MAN AND SUPERMAN—THEN AND NOW

Flight as the American Dream

By Jim Welsh and John Tibbetts

For anyone under the age of, say, fifty, who might have grown up reading comic books and who is even slightly vulnerable to nostalgia, SUPERMAN—THE MOVIE has more than passing interest. It is a stunningly spectacular escapist fantasy, powerful enough, I think, to turn any adult familiar with the story (and therefore susceptible to it) into a quivering nine-year-old.

SUPERMAN—THE MOVIE is but the most recent incarnation of a character that first exploded upon the scene in the June 1938 edition of Action Comics. Since then he has survived and transcended virtually every communications media—books, radio, live and animated film, and television. Like his popular fictional brethren, Tarzan and Mickey Mouse, his stature never stops growing, and his appeal never diminishes. He forever remains not quite of this world. Like Dr. Jekyll, Don Diego, and Bruce Wayne, he has an alter ego that is more powerfully exciting than his conventional identity. But unlike them all, he does one important thing—a thing that, I suspect, accounts for an enduring popularity that surpasses perhaps any other fictional American character of this century.

He flies.

This new film version relies much upon these aerial attractions, while also retaining most of Jerry Siegel's and Joe Shuster's four decades-old storyline.

Mario Puzo's screenplay treats the Krypton story seriously, even reverentially, as befits the mystery of an extrapolated civilization light-years beyond our ken. Augmenting the basic story here is an odyssey involving the trial of three Kryptonian criminals (led by Terence Stamp) who are condemned to a world known as Earth. What fate awaits them? In Puzo's original design, one supposes that this troublesome threesome may return in the inevitable SUPERMAN II sequel. But it makes no sense at all in the present movie, other than to demonstrate the wisdom and leadership of Jor-El, Superman's father.

SUPERMAN begins, then, as pure science-fiction, in an extraterrestrial setting that is more impressive than any I have ever seen represented on the screen. Although Jor-El promises to remain on the doomed planet, he fashions a spacecraft in the likeness of a star that will carry his only-begotten son to the Earth, with its primitive cultures and its people. Jor-El explains to his wife, Lara, that his son has a potential for goodness that may be aided by the wisdom and leadership their son will receive. The spacecraft is launched just in time. The spectacle of the destruction of the planet Krypton, with buildings collapsing and bodies falling into a nuclear void, is simply beyond description. The didactic journey through space that follows is equally moving in its own quiet way.

This portion of the film is handled with a great deal of dignity and restraint. The dignified treatment is also extended to the stanchio's arrival on Earth and his immediate adoption by Jonathan Kent and his wife (wonderfully played by Glenn Ford and Phyllis Thaxter). Glenn Ford's "cameo" role is matched in its excellence only by Jackie Cooper's as Perry White, the hardened editor of The Daily Planet. The adolescent Clark Kent is played by Jeff East, who hails, appropriately enough, from the West —
Kirk Alyn was the live-action screen's first Superman. (Photo courtesy Marvin Paige.)

Kansas City in particular — and who is obviously at home on the plains, even if it isn't really Kansas. (Smallville, U.S.A., it turns out, was filmed in Calgary, Canada.)

Clark Kent's boyhood years were to be set in Kansas, but those sequences were in fact shot in Canada for economic reasons: The growing season in the province of Alberta, according to David Michael Petrou's chronicle on the making of the movie, "was ahead of that in the States, and the wheat fields needed in the crucial scenes around the Kent farm were at just the right stage of growth for shooting." The train called the "Kansas Star" that the young Clark Kent races against in that sequence was leased from the Canadian Pacific Railroad (cost: $5,000 per day). Petrou explains that the cost of using trains and track-lines in the United States is "almost prohibitive." So in order to demonstrate that Clark Kent is indeed "faster than a speeding locomotive," a location crew had to be sent North to Canada.

