



They can't get no satisfaction

By Don McLeese

Attempting to analyze the Rolling Stones at face value is a tricky business. For years now, healthy doses of irony and ambiguity have pervaded the work of these very white boys with the very black influences. Although some politicians might prefer their rock'n'roll messages a little more straightforward—something on the order of Tom Robinson's "If left is right then right is wrong/Better decide which side you're on" sloganeering—the Stones refuse to make it easy.

("Pleased to meet you, hope you guess my name. But what's puzzling you is the nature of my game.")

Let's start with a couple overtly political songs (or at least songs with overtly political implications) from *Beggars Banquet*, an album released 12 years ago. While "Salt of the Earth" could easily have been a hymn to the working class—and, with one or two lyric changes, has been covered as such by a couple of other artists—the key to the song actually lies in its lines of curious detachment: "And when I search the faceless crowd, a swirling mass of gray and black and white, they don't look real to me, in fact they look so strange." Coldly indifferent? Or simply a little more honest than a lot of "love of the masses" rhetoric?

A similar twist occurs in "Street Fighting Man." What starts out as a call-to-arms (and was banned as such over Chicago airwaves around the '68 Democratic convention) is soon undercut by the refrain, "But what can a poor boy do, 'cept sing for a rock'n'roll band, 'cause in sleepy London town there's just no place for a street fighting man." There may be little doubt where the song's sympathy lies, but, as in "Salt of the Earth," such resignation keeps the singer removed from the fray.

By the time of 1978's *Some Girls*, the title cut of which aroused so much ire in these pages as elsewhere, irony-tinged detachment had slid all the way over into self-parody. What struck many as the gross insensitivity of the sexual cataloguing within "Some Girls" was as significant for its lampooning of Jagger's superstar/misogynist image, exorcising his cock-rock bravura by exaggerating it beyond belief. The intentionally ludicrous line "Black girls just wanna get fucked all night, I don't have that much jam" said less about someone else's supposed proclivities than about the singer's own sexual inadequacy.

Which, once again, is a little more ambiguous and ironical than those who demand their

messages straightforward would like it. I have a feeling that those who expressed the most outrage over "Some Girls" have never felt much affinity for either rock'n'roll or the Rolling Stones in any case. I also have a feeling that Mick Jagger wasn't terribly concerned about all the wrath he provoked—nothing like a little controversy to sell a few records.

The recently released *Emotional Rescue*, an album a lot more musically varied than the rejuvenated rave-ups that dominated *Some Girls*, is even further steeped in self-parody than its predecessor. Despite what the title suggests, detachment is everywhere. It's an album of so many masks and voices—mock-Bee Gees, Rasta romantic, Buddy Holly-lit, third-world balladeer, hop-head soul-brother, gutter-

bluesman—that one eventually wonders whether there's still a unifying sensibility beneath the disparate guises. Or have the Stones reached the point where one role is as good as the next?

At this juncture, the Stones seem to have worked themselves into a corner. Although Jagger's clever enough to see through most rock'n'roll poses, he's either unwilling or unable to cut past them. Realizing that a 37-year-old man sounds a little silly singing about boy-girl dalliance ("Summer Romance," "Where the Boys Go"), that a high-rent jet-setter lack credibility on a skid-row blues ("Down in the Gutter"), that a proper Englishman sounds stilted flirting with Jamaican ("Send It to Me") or Central American ("Indian Girl") inflections, he exagger-

ates his vocal affectations to the point of absurdity, distancing himself from whatever honest emotion these songs might have possibly contained.

Musically, the Stones are as strong as ever. Although drummer Charlie Watts could do this in his sleep by now, his back-beat sounds fresher each time out, his accents perfectly to the point, pushing but never overpowering the music. Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood remain rock'n'roll's premier guitar tandem, ripping and slashing all over the tracks. The album's mix matches its music, crisp and cutting throughout.

