

Long runs and reruns: the film game

Is *Star Wars* ever going to leave? "Not when it's still making money," the theater manager told me.

If people here were that ready to go through a second childhood, you'd think they would have done it to their heart's content by now. The runaway success of *Star Wars* (it will probably be the top-grossing film of all-time by Christmas) again shows the all-powerful appeal of mass culture—TV and comic books in particular. Most people want their movies to have the same formulas and the same effect on them as TV does—quick, short and to the point. Everything is worked out; you know how it will end. Formulas are reworked time after time, and audiences eat it up.

films

By HANK BAKER

There is some kind of reassurance for the audience in this kind of repetition, being able to see a world in which stability is triumphant every week and characters have familiar traits and nuances. Yet one cannot help but wonder how many times people have to see this stuff before it becomes tiresome. Are people that afraid of being stimulated by something they aren't familiar with?

The local (and, I suspect, limited) success of films like *Cri-la*, *3 Women*, and *Carrie* is encouraging, particularly since these films are much more imaginative and funnier than *Star Wars* even begins to be. Yet you can't help but notice that it is films like *The Paper Chase*, *American Graffiti* (that George Lucas has his mass audience figured out perfectly), *Play It Again, Sam*, and *Women In Love* that keep returning. The only Altman film that makes such a record number of returns is *M*A*S*H*, while his most innovative works *McCabe & Mrs. Miller*, *The Long Goodbye*, *Nashville* come around infrequently, if at all.

The films that come back time after time are like TV reruns—audiences want their weekly or monthly doses of the same old thing. There's nothing wrong with wanting

to see a film again and again, but when all it offers are jazzed up versions of tired or pat situations, I wonder what people see in it. *The Paper Chase* and *Play It Again Sam* have some entertainment value, and the reason that they're college favorites is that both appeal to favorite fantasy pastimes of many students.

The Paper Chase is a supposed "youth movie" that is struggling to say something and then doesn't. What it does provide is a fantasy version of the student's life, full of pat situations and cliched characters. These are guaranteed to please people who really want to believe that their lives and experiences can be put across so simply. I don't think there's ever been a director who has succeeded at capturing a college atmosphere in a film, but if one did, people would probably stay away in droves. Without a beautiful professor's daughter to go to bed with, or the chance to call the professor a son-of-a-bitch, there's no "popular appeal."

Woody Allen is a favorite everywhere, and with the added attraction of the Bogart figure, the filmmakers have killed two birds with one stone. Never mind that the film has a lot of stale jokes and a stodgy feel to it because Herbert Ross allows no spontaneity in his direction. When you've got an old and new favorite along with the old 40's Hollywood idealism in the same film, you've got a sure-fire rerun hit.

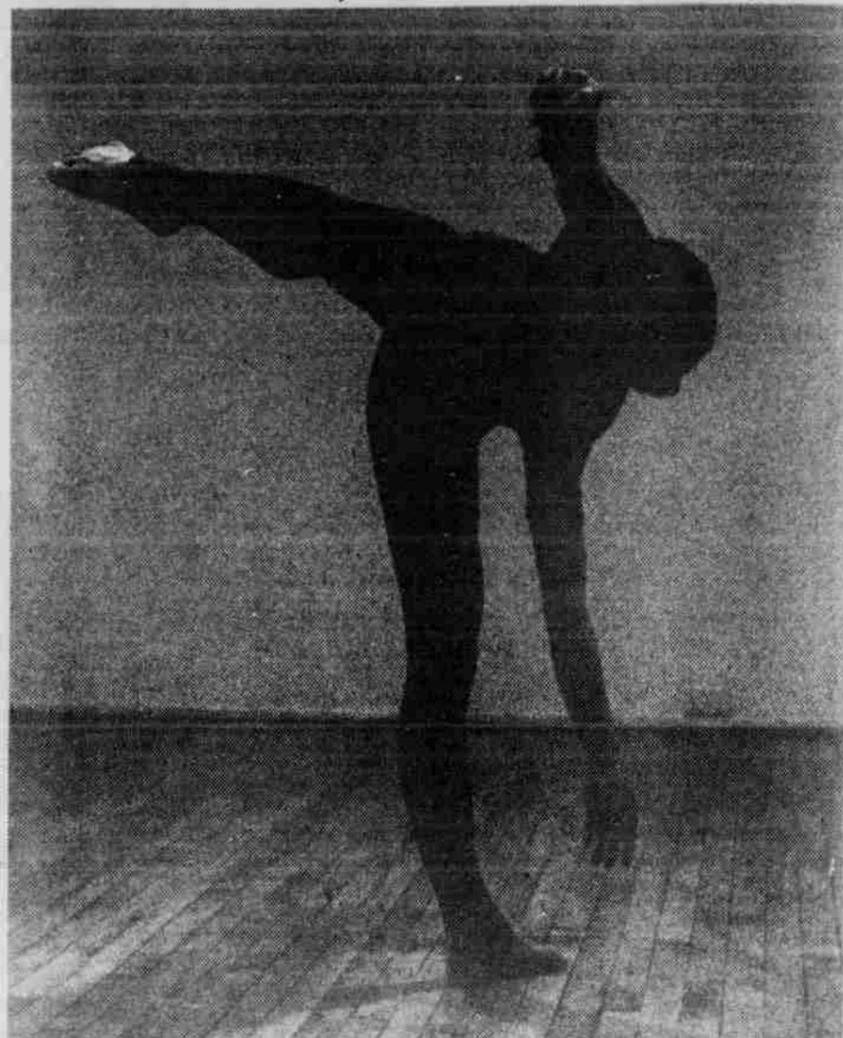
Women In Love is different, to a degree. But its appeal can be linked to the same mass culture appeal as the other films. *Women In Love* is supposed to be the "high art" cult film hereabouts, but it has no more to do with art than does *The Paper Chase*. Its only claim to fame is its constant input of heavily charged scenes. Ken Russell gives us all the pulpy parts of D.H. Lawrence's book, as if that was what the book was really about. There are plenty of people who haven't read the book and think they're getting a visual equivalent of Lawrence. But *Women In Love* is just Russell's own heavy-handed, Hollywoodized condensation of the book's sexual and sensual highlights: a gothic porno *Comics Illustrated* version for supposed adults. People don't care that the film is a perversion of a great book and that Russell

