be two Saturday matinee performances, on April 2 and 9 at 2 p.m., and tickets are \$4.90. Evening performances are at 8 p.m., and tickets are \$4.50 during the week and \$4.90 on weekends.

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