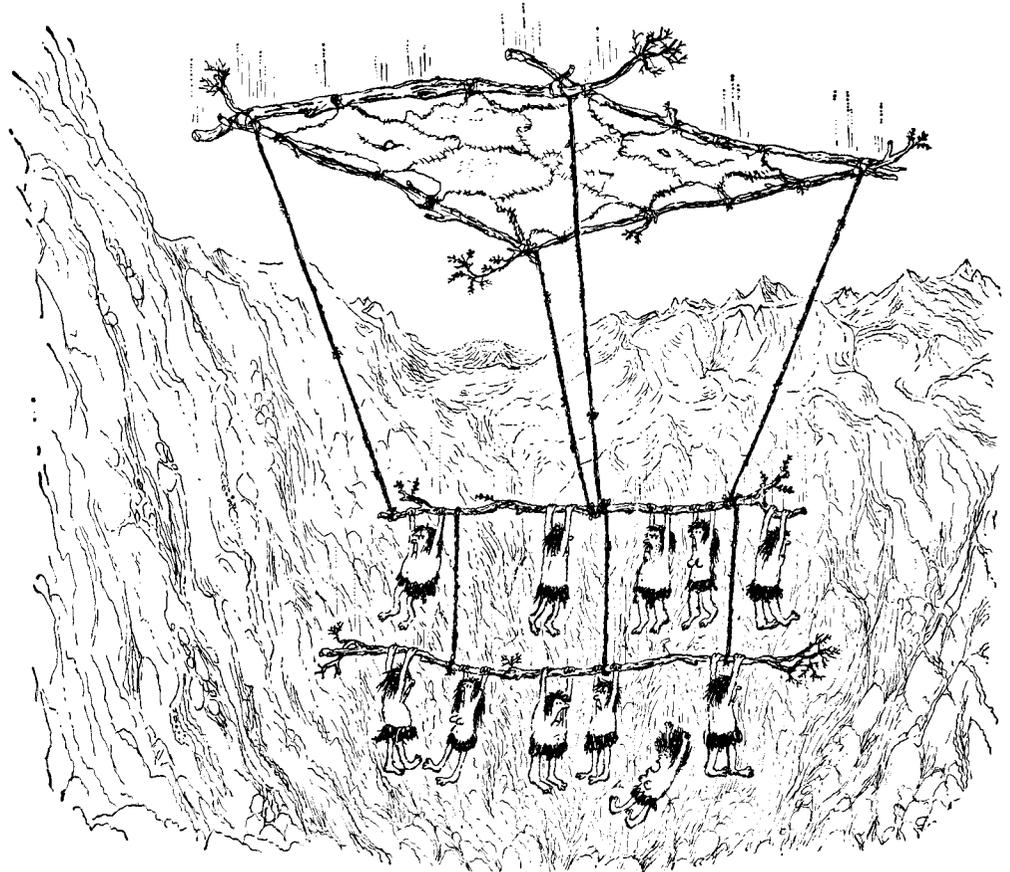


Flight by Fernando Krahn



Dark, A Hard Day's Night, and That Man from Rio.

THE FILMS of Blake Edwards, who wrote, directed, and produced *A Shot in the Dark*, always show that he has done a certain amount of homework. Two years ago, in *Experiment in Terror*, he combined a good working knowledge of Cluzot, Hitchcock, Carol Reed, and other old pros with his own sense of the dramatic to put together a creditable suspense film. *Breakfast at Tiffany's* in 1961 and *The Pink Panther* in 1964 reflected a considerable knowledge of and feeling for sophisticated comedy. And in *The Pink Panther*, several carefully worked out and executed slapstick sequences demonstrated that he was also familiar with the masters of the silent comedy. In *A Shot in the Dark* he relies heavily on their techniques, with results that range from the hilarious to the embarrassing.

As Inspector Clouseau of the Sûreté, Peter Sellers plays a bungling detective who falls in love with the prime suspect in a murder case, played by Elke Sommer, and goes through many improbable adventures before he proves that she is innocent. There are many very funny one-shot gags, most of them variations on tried and true slapstick routines. For example, Sellers gives his destination to the driver of a police car, who speeds away before Sellers has a chance to get inside. On another occasion he steps backward out of his car into a pond. There are two or three good running gags and several hilarious long sequences, in one of which—a bedroom scene with Sellers and Miss Sommer—a valet practicing karate assaults Sellers, a champagne bottle is broken over someone's head, feathers from a pillow fly all over the room, and a time bomb explodes.