A great *sounding* album, but to what point? At a time when artists such as the Clash, Elvis Costello, and Graham Parker are renewing rock's passion,

there seems to be little sense of purpose underlying most of *Emotional Rescue* beyond the Stones' own self-perpetuation. From romantic desperation ("She might be Ukrainian, she could be Australian, she could be the Alien—send her to me") to salvation ("I will be your knight in shining armor, coming to your emotional rescue"), it's all a sham. When the album takes a comparatively serious turn with "Indian Girl"—the poignant (and political) ballad from the Stones in years—one hesitates to trust the song's compassion after all the game-playing that has gone on.

Not until the album's final number does *Emotional Rescue* show any scars of self-revelation. With Keith Richards taking the vocal, "All About You" bristles with the sort of honesty that will most likely make it this album's center of controversy. While certain lyrics are bound to offend—"So sick and tired of hanging around with dogs like you/You're the first to get laid, always the last bitch to get paid"—Richards' world-weary tone renders his bitterness brutally believable. The album's final line—"So how come I'm still in love with you?"—is also its most moving.

"All About You" shows evidence of real heart, no matter how hate-filled. As for the rest, the problem with the Rolling Stones lies not with what they have to say. It lies with the possibility that they have nothing left to say at all.

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MOVIES

High noon for "cowboys of the skies"

By Janet Coffman

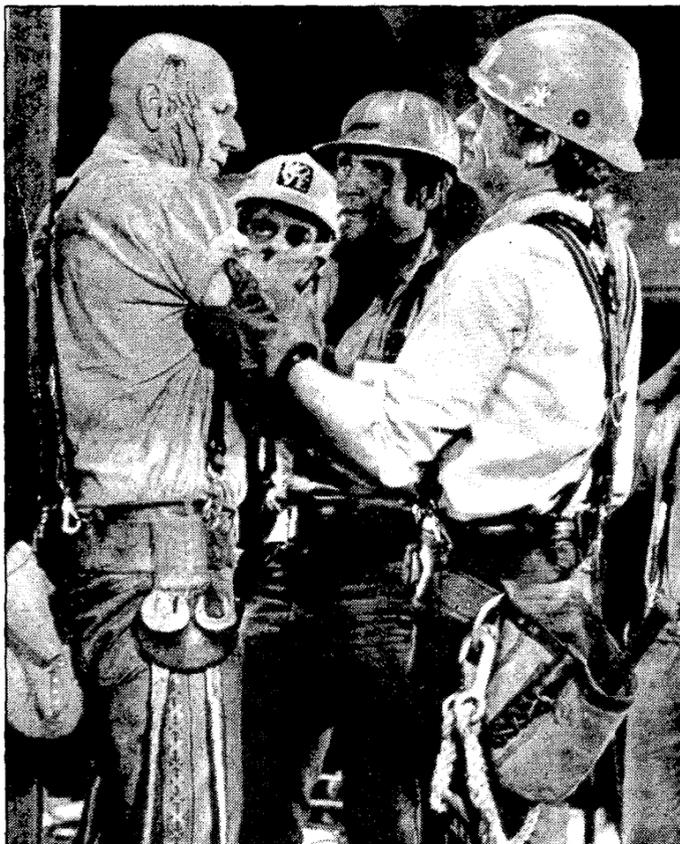
Ironworkers and film industry spokesmen express undisguised ambition for the full-length feature film, *Steel*, scheduled for release by World Northal in cities in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky and West Virginia during the first week of August.

"If this movie is successful, children will be wearing spud-wrenches and hard hats instead of *Star Wars* hats," says William Bartman, production associate of *Steel*.

The film, based on the book, *On High Steel: the Education of an Ironworker*, written by Mike Cherry of Local 40 in New York, accurately portrays the working conditions of ironworkers, known in labor lore as the "cowboys of the skies." In it, actors Lee Majors, Jennifer O'Neill, George Kennedy, Art Carney and Local 70 of Louisville, Ky., uneasily negotiate massive steel girders, Teamsters and gravity in an aggressive competition with time and the bank. Their goal is to "top off" the tallest building in Kentucky within three weeks, thereby preventing the default of Cassco Construction.

The rapid-fire action of *Steel* breaks evenly and hinges on the shuffling of alliances, few of which are struck in heaven. Opening black and white frozen frames of workers engaging steel beams against the backdrop of an open sky are soon replaced with scenes that speak of the ultimate hazards of "laying iron."