Warner Communications has displayed a great deal of marketing ingenuity in its attempt to exploit the movie commercially. First of all, for example, there is a profusion of spin-off products intended to be sold in the lobbies of theaters — tee shirts, rings, posters, and chunks of plastic "kryptonite." In addition, Warner Books has released David Michael Petrou's The Making of SUPERMAN — THE MOVIE, a paperback with sixteen photos that should reveal all that anyone might reasonably want to know about how the movie was financed and put together. But this is only one of nine projected Superman-related titles to be marketed from Warner Books (three mass-market and six trade titles). Foremost among these will be Anthony Clesy's "novelization" of Mario Puzo's screenplay (augmented by David and Leslie Newman and Robert Benton; one hopes that this will be done in such a way that one will be able to tell who contributed what, but that is unlikely) and Bruce Nash's The Official Superman Quiz Book ("illustrated with authentic Superman comic-book cartoons").

Superman is a uniquely American sort of folk hero, reflecting strength, power, initiative, and a basic optimistic idealism about "Truth, Justice, and the American Way" (as Christopher Reeve expresses our hero's "credo" to Lois Lane in the current version). The character was created during a time of social and psychological stress in 1933. The first story, "Reign of the Superman," appeared in Jerry Siegel's amateur magazine Science Fiction in January of that year; but nearly six more years were to pass before Superman first appeared in the pages of Action Comics. Siegel later explained that he conceived "a character like Samson, Hercules and all the strong men I ever heard of rolled into one. Only more so."

A key ingredient of this Janus-like character is his split personality. David Michael Petrou perceptively notes the difference between Siegel's creation and other heroes of popular fiction who possess double identities. Unlike "Don Diego/Zorro or Bruce Wayne/Batman — Clark Kent is the counterfeit and Superman, all-righteous, all-just, all-powerful, is the reality." By February of 1940, the character had grown in popularity to the extent that the Mutual Network initiated the radio series, with Bud Collyer doing the voice of Superman, Joan Alexander as Lois Lane, and Julian Noa as Perry White. The radio show was narrated by Jackson Beck and sponsored by Kellogg's cereals. It was merely a matter of time, however, before the movies and television would attempt to exploit the character's popularity.

Max Fleischer's cartoon version (Paramount, 1941) was followed by George Lowther's novel Superman in 1942. Columbia Studios then produced two fifteen-episode serials (with Kirk Alyn as Superman and Noel Neill as Superman and Lois Lane) in 1948 and 1950, respectively. Republic had plans to serialize Superman as early as 1940 (according to Gary Grossman's book Superman: Serial to Cereal, published by Popular Library's "Big Apple" series in 1976), before the project ultimately landed at the desk of Sam Katzman, who has been called the "King of the Serials at Columbia during the 1940s and 1950s." Director Spencer Gorden Bennet, Hollywood's "most accomplished illusionist" (according to Grossman), was able to work under the limitations of Katzman's notorious frugality.

Incidentally, I have always thought that the best of all the various incarnations of the character came in the Fleischer series of cartoons for Paramount in 1941-43. Surprisingly, they are all but dismissed in Gary Grossman's otherwise definitive history of the character. Comprising such titles as "The Mad Scientist," "Billion Dollar Limited," and "The Bulleteers," the Fleischer series combined stunning animation with swift pacing. There was no waste, no excess, just solid narrative, with a character completely liberated from the laws of gravity. "The Bulleteers," especially,
George Reeves soared through television skies throughout the fifties. (Photo courtesy Marvin Paige.)

Jeff East — "The Young Superman." (Photo courtesy Dan Meyers and Co.)

Christopher Reeve's Clark Kent presented a decided contrast to the Man of Steel. He altered the general posture to make Clark look stoop-shouldered. (SUPERMAN THE MOVIE. TM's & DC Comics Inc. 1978, All Rights Reserved.)

profited from a richly animated look that blended art-deco flair with the three-dimensional modeling of classic pulp illustrations. The cartoon series done for today's television programs absolutely pales by comparison.