But much of the film is simply not funny. Sellers gives a long dissertation to his assistant on the use of facts and logic in criminal investigation, only to have the assistant come to the opposite conclusion deduced from the facts of the case at hand. The assistant's punch line is mildly amusing, but the audience has seen it coming from afar and in the meantime has had to sit through so much labored dialogue that whatever effect it might have had is lost.

To make matters worse, Edwards uses the routine twice. Several sequences would have been much funnier had more time and effort been put into them. In one, Sellers, after another unnecessary conversation with his assistant, prepares to break down the door of an apartment. With lowered head and braced shoulder he rushes toward the door just as someone on the other side opens it, so that Sellers hurtles through, across the room, out a window on the other side, and into a pool below. The gag lasts for about ten seconds and gets one of the biggest short laughs of the film. But it could have produced at least a minute of steadily increasing laughter if the material at the beginning of the sequence, which contributes nothing to either the pace of the film or the gag that followed, had been replaced by even the most elementary kind of buildup. The rush through the room would have been a climax instead of a fleeting gag. The transitions at times also seem to suffer from a lack of inspiration or effort or both. Time and again a gag ends, the laughter dies down, the cast stands around as though not knowing what to do next, and the awkward pause is broken by Sellers delivering a line such as "What is that you said?" to someone who has said nothing. This may be followed by some inconsequential dialogue before the picture starts moving forward again.

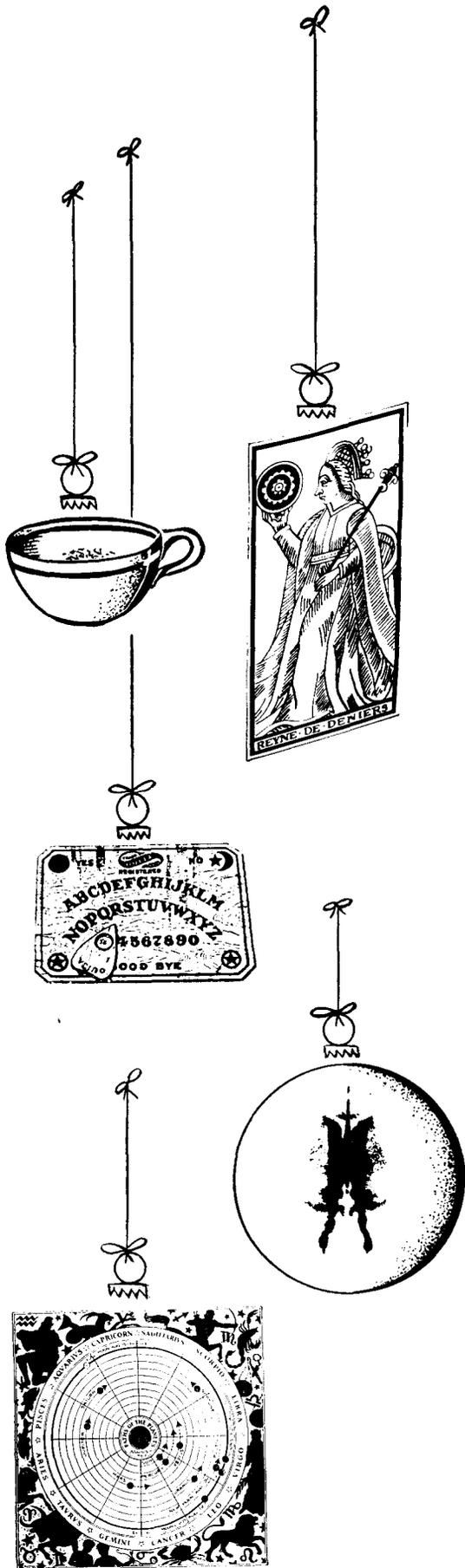
A Shot in the Dark is a film in the Mack Sennett tradition of slapstick—funny cops, buxom girls, broad gags. But it is wildly uneven and lacks the exuberance and the pace of the best of the type. Edwards the writer-director does not have a completely sure touch in slapstick. And Edwards the producer was unwilling or unable to spend the time, effort, and money required to get the most out of his material. There are, however, enough laughs to send one away with the feeling that the movie is funnier than it really is.

