

'Paper Moon' is brilliant

*Ryan O'Neal as
a hucksterish bible salesman
preys on widows.*

By Al Walentis

Two years ago "The Last Picture Show" introduced Peter Bogdanovich as one of the dynamic young directors in American cinema. Through skillful cutting and a near-perfect duplication of Texas life during the 1950's, Bogdanovich brilliantly detailed the dying of a small community and, more so, a way of life.

His latest production, "Paper Moon," establishes him as one of the premier forces in filmmaking. Its critical response will earn the 33-year-old director's next production an advance sale as hefty as a Muhammad Ali purse, in addition to some assorted mug shots in Time and Newsweek magazines.

Like its predecessor, "Paper Moon" is set in a dead era and culture. The scene this time is the Midwest during the Depression and Bogdanovich recreates not only the mood and intrinsic details, but also the filmmaking style. Consequently, "Paper Moon" is shot in black-and-white, without Cinemascope or distract-a-vision. The effect of a 1930's flick is so real that a coming attraction is expected for Karloff and Lugosi in "The Black Cat" or a sports-reel highlighting Max Schmeling's knockout of Joe Louis.

"Paper Moon" is much lighter than earlier Bogdanovich fare. Ryan O'Neal stars as a hucksterish bible salesman preying on widows. He is accompanied by Addie, a nine-year-old girl he is transporting to Missouri. She never ends up there and together they connive schemes more elaborate than peddling bibles.

Ryan O'Neal turns in a fine performance which should erase some of the pseudo-reputation he claimed after stints on "Peyton Place" and in "Love Story."

But it's Tatum O'Neal as Addie who steals more than the money she lifts in the film. She has already forced critics to grope for expletives to define the girl who could become the youngest Oscar winner in history.

Basically, "Paper Moon" may appear to be nothing more than a nostalgic enterprise, designed to capture the spirit of a portion of Americana. But on higher levels, it touches all ranges of the human experience, from persons unable to cope with an angry environment to the forces that drive men to thievery and deceit.

In the early sequences it is Addie who gains the audience's sympathy as she foils Moze (Ryan) in his attempts to extract every dollar from his unwary customers. Later it is Addie who emerges less than perfect when she sabotages Moze's affair with a sexy carnival dancer. Finally, both suffer when a bootleg scheme goes awry.

Through all of this, Bogdanovich smoothly molds the characters who, although not vaguely reminiscent of actual person, do emerge as satiric representation of reality.

Reviewers everywhere are acclaiming "Paper Moon" as one of the five best films of 1973. It might be. At the very least it's one of the most enjoyable, filled with charm and warmth, pathos and humor.

"Let the Good Times Roll" is a documentary, of sorts. It supposedly recreates the 1950's with the help of rock and roll artists like Chuck Berry, Bill Haley and the Comets, Bo Diddley, the Shirelles and others. The film, however, is composed largely of recently made film of rock and roll concerts held in New York by promoter Richard Nader, the film's producer.

In an attempt to be more than a simple filmed concert, "Good Times..." sports a lot of split screen work (that is, the wide panavision screen is divided into two separate pictures) so shots of old TV shows and movies can be thrown in from time to time.

The unfortunate thing about this film is that nothing works. As a film reconstruction or an era, "Good Times..." fails to convey any real atmosphere or character. While clips of James Dean, Brando and Groucho Marx can suggest things in the past, they really contribute nothing to the content of the film aside from an occasional exclamation of recognition.

The marathon "movie orgies," produced for a national beer company, work much better as a rapid-fire synthesis of nostalgia. As far as capturing the spirit of the "good old days of rock and roll" no film succeeds nearly as well as George Lucas' new motion picture (not released, as yet in this area) "American Graffiti"

which depicts 1962 in brilliant, entertaining and extremely professional fashion. "Good Times..." cannot even hold a candle to this kind of nostalgic recreation.

On still simpler levels "Good Times..." is disappointing. While the photography and sound are good, they do not really take advantage of their potential. The split screen technique, for example, or multi-image technique (more than two images) is limited to a few similar shots with only an occasional kaleidoscopic conjunction of images or, as mentioned before, periodic clips from old films.

The National Film Board of Canada has done far superior things with split screen, especially in some of its fast moving and entertaining travelogues. There was also a dandy little murder mystery a few months ago called "Sisters" which made excellent use of split screen by showing the same action from two separate camera angles, a technique far more interesting than anything in "Good Times..."

Even as a filmed concert, this movie lacks the energy and vitality one experiences at live concerts by these artists or those of Jerry Lee Lewis or Sha-Na-Na. Despite all the shots of sweaty performers and screaming fans there is just no spunk, no life, no real excitement in this film, and isn't that what it is supposedly all about?

'Let the Good Times Roll'

*Just for the memories
and the music*

By Jennifer Wilkinson

Return of the 50's

*'Despite shots of
sweaty performers and
screaming fans, there is
no real excitement in this film.'*

By Mark Trachtman

Like it or not, the fifties had a style all their own. "Let The Good Times Roll" is a refreshing, funny and touching collage of the era, its mores and music.

And what music! So direct and to the point. There's a special kind of innocence in such songs as the Coasters' "Poison Ivy." "You better not let her under your skin or you'll soon need an ocean of calamine lotion." And there's nothing in the world like Fats Domino's rendering of "Blueberry Hill."

The film is more than just a collection of old songs, though. Artful splicing places the singer beside his image of fifteen years past while choice still photographs and fifties news reports put the sounds in their setting.

But not without a slight nudge here and there at present day politics. One flashback shows a very serious 1950's Richard Nixon "loving his country" to the tune of "Why is Everybody Always Picking on Me? Charlie Brown . . ." while two packages of Old Gold cigarettes dance insolently on one side of the screen.

Little Richard's almost (Alice) Cooperesque performance in the second half of the film is a bit out of tune with the general mood and momentarily stops the otherwise rapid pace. But the pause is not too damaging.

"Let the Good Times Roll" is greatly entertaining and very worth seeing, if only for the memories the old songs bring back.