

'Phantom of Paradise'—comix culture at its best

By Greg Lukow

Phantom of the Paradise is a hip comic book come to life. It is pop, groupie culture at its best: grotesquely caricatured and exaggerated, a gawdy, colorful rock-horror show.

For the record, it is our

fourth remake of *The Phantom of the Opera*, originally a silent starring Lon Chaney. But instead of the secret underground sewers beneath a Paris opera house, writer-director Brian de Palma has placed his phantom amid

the patch panels and mixing decks of an ultra-modern recording studio. The Paradise is a decadent rock gallery, constructed by a millionaire-producer called the Swan, a mysterious hybrid of Phil Spector and Citizen Kane.

The Phantom's name is Winslow Leach, a discouraged, tragic songwriter who has his face permanently embossed in a record press. The part is hammed up nicely by wide-eyed William Finley, but the real star of the show is sinter-composer Paul Williams. Swan is an appropriate name for this white-haired, dimpled urchin who supposedly has written some fine pop material that usually ends up being performed by people like the Carpenters and Three Dog Night. People haven't paid much attention to Williams before this film and I doubt if they will afterwards, but his music does work well here. When combined with de Palma's rapid fire pacing and perfect editing it creates a rhythmic movie that is nearly a rock opera in itself.

De Palma is yet another of those promising young American directors, his most notable effort being the critically acclaimed *Sisters*, a minor little horror study that spent most of its time knocking around summer drive-ins.

By David Ware

Brian de Palma's *Phantom of the Paradise*, showing at the Hollywood and Vine Theater, is an uneven, quirky movie that emerges, in spite of its uneven texture, as curiously impressive film displaying flashes of genius and a real love by the producer and director for the film's real subject: Rock n' Roll.

Taking bits and snatches from *The Phantom of the Opera*, *Faust*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and *Tribby*, de Palma has fashioned a nightmarish sparkling image of the self-destructive twilight cosmos of rock.

The shining jewels of the piece, though, are composer Paul Williams, and new face Jessica Harper. As Swan, the shadowy, behind-the-scenes rockmeister, Williams is smooth, impossible to ruffle and innocuously sinister. The advertisements read, "He sold his soul for rock n' roll," and this is a fair reduction of the film's theme. He is a baby-faced immortal serving the devil and making a profit. This invocation of the Faust theme is humorous yet chillingly effective, especially so in a flashback showing Swan being signed up by a devil who bears his own cute, puggish face.

As the composer of the film's score, Williams re-inforces my earlier opinion of him as one of the greatest living pastiche artists. His score is a loving yet faithful amalgam of elements lifted from the past two decades of rock, mixed with consummate care and concern.

The real showstopper, though, is Harper as Phoenix. Almost unspeakably beautiful, with a voice to match and an unconscious fluid dense of movement, she is superb and quite possibly worth the price of admission.

More important than Harper's transcendent loveliness or Williams' craftsmanship is the message hurled by de Palma in the last few frames. As Swan and his nemesis Leach lay dying on the stage of the Paradise Theater, with glorified groupies Phoenix looking on in horror, de Palma reminds us that there is no glory, no touching demise for the stars or the starstruck.

This sobering realization provides a measure of salt for, and toughens the substance of *Phantom of the Paradise*, making it an honest portrait, without tears, of the subculture that has grown up around rock music.

BONANZA EVERY TUESDAY NIGHT RIB-EYE SPECIAL

Served with baked potato and crisp salad, with a choice of dressing, and Texas Toast. **1.79**



Good wholesome American food at right neighborly prices.

8315 'O' Street Lincoln



"No tipping please. Just leave us with a smile."

ARP is here

Complete selection of ARP's keyboard synthesizers only at Sound City Music. Lincoln's exclusive ARP dealer.



9th and N St.

475-5128

VALENTINO'S

Fine Italian Food

NORTH

35th & Holdrege

467-3611

CLOSED MONDAY

SOUTH

70th & Van Dorn

483-2611

CLOSED TUESDAY

This Wednesday is special student night at Valentinos party room. All the pizza and pop for only \$2.25. Look for details in Wednesday's paper.

HOURS:

Sunday—Thursday 4pm-Midnight

Friday 4pm-12:30 am

Saturday 4pm-1:00am

VAL'S

greg lukow key grip

De Palma has obviously had fun with *Phantom*; it is full of little inside movie jokes. Swan has a fat, greasy promoter named Philbin, (after Mary Philbin, the trembling, curious heroine who yanked Chaney's mask off in the original *Phantom*), and there is one scene in which de Palma films a shot-by-shot recreation of Hitchcock's shower-knifing sequence from *Psycho*.

So far, de Palma's principle asset is that he is a talented director who does not appear ready to jump into the mainstream of commercial film-making as some of his peers, like Coppola, Scorsese and George Lucas, have done. Despite a surface shallowness, he has spiced up *Phantom* just enough so that it is its own reward, which is more than can be said for other modern, camp-horror remakes like Paul Morrissey's *Frankenstein*, a movie we didn't need.

Phantom at its best gives us a delightfully offbeat laugh at the glitter'n gold that has replaced the rock 'n roll in a slick, hollow culture. It is at its worst only in those brief moments when it indulges in that same spoon-fed culture.

Showcase to feature experimental films

This semester's Film-makers' Showcase, presented by the Sheldon Film Theater, will feature Storm De Hirsch, an experimental film maker who is noted for her unique technical use of color and visual expression.

Eight of De Hirsch's films, varying from ten to 80 minutes in length, will be shown at 3 and 7:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday.

On Tuesday three short films, *Third Eye Butterfly*, *The Tattooed Man*, and *An Experiment in Meditation*, will be shown. Wednesday features a series of shorts, *Hudson River Diary*, along with a trilogy of shorts entitled *The Color of Ritual*, *The Color of Thought*. On Thursday, a feature film, *Goodbye in the Mirror*, will be presented. All the films are free.