never shows you why the characters act and talk the way they do. As long as audiences can get one highlight after another, like they can on TV, then it's all right. Russell has since proven what he really is—a campy hysteric—but his films still have an appeal for those who like to be bludgeoned.

I was surprised when someone at a party told me that *Star Wars* was funny, but that *Carrie* was silly. The inherent foolishness in that remark was the first thing that hit me—*Star Wars* is as silly a movie as anything I've seen. But there's something else that shapes an attitude like this. *Carrie* is a horror film that doesn't take itself seriously—in fact, it satirizes a lot of old horror movie conventions and plays them up for a screwy effect. Brian de Palma doesn't naively take the old conventions seriously like George Lucas does in *Star Wars*. This may be the

reason for the hostility towards *Carrie*. People don't want their comforting conventions made to look so shamelessly funny in such a potentially enjoyable way. *Star Wars* rehashes the old plot lines and the like—even when the film sends up some conventions, you can tell that Lucas still thinks they're greater than they really are.

Enjoying old movies and old conventions is all right to a degree, but when it gets to the point where it's the only thing that people will enjoy, then the growth and maturity of American art forms is in serious trouble. Films like *The Paper Chase* and *Star Wars* are for people who don't want to ever take films seriously because it's too much trouble. The idea that films are just for simple entertainment is as archaic and stupid as the conventions that keep appearing too many times.



Satoru Shimazaki, choreographer-dancer-instructor, will perform his solo "Geki-Sei" at the Seventh Annual Electronics Music Plus Festival at 8 p.m. Saturday. The music, composed by John Watts, is based on two sections from the ancient Japanese court music first performed in 1074. The festival, to be held at Hill Hall, is co-sponsored by the Composer Theatre, Southeastern Composers League and the UNC Department of Music.

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Down in the hot plains of Mexico, the natives produce a liquor from the mescal or agave plant which we have come to know as Tequila. Good tequila tastes somewhat like you would imagine fermented cactus juice tastes. This flavor has puzzled great minds for years. The unanswered question being, "What can we do with tequila other than drink it straight or make Tequila Sunrises, like the kind you get in Mexico with a worm in it???"

Rather than see each of you face the task

weekend bartender

By CARL R. FOX

—Drink of the Week: *Frozen Bandito*—

of rising from bed after a long evening of salt, tequila and lemons, I would like to offer at least a partial answer—The Frozen Bandito! Hombres, this drink will keep you singing long after the music has stopped. There's plenty of Vitamin C, too. Try one soon. Cisco and Poncho would have killed for such a treat.

Ingredients for The Frozen Bandito®:

- 4 ozs. tequila;
- 3 ozs. grenadine syrup
- 2 ozs. Triple Sec;
- 6 ozs. frozen orange juice concentrate.

Pour ingredients into a blender jar, fill with cracked ice and liquefy. Pour into large wine goblets. Serves 6. NOTE: Use at least a moderately priced tequila so that its flavor is sure to come through.

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