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PG

'Four Musketeers'—Lester sharpens swords and satire

The rapturous pleasure of *The Four Musketeers* is that it's such a beautifully entertaining movie that it doesn't even need Richard Lester's knock-about style and roguish satire to make it a great film. But that style, those bumbling human quirks that make up Lester's personal vision, are all there and it combines to make this perhaps the most intrinsically enjoyable period, adventure film ever made.

All of the main characters are back from *The Three Musketeers* (although we see considerably less of some of them) since this is, after all, the same movie only cut in half.

Yet it is different in feeling than the original installment. There is less emphasis on Lester's little moments of comic, hit-and-miss slapstick (although they're still there). The picture is a bit lewder, grittier and gaudier, and in the final reel a tense but never strained seriousness takes over as some of our old friends and villains are killed off.

I like it better than *The Three Musketeers*, not only because Lester successfully manipulates the shift in the movie's basic feeling, but also because in lessening the designed slapstick, he has given us a surprisingly broader tapestry.

The scenes here are complexly constructed tableaux and they need to be watched and listened to carefully because Lester's throwaway humor is some of his best. Comic lines are tossed out and barely heard and some of the brightest visual gags are those found away from the main focus of the frame. When Lester sets up a large-scale bombardment scene he's not content to line up rows of soldiers and cannons, he has to put a herd of terrified sheep wandering aimlessly in front of the action and a scurrying priest walking along and blessing each cannon with holy water.

There is much in this movie that surpasses most of what was done in the earlier Musketeers picture. The best include the opening sequence in which the Musketeers (once again Oliver Reed, Richard Chamberlain and Frank Finley) rescue the eye-patched villain Rochefort (Christopher Lee makes him one of the all time great movie sinisters) from an incompetent firing squad; the gorgeous sword fight on the river of ice between D'Artagnan (Michael York) and Lee, and the scene on the parapet in which the four heroes fight off an invading rebel attack while trying to get in a morning's breakfast.

There is one other scene, seemingly smaller in scale and import, yet perhaps my favorite because it best sums up Lester's intentions: York and Faye Dunaway (as the evil Milady) wake up from a night's affair and within seconds find

themselves in a tooth-and-nail sword and knife fight, trying to out maneuver each other while stumbling over and clutching their bed sheets in efforts to keep decent in front of each other. For Lester there is no dignity in chivalry.

The Four Musketeers is coitled "The Revenge of Milady" and appropriately it turns out to be Faye Dunaway's movie. Her acting gyrates through moments of feigned innocence and lying treachery that wins us over to her style, but not enough to keep her from a tense, well deserved beheading. It's a brilliant acting job in a picture where you don't really look for brilliant acting jobs.

greg lukow
key grip

There are story devices devoid of all pretensions, visually exciting photography from David Watkin and perfectly set up sword fights that make Errol Flynn and Basil Rathbone look amateurish. There are heroes to cheer and villains you can boo. *The Four Musketeers* is a joy.

A few words on *At Long Last Love*. Peter Bogdanovich evidently didn't give this picture much thought so neither will I.

Ever since director Bogdanovich broke into the movies it's been all downhill for him, a sad circumstance since his first major feature, *The Last Picture Show*, showed so much promise of talent.

At Long Last Love is a string of Porter songs in search of a plot that Bogdanovich evidently based on the old upper-class sophisticate, musical-comedies of the late thirties (for Bogdanovich, the only movies ever made worth caring about are from the late thirties) but whether it is parody-salute or a parody-spoof is still up in the air.

The film stars all those dancing, singing greats such as Cybil Shepard, Burt Reynolds, Madeline Kahn and that good-looking Italian, I forget his name. The photography is OK (after shooting two films in black and white, now he shoots a black and white film in color), and John Hillerman and Eileen Brennan give nice performances as household domestics, but you need a lot of patience with Bogdanovich's indulgent in-jokes to put up with this insufferable turkey.

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