

# Arts & Entertainment

## Is TV worth the trouble?

By Pat Clark

Last week: Under intense pressure from a host of trite television cops, Dr. Donahue surrendered to arresting officer Joe Friday, on the condition that his case not be tried in a typical American court of law. Instead, Dr. Donahue, like hundreds of idiots before him, would be tried in television's own justice market, the only court that matters, "The People's Court."

The Honorable Charles Wopner, sage dispenser of justice between the commercials, took his position at the bench. "This court is now in session," he said, nonchalantly pounding the bench with his well worn gavel. He looked around the studio courtroom and saw Dr. Donahue standing where the defendant traditionally does, with Nielsen, Spinoff and Brewster crowded around the prosecution's microphone like a little trio of backup vocalists.

"Oh, it's you guys," said the judge sourly. "The kidnapping case, right?"

telling the national television audience a recently-hatched lie about Judge Wopner's "untimely illness" that would force cancellation of this week's version of "The People's Court" and possibly all future ones. The director frantically dialed a phone number, which Nielsen guessed would put him in touch with the show's producers, while technical crew members pulled plugs out of sockets and shut off microphones.

Still Judge Wopner blathered on. "In the opinion of this court, you are all equally guilty of placing too much importance on television," he said, pointing first at Donahue and then the others, back and forth several times for emphasis. "I am not going to claim that nothing is wrong with television. For the most part it is simply eye candy for people who are trying desperately not to think. It is, after all, television that brought us the likes of roller derby and Hollywood Squares and made Morris the Cat a more recognizable name than that of the vice president of the United States. But is that the fault of television, or of the television audience?"

Nielsen could hear Judge Wopner rambling on, but his attention was focused on the sound booth, where the director was talking to two men whom Nielsen recognized as Marlin Perkins and his faithful sidekick Jim. Marlin and Jim were dressed in safari garb and were carrying rifles.

"We can't deny that there is a market for the kind of programming we get on television these days," the judge continued. "Nielsen here is proof enough of that. Somebody is watching all of those 'Love Boat' reruns. We might wish it were not so, and talk a big game about how television should and must do more to educate and improve people, rather than merely lull them to sleep. But I am not so sure that people are so easily or so willingly improved. The history of educational television is littered with shows that everybody demanded and nobody watched. What I don't think we have come to understand is that while television may be big and profitable, it is still not important, at least not to the people who watch it. Television is capable of both good and great evil, but, for the present at least, accomplishes neither. I say, leave it alone."

The judge was still talking, but Nielsen's attention was focused on Marlin Perkins, who was talking into the house microphone. "While I wait up here in the safety of the sound booth, Jim is down on the studio floor, stalking the judge," Perkins said. "The judge seems to be offering no resistance at all . . . Jim will be shooting the judge with a mild tranquilizer so that we can put him in a crate and take him to his new retirement home in Florida . . . there's the shot . . . it's right on target, and down goes the judge. And now this word from Mutual of Omaha."

Next week: The resolution

## Television Review

"That's us," said Spinoff, as Brewster and Nielsen nodded their agreement.

Judge Wopner cleared his throat. "As you know, here on 'The People's Court' we frequently forego regular courtroom proceedings and since you agree to that condition before you come on the show, you're stuck with whatever I give you."

"In this case," Judge Wopner continued, "we had to find a crime petty enough to fit in with the format of the show, so all of this stuff about kidnapping and terrorism and what-have-you doesn't matter, at least in this courtroom. We tend more toward the kind of trials in which Family X wants Family Y to chop down an apple tree because the branches extend across the property line, big crimes like that."

Nielsen looked up in the booth, where the director was frantically waving and stomping and pointing like he was choreographing a hula dance about Armageddon. Finally he got the attention of Mark Lewellyn, who quickly cut away for an obviously unscheduled commercial.

Judge Wopner continued, either oblivious to the panic around him or trying his best to pretend he didn't see it. "Now, the way I see it, what's on trial here is not Dr. Donahue or any one of you on the prosecution side, but television itself and the amount of attention we give to it. The question before this court today is not whether Dr. Donahue or the Video Nostra or anybody else kidnapped Nielsen to make a statement about television, it's whether television is worth the trouble."

Goggle-eyed panic prevailed among the studio crew. Mark Lewellyn was calmly



Bess Armstrong plays socialite Eve Tozer and Tom Selleck portrays Patrick O'Malley, an ex-World War I daredevil pilot, in the action adventure "High Road To China."

## 'High Road' just another lookalike

By Jeff Goodman

It has been said that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. In Hollywood, imitation is also a way to make money.

John Carpenter's success with "Halloween" unleashed an entire pack of

change.

Not that the action scenes aren't good, it's just that there are too many of them and they get redundant.

In addition to the shoot-'em-up mentality, there are a few events that are a little too convenient to believe.

After failing to find Eve's father in Nepal, our intrepid heroes set out for China, for which he was headed. And, lo and behold, the first oxen pasture they land in is only a few hundred yards from where Mr. Tozer has decided to take up residence. Now come on, guys. China is a pretty big country and they didn't have any electronic homing devices back in the '20s.

One major problem with this film is that the characters and their roles are defined from the outset. They don't grow at all. Indeed, they're not allowed to.

Selleck is the tough, hard-bitten war hero who doesn't show any emotion except when he recounts some of his war stories.

But that emotion never comes up again. And it hurts the character. We all know that O'Malley is tough. He doesn't have to show us that. A little more emotion would have made him a much more sympathetic character.

The same is true of Armstrong's character. All we see is a rich society girl who's spoiled rotten. The reason she originally hires O'Malley to find her father is because her father's partner is going to have him declared dead so he can take over the company, thus depriving Eve of lots of dollars.

Still, in spite of these defects, "High Road to China" is a good movie. It has a certain energy and vitality that most films these days seem to lack. Most importantly, it's fun. It's a good adventure film, although not in the class of "Raiders of the Lost Ark."

## Film Review

imitators, almost without exception pale copies of the original.

Now along comes "High Road to China," a film very much like "Raiders of the Lost Ark." At least it *tries* to be like "Raiders."

That is both its charm and its downfall. The premise is good: A society girl, Eve Tozer, hires Patrick O'Malley, a down-and-out World War I ace, to find her father, who has been missing for three years.

Tom Selleck, in his first starring role on film, plays O'Malley. He is basically just an extension of Selleck's television character, so he's had lots of experience playing that role. He still plays it well.

Bess Armstrong also does well as Eve Tozer. The part doesn't call for much — a rich spoiled brat — but Armstrong manages to breathe life into what is, on paper at least, a pretty dormant role.

The best performance, however, is turned in by Jack Watson, who plays O'Malley's mechanic, Struts.

Well, if the acting is good, what's wrong with this film? For starters, too much reliance on special effects. Whenever things get a little slow, the director throws in a little aerial combat or some gunplay.

But, unlike a lot of movies these days, there aren't a lot of gory closeups of bullet holes or anything like that, a welcome

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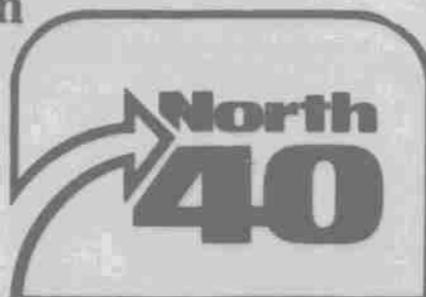
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