Early in the film, Lew Cassidy (George Kennedy), the head contractor who has risen through the union ranks, dies from injur-



The Ironworkers Union endorses this action film.

ies sustained when he falls from the top floor of the incomplete structure. In what becomes the obligatory nod in the film to the shifting roles of women, daughter Cass Cassidy (Jennifer O'Neill) replaces him. She consults with ironworker business agent "Pignose" Moran (Art Carney), who, anxious that the building be completed as a monument to Lew Cassidy and the ironworkers, advises her to hire "ramrod" Mike Catton (Lee Majors) in order to construct the

remaining nine floors by deadline. Catton brings with him an advance crew so notoriously skilled that their appearance causes two ironworkers, already employed by Cassidy, to offer to work with them at half the prevailing wage.

The tension created by the bank's deadline is not only heightened by the barely friendly relationships between members of the advance crew, but is further aggravated when Teamsters, responsible for hauling the steel

to the construction site, call a wildcat strike and walk off the job.

Filmed during actual construction of Kinkaid Towers in Lexington, Ky., *Steel* provides a departure in content from the typical feature popular among studio producers. Its departure lies in its concern with the mechanics of a union shop.

While this concern prompted Columbia Pictures to can the film on its shelves for over two years, it also motivated World Northal to resurrect *Steel* with the aid of the International Association of Bridge, Structural and Ornamental Iron Workers.

"This movie, in a different way from *Norma Rae*, presents the working man in a very positive light," says production associate Bartman. "Ironworkers live hard, they have real emotions, and their job is surrounded by danger. They're not people who get paid high wages for doing nothing. Instead, they risk being hurt and deserve the money they earn."

In agreement, the Ironworkers have invested heavily in promotion, offering pre-screening, generous press packets and direct mailings to union membership.

"*Steel* will go on the basis of an action adventure film rather than a union film. But in the meantime, audiences will be exposed to the occupational risks of the trade and the fact that ironworkers are just nice people," says Bill Lowbaugh, editor of the union publication, *The Ironworker*.

Janet Coffman is a journalist researching unions and media at the Institute for Policy Studies.

By Beth Bogart

Waving the banner of the First Amendment, public TV stations last spring showed the documentary *Death of a Princess* despite the sputtering of the Saudi Arabian government, the whimpering of the State Department and the uneasiness of the network's top brass.

That commitment to freedom of expression, however, appears to have narrow limits when it comes to international news coverage. *Death of a Princess* was part of the *World* series, which station managers voted to discontinue at their annual bidding meeting earlier this year largely because some of the shows were "too hard-hitting and generated more controversy than most station managers are happy with," one Center for Public Broadcasting (CPB) spokesman said. The official reason for the decision was budget constraints.

Previous shows in the series, PBS' principal international programming, had generated as much controversy as *Death of a Princess*, but they were cut by the same executives who then championed the principle of an unfettered press for *Princess*.

A much-publicized charge of censorship in public television's international programs is independent producer David Koff's current suit against station WGBH in Boston and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) for their "editing" of his documentary *Blacks Britannica*, shown in 1978.

Blacks Britannica, produced by Koff and Musindo Mwinyipembe, examined the causes of racism in Great Britain and the black resistance to oppression by the police and the state.

When filmmaker Koff refused to edit the film to meet WGBH executives' concerns about its political viewpoint and sympathetic portrayal of organized black resistance to racism, *World* executive producer David Fanning "restructured" the film, according to Koff's attorney, Lynne Bernabei.

Fanning told *Newsweek* magazine that he had edited the film because he was concerned with its "endorsement of a Marxist point of view."

Blacks Britannica, however, is just one example of public TV's narrow definition of international news issues.

"The premiere international programming, *World*, was butchered," said independent producer Allan Siegal. "What they did to *Blacks Britannica*, they did to many of the other programs," he said.

That view was corroborated by numerous filmmakers, including those who had worked for *World*, but who asked to remain anonymous because they did not want to make their chances "of ever doing a film for public television even more unlikely," in the words of one.

