

on Fleming's handling of actors and staging of action. Standard movie music is naïve program music carried to absurdity—a dramatic supplement designed to make you swoon in the romantic scenes or to shock you to attention at some brutality, but never encouraging you just to listen. It's a relief to hear the Quincy Jones music, which goes along independently, at its own rhythm. But Fleming's direction is so uninteresting that without the kind of music that makes points and emphasizes climaxes and intensifies the changes of mood one tends to forget about what is going on on the screen. The action up there doesn't seem to have any shape—it's like what one might see from a train window—and so some stretches of the movie are concerts.

Although "The Split" is like a square comic strip, this may be enough for commercial success, because people want action so badly that they don't necessarily mind if it's stupid and patched together out of irrelevant, jarring camera angles. And, because in the movie business the producers look not at a man's work but at the grosses of his pictures, Gordon Fleming will go on to bigger messes. Good gangster-action movies don't always score at the box office. Carlo Lizzani's "The Violent Four" went by earlier this year without much attention, and when "The Killing" came out it was a financial failure. They weren't crude and garish sideshows, like "The Split," and they didn't have Jim Brown. As a hood, Jim Brown is handsome and stiff—the essence of straight. He looks like an Indian, and he acts like a wooden one; he's totally unconvincing. (For a comparison, one needs to go back to Charles Starrett.) But each time he comes on the screen the kids in the theatre yell as if he had just scored a touchdown, and an actor who has the public on his side like this is almost sure to loosen up; when you're cheered for a performance like Brown's in "The Split," you have no need to be anxious and stiff. Brown may become the first Negro matinée idol of the screen. Poitier made it to the top by acting; Brown is the equivalent of the old Arrow-collar-ad idols, and he may be the new Robert Taylor or Gregory Peck. Is there a phrase along the lines of "Ontogeny repeats phylogeny" for blacks' recapitulating whites' mistakes?

ONLY fourteen years have elapsed since "It Should Happen to You," in which Judy Holliday, as Gladys Glover, a nobody who wanted to be a somebody, thought the answer would

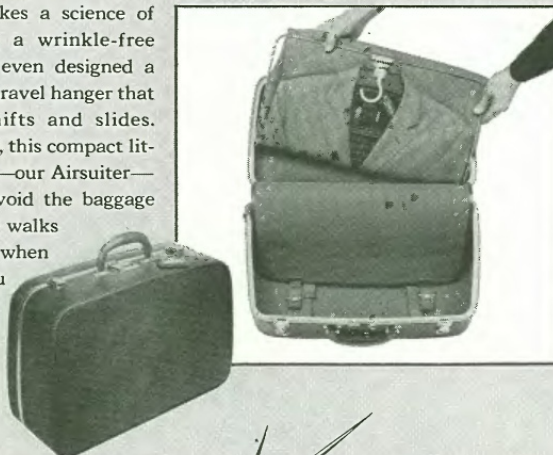


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be to have her name on a billboard—a solution that the movie presented satirically. But our notions of celebrity have changed, and John Brockman, a young mixed-media promoter who has put his face in the television and newspaper ads for "Head," has probably made himself a somebody. Brockman has made himself the star of "Head," though he doesn't even appear in the movie. The depressing possibilities that he has thus opened are sure to be seized on.

The advertising campaign for "Head" suggests some sort of turned-on movie about the drug scene, but the movie itself is designed for the sub-teens. The only novelty is in the selling—in convincing kids that they are visually sophisticated when they buy old jokes and blackout routines as mind-blowing, psychedelic, McLuhanite collages. "Head" is an attempt to do for the Monkees what the Richard Lester films did for the Beatles, but it borrows as much from Abbott and Costello as from Lester. (Will somebody try to sell the old Abbott and Costello films as marijuana visions, too? And "Hellzapoppin," and the Three Stooges?) This is the kind of material, taken from all over, that the Monkees have already worn out on television, only much worse. The movie might have worked for bored kids at kiddie matinées, but the filmmakers got ambitious. The by now standard stuff of girls squealing as pop idols perform is not even convincing when they're squealing for the Monkees, and when this is intercut with documentary footage of the suffering and horror of war, as if to comment on the shallowness of what the filmmakers are manufacturing and packaging and desperately trying to sell, the doubling up of greed and pretensions to depth is enough to make even a pinhead walk out. So when the boys started to sing "Open your eyes, there's so much to do in the sunlight"...

—PAULINE KAEI

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MOST FASCINATING NEWS STORY OF THE WEEK

[The following item, reprinted in its entirety, is from the Reading (Pa.) Times]

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