SENNETT'S FORMULAS are followed with greater success in *A Hard Day's Night*, the first commercial film starring four young men known collectively as the Beatles. In exuberance and pace it measures up to the

best in the genre. The trick in using inexperienced and untrained actors is to tailor the script to their natural gifts and to be flexible enough to cover and to fill in the gaps when things do not work out. The Beatles have several things going for them. They are immensely likable, wildly uninhibited in action and deft with patter. They have good timing and distinct senses of humor ranging from way-out funny to mildly amusing, and all of them can manage to look as though their tongues were in their cheeks even when they are licking their lips.

The Beatles are at their best when they are playing against each other. When the necessities of the script require one of them to exchange lines with another member of the cast, more than a hint of amateurism creeps into the performance. The director, Richard Lester, and his writers have kept such sequences to a minimum, and most of the contact that the four have with the outside world is confined to broad physical comedy or to patter among themselves about whoever is sharing the scene. Without overdoing it, Lester has taken full advantage of the slapstick possibilities inherent in the constant pursuit of the Beatles by hordes of teen-age girls. He also has created several other routines that are extremely funny. His greatest contribution, however, is his use of the camera. In many sequences it is completely mobile and its movements, often quite unorthodox, match and reinforce the crazy goings-on. At times he has speeded up the action with his camera. One such sequence, showing his four stars cavorting in an open field, is one of the funniest and most imaginative scenes filmed in some time.

It is too bad that a Beatle movie must have Beatle songs in it to satisfy the screaming teens. But even here, Lester has turned a problem into an asset. Only two songs are sung straight on. The others are included painlessly by very dextrous intercutting of sound and picture so that the quartet seems to be singing at the same time that they are actually doing something else. In short, Lester has captured the crazy-funny attractive quality of the Beatles. Moreover, he has



If you can't figure out what your hard-to-please friends might like for Christmas . . .

- You can consult a ouija board . . .**
- turn over Tarot cards . . .**
- read tea leaves . . .**
- work out horoscopes . . .**
- apply psychoanalysis . . .**

Or you can eliminate guesswork altogether and give them subscriptions to

Because as you know from your own experience, *The Reporter* invariably pleases people who want the best.

Your particular friends will find *The Reporter* a refreshingly different gift—or, rather, *twenty-four* refreshingly different gifts! They'll appreciate the aptness of your choice each time a new issue arrives full of important, authoritative information they can't get elsewhere . . . unusually perceptive reviews of books, music, painting, movies, theatre and TV . . . pungently pointed poems and satire . . . candid, colorful travel pieces . . . astute analyses of the contemporary scene.

And while it makes an even more lasting impression than a very expensive present, *The Reporter* costs so little to give. After the first gift at the \$7 rate, you pay only

Also, by entering or renewing your own subscription now, you can arrive immediately at the reduced rate for *all* your gifts. If you already have a subscription and it still has a while to run, we'll add on your renewal whenever it does expire.

Remember—*The Reporter* is so easy to give! No last-minute shopping in stampeded stores, no "last-resort" selections, no package wrapping or standing in long post office lines—just fill out and send us the airmail order form opposite.

A few days before Christmas, each person on your list will receive a handsome Christmas card announcing your gift. The special Christmas issue of the subscription will arrive soon after—to begin a rich, year-long adventure in good reading.

You needn't send any money with your order. To help ease the seasonal strain on your budget, we'll be glad to withhold the bill until after the first of the year.

So solve your Christmas gift problems to everyone's satisfaction with the order form right here in front of you. Mail it today and share *The Reporter* with your friends all year.

660 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK 21, NEW YORK

enhanced them with his imaginative use of slapstick and the camera.