"The front line of censorship at PBS stations," he said, "is choosing filmmakers from a very small circle and excluding most independents with any kind of a 'political' perspective."

Public television "doesn't offer much access for independent producers," said Eli Evans, currently head of the Revson Foundation and a member of the Carnegie Commission.

"The four dirty words for public television are gay, feminist, black and Marxist," said independent film producer and ex-WNET producer Jack Willis. Willis cited as an example his

recent efforts to get public TV to show three films with an international focus, which were "totally political so they were totally unacceptable" to station managers.

One, *O Povo Organizado*, a film about Mozambique, was selected by the Independent Film Focus' "peer panel" as an excellent documentary but was turned down by New York's WNET (*In These Times*, Feb. 6).

Another film Willis urged public television programmers to show was *Battle of Chile*, an award-winning eye-witness account of the 1973 toppling of Salvador Allende's government by a right-wing coup.

When PBS director of public affairs programming Barry Chase told a meeting of public television programming managers in 1978 that he could not air *Battle of Chile* on the network because of "problems with the language, the programming people caucused and agreed that it should be shown," according to Willis, who attended the meeting.

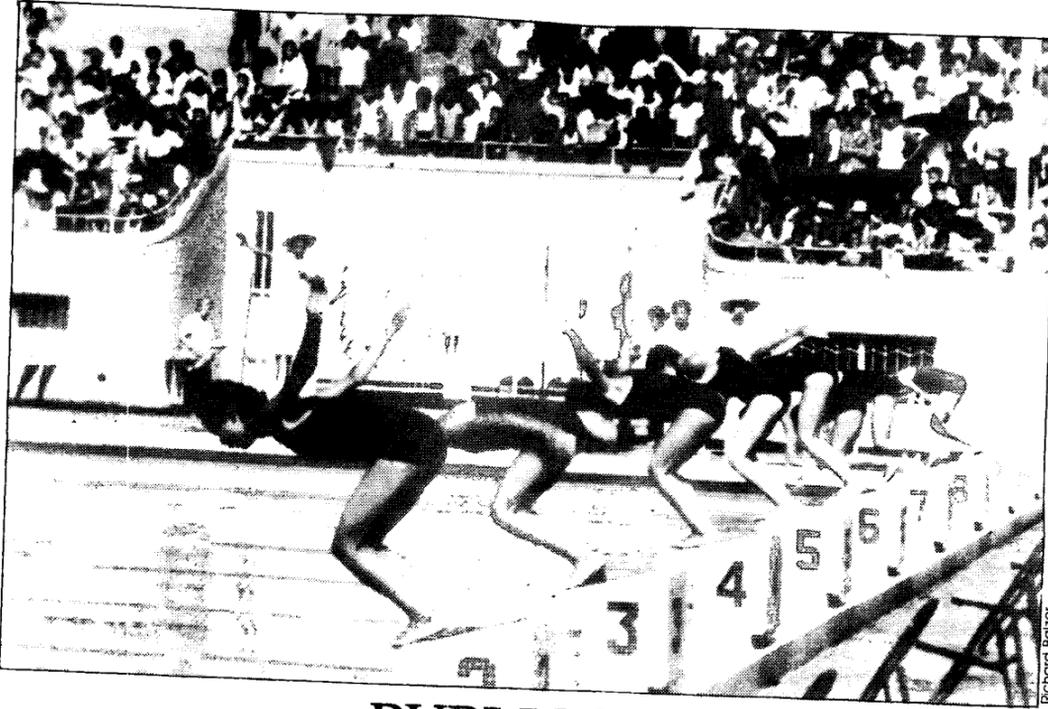
Chase said he would broadcast *Battle of Chile* if he received the programmers' request in writing. A letter was sent to Chase, but *Battle of Chile* has never been aired on public television.

Battle of Chile would "need a lot of work to be turned from a film into an acceptable PBS television show," Chase said. The subtitles would have to be redone for legibility, the footage shortened and the film renarrated, Chase said, "and no station seemed interested enough in doing the work."

