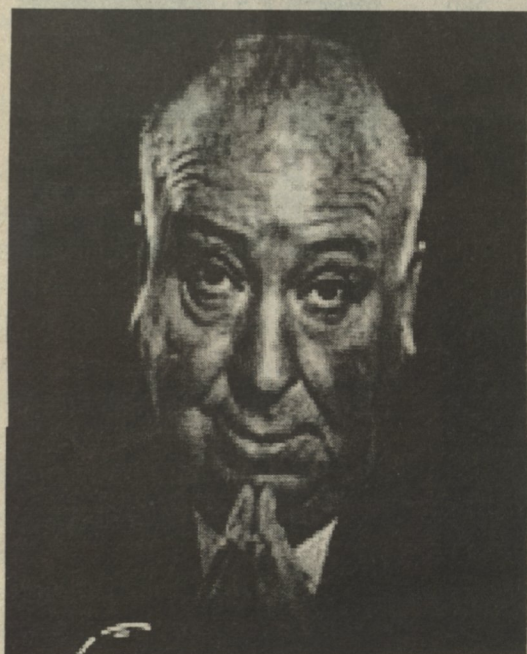


Four-Stars Movie Reviews: *Vertigo*

by David Macdonald

It's not really a *Wonderful Life* for James Stewart as he plays an obsessed private detective, afraid of heights



"Vertigo," directed by Alfred Hitchcock, is one of the greatest of all Hollywood films, (A+) and contains numerous pleasures and oddities, unparalleled in the classic Hollywood tradition. The biggest peculiarity, at least in my opinion, is that this is not a "standard" Hitchcock production. Unlike more popular films such as "Psycho," or "North By Northwest," "Vertigo" does not place emphasis on action or suspense. Rather, its focus is the sick, twisted "romance" between the two

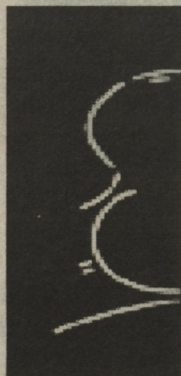
main characters, played by James Stewart and Kim Novak. This disappointed many who expected Hitchcock's usual tricks, resulting in one of the great flops of 1958. Fortunately, "Vertigo" has endured to become one of cinema's great achievements.

Stewart plays a private detective, recently retired after an experience where he developed vertigo, or fear of heights. Despite this setback, he is forced back to

work, as an old friend calls him up to ask if he

can follow his wife, Madeleine (Novak). It seems an old family curse is about to lay claim to Madeleine, and it is up to Stewart to ensure her safety. But one fateful day, he

saves her from a suicide. And as Madeleine and the detective's lives are even more entangled, the two fall in love.



careful; those who haven't seen the movie should read no further, for there is much more to this film than meets the eye.

Tragedy strikes, and Madeleine dies. Stewart is distressed to the point of madness. Months later, he meets a woman who looks much like Madeleine. After much uncomfortable prodding, he is able to begin a relationship with this

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woman. And the story grows more disturbing, as Stewart forces this woman to look, and behave, like Madeleine. And there is so much more than this explanation, which I'll leave the viewer to discover.

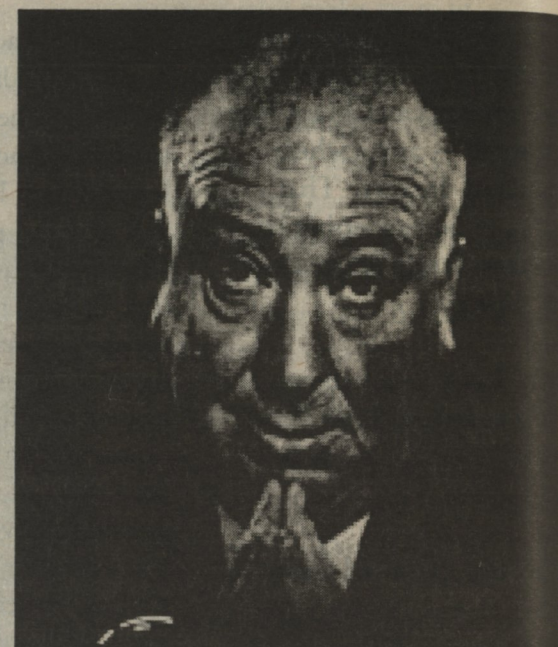
Hitchcock doesn't simply attempt to surprise us with these revelations and developments. Rather, he wants to fully depict the nature of this relationship; the fact that Stewart is indeed a very obsessed man, and also why both women are willing to stay with this man. The is extraordinarily complex; even after three viewings over the years, I'm still not

And this is where I must be

sure of everything. But from my observation, I believe the point of this film is to show that the male ideal of the perfect woman, an ideal projected onto many works of art (including Hitchcock's

own films), is ultimately destructive, both for the man with this fictitious belief, and the woman who is the object of this belief. The pleasures of this movie are many. Bernard Herrman's score

creates both a romantic and creepy feeling. The color is wonderfully bright and expressive, concealing the darkness underneath. And the two major performances are interesting; both have to be subtle, for neither is who we think they



are. Stewart is especially good; can you imagine good old American boy George Bailey from "It's a Wonderful Life" playing a man obsessed with a dead woman, and on the verge of necrophilia? Well, you don't have to imagine it, for it is all here. And it is all part of one of the most complex, and intriguing films ever created.