IN *That Man from Rio*, the slapstick is broad but the story line and the sentimental delineation of the characters put the film more in the Chaplin than the Sennett tradition. Philippe de Broca, the French director, has a sure sense of slapstick and of the medium in general. This circumstance gives him the freedom to realize the full potential of his material with the greatest artistic economy. An improbable plot, which includes archeological discovery, kidnapping, robbery, flight, and pursuit by almost every known form of locomotion, murder by poison dart, and buried treasure, is kept moving forward at an incredibly fast pace, all neatly tied together by a funny and tender little love story. With the help of several very good actors, some of whom have been cast against type, de Broca has created a group of exaggerated but very believable characters. His camera gets the most pictorially out of many spectacular locations, and the whole action is infused with a pleasant atmosphere of comic expectancy that functions very much like a continuous buildup, adding force and body to each comedy sequence as it erupts. Although de Broca obviously is familiar with the classic comedy techniques, his use of them is always subordinated to his own comic inventiveness and sense of pace. There is almost nothing in the film that does not either advance the plot, add to the comedy, enrich the characters, or contribute to the atmosphere, and the result is a film that is almost continuously exciting, funny, and human.

All three of these films are destined for commercial success. In terms of how well they do what they set out to do, only the last two can be judged completely successful. Both de Broca and Lester are in masterful control of the slapstick and other techniques they employ to get the most out of their material. Blake Edwards, however, gives the impression that he set out to make a slapstick comedy, found that he was not at home in the form, and yet stuck doggedly at it even when some of the old tricks weren't working for him.

Going for Baroque

JOHN M. CONLY

THE MOST FASCINATING and elusive figure on the musical scene these days—at least as far as record manufacturers are concerned—is the Baroque buff, a listener tuned exclusively to the period that Webster places at about 1550-1750. Of his existence there can be no doubt. He is extremely articulate. When he is neglected, record makers get letters of high eloquence and literacy, demanding more and more music by Telemann, Schütz, Marc-Antoine Charpentier, Manfredini, and, especially, Vivaldi.

What often happens next is why disc companies find the Baroque buff a vexatious customer indeed. To illustrate: last year the Book-of-the-Month Club, in response to these blandishments, issued through its Classics Record Library a three-disc album of Vivaldi—fourteen concertos, including the ever popular *Four Seasons*. A beautiful set in all ways, it is priced about fifteen per cent below what the average dealer would have charged. It did set a sort of house sales record, but not, unfortunately, one of which BOMC personnel care to be reminded. Their attitude is understandable to me.

As it happens, I wrote the publicity for the album, and it did not require extrasensory perception to enable the enthusiasts in my neighborhood to surmise that I would have a complimentary set around the house. Indeed, hardly had I received it when a young graduate student whom I knew slightly arrived at my door bearing a portable tape recorder. On this instrument, in four-track stereo at $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches per second, he copied all six record sides, and quietly and politely departed. Moments later, another free-loader arrived, similar in every way to the first. He too left with three hours of recorded music—procured at a cost of about a dollar an hour. Plainly, Vivaldi was getting plenty of mileage but was not exactly paying his way.

This paints a slightly exaggerated picture. Vivaldi was, after all, one of the great Baroque triad, along

with Bach and Handel, and occupies two pages in the current Schwann catalogue. All those entries wouldn't be there if he were a disastrous money-loser. Just the same, the Baroque market seems not to be an affluent one. The Library of Recorded Masterpieces apparently also has discovered this. The Library (150 East 82nd Street, New York) is a subscription-sales company founded as a sort of artistic tribute by the late Max Goberman, a veteran Broadway musical director. His avowed intent was to record all 104 Haydn symphonies and all four hundred-plus Vivaldi concertos. Goberman died in Vienna while working on the Haydn project after only seventeen Vivaldi records had been cut. The company is negotiating to complete the Haydn project, but not the Vivaldi. Each Goberman issue was accompanied by a complete score and annotations, handsomely packaged and priced (by mail order from the company) at either \$8.50 (subscribers) or \$10 per record. Apparently the Haydn public had the money and the generally younger Vivaldi crowd did not. The Vivaldi records, however, are not being dropped; they are now to be sold through retail outlets at conventional prices, without the trimmings.

Vox has had a kindred experience. Rather early in LP days, Vox began issuing huge, luxurious Baroque packages—Vivaldi, Corelli, Torelli. These were an expression of the personal taste of the company's president George Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, whose illustrious forebear is credited with having retrieved J. S. Bach from limbo. They weren't expected to make money and probably didn't. However, Vox has now found a more practical way to market Baroque music: "Vox Boxes." These obligate the buyer to buy two or three discs at a time, but he gets them for about \$3.30 per record. The complete *Opus 5* of Corelli, for example, twelve concerti grossi, costs \$9.95, stereo or mono. Some of the Boxes are remakes of the earlier de luxe albums. (Vox