"I could not accept the narrator," Chase said, "because he uses Marxist jargon that you forget when you leave college, making it hard to know who the players are when he talks about the 'petty bourgeoisie,' etc. In addition, it would be offensive to audiences."

Even when public TV station producers solicit films from independents, they "always have a very developed idea of exactly what they're looking for," according to Siegal.

One example is WNET's rejection of a film his company offered when the station asked for films on the Middle East. Siegal proposed one done by an Israeli about Israel. The film



PUBLIC TV

"Passive censorship" of international news



World, PBS' only regular foreign news program, has become a "big-event forum," like this *SPORTS IN CHINA* special.

was "provocative, controversial—and refused because of the filmmaker's Marxist point of view," he said.

In another case, the Washington, D.C., public station, WETA, refused to air a program called *Iranians inside the Islamic Republic*, broadcast by PBS and made by WNET in New York. WETA executives decided that the program was too "one-sided," a reason frequently used by station officials to explain their rejection of certain "controversial" programs. Yet public television spokesmen see nothing "one-sided" about the network's roster of international programming.

Although *World* has been saved by a one-year, \$500,000 commitment from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, it is being reduced from a series to a "big-event forum." That leaves PBS with no regular international program, and the network intends to rely on occasional international news coverage in the *McNeil-Lehrer Report*, the Bill Moyers show, *Ben Wattenberg's 1980s*, and a few specials like the July 7 screening of *The War Called Peace*, a 90-minute examination of the U.S.-Soviet relationship, which presents a "hard-line view," Chase said.

The "underlying assumption" of *The War Called Peace*, Chase

said, is that "the U.S. can't afford to be a second-rate power" and the conclusions are that "the Russians probably don't want what we consider peaceful coexistence but want to turn the world into a socialist paradise and that effective deterrence is a necessity because you can't fight fire with anything but water." Part of this deterrence, the show concludes, is "public relations machinery to counter the Soviets' propaganda."

Public TV executives "are very closely linked to the White House, the State Department

and CIA-funded think tanks," charged *Blacks Britannica* producer David Koff. In setting up the *World* series, for example, most of the board of advisers came from the White House, the State Department or the "Charles River Gang" of academics from Boston who swing through the federal government's revolving door.

One academic, who asked not to be named, went to work for the U.S. Information Agency and has returned to Cambridge. He was—and is—frequently consulted by public TV producers and programmers. "It's only natural to talk to people who know a lot about an international issue," he explained, "especially when it's a touchy question and someone is screaming 'artistic freedom' to keep inaccurate or damaging facts in a film."

Pervasive, loose contact between the government and public TV obviates the need for more overt strong-arm tactics by the State Department or other agencies concerned about a program's international repercussions, according to producers, television executives and government officials.

"Government interference was much rougher in the Nixon years," one station manager said, "when we didn't just get polite notes like WGBH did about *Princess*."

"Station programmers show minimal interest in the Third World or other potentially controversial international events," said one independent filmmaker who tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade public television stations to air his films about colonization in Africa.

"Commercial television is more controversial—more 'public'—than so-called public television," said Lynne Bernabei.

"Sponsors aren't interested in non-fiction programming," said David Loxton, who heads TV Lab (producing *NonFiction TV*) at WNET. "They want to stay out of issue-oriented shows and stick with entertainment."

The lack of controversial shows about international events is due, according to Loxton, "to economics, not to a conspiracy. The simple fact is that the people who run public TV, the people who do the programming and the people who do the paying, aren't interested in anything but entertainment."

Even station managers and PBS officials admit that their limited budgets, and the sources of most of their money—from Congress through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and from large corporations—lead to "passive censorship," in one producer's words.

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CULTURE SHOCK

THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT

Muppet creator Jim Henson now offers "Muppet Meeting Films" to corporations wanting something to lighten up a meeting mood. For \$300, reports Zodiac, you can get a short called "Sell, sell, sell."

CULTURAL EXPORTS

The J.R.-murder episode of *Dallas* pulled in an audience of 20,000,000 in Britain. Further, \$135,000 was wagered on the event. British bookies gave 33-to-1 odds that J.R. was a suicide. Payout comes next fall, with the fall *Dallas* series.