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Kaplan movie breaks a way from most sports films

By Peg Sheldrick

Fast Break is like Dr. Pepper: though it lacks the sophistication of champagne or the wholesomeness of milk, it is none-the-less bubbly, cool, and refreshing under the right circumstances.

review

It's another in the recent slew of "athlete-with-a-crazy-dream" movies, and it chooses to emphasize the comic potential of the fable rather than the melodramatic aspects.

Fast Break is the story of David Greene, a delicatessen clerk who has a chance to realize his dream of coaching basketball. He decides to "go for it," forsaking wife and job, and heads for rinky-dink Cadwallader University with a hand-picked team taken from the streets of New York.

His team includes a hood on the run, a pool hustler, a former evangelist (evading cultists who want to punish him for getting the leader's daughter in trouble), and a young woman who has to pose as a young man to play on a team worthy of her talent.

In addition to his motley crew, Greene copes with a piece rate salary (\$60 per victory), an amoral team manager (who thinks Nixon got a raw deal), and the knowledge that he must get a game with top-rated Nevada State and beat them if he is to continue coaching. Not exactly *cinema verite*, but it works despite all of the improbabilities.

This is Gabriel Kaplan's first movie, and it is a good choice for him. David Greene is not unlike Gabe Kotter, Kaplan's TV image, but Greene is more of a human being than the paragon of understanding Kotter is. The TV series was a natural extension of Kaplan's stand up comedy act, and the movie is something of an extension of his TV role (although the film was not written to be a vehicle for him).

The contrivances of the plot could easily turn the movie into an inane farce, but thanks to a good supporting cast and a well-handled script, the story never goes too far afield (or, rather, off court).

Randee Heller is especially good as Jan Greene, the wife who elects to stay in New

York rather than play follow the leader with her basketball-obsessed spouse. Sandor Stern's screen play is not without stereotypes but he avoids some of the more obvious schtick and gives his characters at least a semblance of dimension.

They are not the unreal buffoons of Kotter country. Stern contents himself with chuckles instead of belly laughs (although there are a number of those) and the result has a bit more grit and intelli-

gence than the TV series.

The casting of the team itself could not have been easy, but it is highly successful. Harold Sylvester, Michael Warren, Bernard King, Reb Brown and Mavis Washington all have sports in their backgrounds, but not all of them have acted before. Yet, they come off as natural and believable as the plot permits.

And by all appearances, they aren't a bad basketball team. The game sequences

are exciting, hardly resembling the pitched battles they are in fact. Members of the audience have been moved to shout as enthusiastically as they would at an actual game.

Fast Break is not to be confused with *Citizen Kane*, but for what it is, it's very good. For the sports fan it offers laughs and action, and for the rest of us it offers an engaging cast in a fine comedy.



Photo courtesy of Columbia Pictures, Inc.

Gabe Kaplan, of TV's "Welcome Back, Kotter", takes time off from teaching to portray a coach in the movie "Fast Break"

Conductor complements Concordia Choir's performance

By Scott Miller

The Concordia College Choir from Moorehead, Minn. skidded into Lincoln Saturday night in fine style. They presented an exceptional program of a cappella music ranging from a Bach motet to the contemporary style of the choir's own conductor, Paul Christiansen.

Christiansen showed flair as a conductor throughout the program as the choir seemed to mirror the musical expressiveness conveyed by his conducting technique.

Christiansen has conducted the choir since 1937, and has written a large number of compositions and choral arrangements, widely performed throughout the country.

The choir has an unusually mature, almost dark quality as an ensemble, which worked quite nicely on the opening piece, "With Thy Spirit Uphold Me," from *Opus 29* by Brahms as well as on the next two pieces, one by Hermann Schien and the other a Kyrie Eleison, based on a plain song melody.

Diction suffered

However, when the choir performed the Bach motet, *Thy Spirit Also Helpeth Us*, the darkness seemed to obliterate the individual lines in this contrapuntal style and even though the motet was sung in English, the diction seemed to suffer on this piece. It is important to note here that the hall at First-Plymouth Church is exceptionally live which could account for part of the vagueness of individual lines.

Part two of the concert included contemporary pieces by Benjamin Britten, Richard Feliciano and Gustav Schreck.

The choir showed nice ensemble balance on the Five Flower Songs by Britten as well as an excellent feel for dynamic unity throughout the selections. Of particular note on this piece was the alto section which sang with almost perfect ensemble and a rich, warm sound.

Tight harmonies

Two Liturgical Songs by Feliciano were quite enjoyable as the singers straightened out the tone and sang with fine control the tight harmonies of the piece and closed it with a pianissimo that was balanced and exciting, yet almost inaudible to the human ear.

The *Advent Motet* by Schreck featured a small section for mixed quartet which unfortunately was covered by the rest of the choir during the entire piece. What was heard of the soloists on this piece was enjoyable, and again a mature sound.

The final section of the program consisted of pieces by Christiansen himself and various arrangements by his father F. Melius Christiansen as well as a few crowd pleasers thrown in an encore numbers.

From Heaven Above, arranged by F. Melius Christiansen, is worth mentioning because of the unidentifiable soprano soloist who sang with a velvety tone and unusually controlled evenness throughout the range of the piece.

Perhaps the best piece on the program was *Four Letters of St. Paul* by Christiansen which used much more useful harmonies than the piece done earlier by Christiansen.

This piece seemed to show off every aspect of the choir from diction and feel for ensemble, to the soloists.

Everything seemed to come together here. A baritone solo was featured in this piece and was sung clearly, and articulately with the choir doing a nice job of adjusting for the soloist.

Another highlight was an American hymn, *Winds Through the Olive Trees*, which featured a soprano soloist who sang with a good line and consistency throughout the piece. Back-up by the choir was splendidly done. One could have shut his eyes and dreamed, but it was too exciting to miss a second of the precision and delicacy with which this piece was done.

Encore numbers

Among the encore numbers performed was the spiritual *Rock-A-My Soul*. It seemed as though the choir regressed a bit here as the sound got a bit shouty, and the feel for ensemble lacked unity. The soprano soloist did a nice job on this piece and the tenor section as a whole showed a flair for this style.

Closing the program was *Beautiful Savior* arranged by F. Melius Christiansen. This beautiful piece was done superbly. The alto soloist was remarkably controlled

and sang with richness and warmth which complemented this subtly exciting piece. The subtle expressiveness and even phrasing of her voice was exceptional.

The Concordia Choir takes a deliberate approach to its music making. Every gesture by Christiansen is definite and each movement signals a musical thought, nothing is wasted in his conducting technique and it rubs off on the choir. Nothing was wasted in the music performed and the entire program was memorized by choir and conductor alike.

The Concordia Choir is a well disciplined group of fine young singers under the command of an exceptional leader.

Praised film to be shown

Celine and Julie Go Boating will be shown through Thursday at Sheldon Art Gallery.

The Foreign Film theatre production, directed by Jacques Rivette, features Juliet Berto as Celine and Dominique Labourier as Julie.

Celine and Julie Go Boating was shown at the New York Film Festival and was credited with "delightful slapstick" by the *New York Times*.

No series tickets is necessary. Admission is \$2. Screenings are at 7 p.m.