The first live-action portrayal came from Kirk Alyn. He has said that he played Clark Kent "for light comedy," but Superman was another matter: "When you play a human being," Alyn told Gary Grossman, "everybody expects certain things. But something like Superman has to be just a little different, so the audience will always think that it is plausible; that it can be." (Interestingly, this is essentially the same approach as was taken by Richard Donner, the director of the current movie version, who consistently stressed the character's verisimilitude, attempting to give fantasy the "appearance of truth.") Noel Neill, who played Lois Lane in the first "Superman" series, had worked as a contract player in Paramount's HENRY ALDRICH films. Character actor Pierre Watkin (MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON, 1939, MEET JOHN DOE, 1941, and MISSION TO MOSCOW, 1943, among others) was a "natural" to play Perry White, the editor of The Daily Planet; he had at one time served as editor of the Sioux City Tribune and the Sioux Falls Argus. ATOM MAN VS. SUPERMAN, the second Columbia serial, brought Superman's archenemy Luthor (played by Lyle Talbot) to the screen.

The growing popularity of television ended the reign of the serials. In 1951 RKO undertook a feature film entitled SUPERMAN AND THE MOLE MEN, and a new Superman was born. He was in fact born in Ashland, Kentucky, and named George Bessolo; Hollywood renamed him George Reeves. But during the 1950s he was best known as Superman. (He died, presumably by his own hand, on June 16, 1959.) George Reeves went on to star in this role for a total of 104 television episodes, THE MOLE MEN, a 57-minute feature directed by Lee Sholem, also introduced Phyllis Coates as the new Lois Lane. Lee Sholem went on to direct the television episodes and was joined by Tommy Carr, who had shared directing responsibilities for the Superman serials at Columbia. A variation on the Superman idea was worked out in 1962 called THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY, with Johnny Rockwell playing the young Clark Kent. Gary Grossman reports that although thirteen scripts were written for the SUPERBOY series, it "never took off."

The media image of Superman, then, developed over the years in the domain of the "B" studios. In 1953, according to Grossman, the
Jeff East on "The Young Superman"

At twenty-one, Jeff East already has an active film career behind him. He first scored as Huckle Finn in TOM SAWYER and HUCKLEBERRY FINN and has done three films for Disney, including THE GHOST OF CYPRESS SWAMP. Two years ago he came to Dick Donner to test for the part of Jimmy Olsen in SUPERMAN. He walked away with the part of "Young Superman."

The following remarks are extracted from an interview with Jeff East in Kansas City on February 1, 1979, courtesy of Dan Meyers and Co., Warner Brothers midwestern representative.

"I asked the director, Richard Donner, if I was going to have to wear a "silly suit" as the young Superman. I really didn't want to wear one. Seriously. The only person who looks decent in it is Christopher Reeve. He looked great. I felt funny enough wearing a black wig and a false nose — enough of a disguise in itself. Actually, I didn't at first think I even looked like Chris — he has a stronger jaw-line and a different nose. But Dick had seen me in HUCKLEBERRY FINN when I was fourteen; he saw a resemblance and that was enough.

In SUPERMAN II the character goes through an identity crisis. The first half of SUPERMAN I is like an introduction to that. That's why the tone is so much heavier than one might have expected. It is more of a prophecy of the identity problems Superman will have later. Originally, there were going to be two separate roles — a fifteen-year-old and an eighteen-year-old. When they got me in England, they decided to combine both roles in me. As for the character itself, I just played me. With Chris, however, it was different. He got so involved with the character that at times he could be hard to deal with. But it was Dick Donner that formed and shaped Christopher Reeve, in the truest sense. I've never seen in my life that much guiding, teaching, directing — everything that had to be done, Dick oversaw. So Chris really got into it too.

Going from my character to Chris is the most important transition in the film. The way I went at it was to think about ROOTS, about Cathedral. But the character of Clark Kent was real, very real. But the older Superman uses that character as the disguise. Since I'm not the disguise, actually my title should not be "Clark" at all, but just "Young Superman." Chris, Dick, and I all got together in advance to work it all out. Chris would say, "Now how are you going to do those farm scenes; those are beautiful scenes, Jeff." I said yes, that I knew I had to bring out the frustrations that in Part II would get much heavier. About 60 per cent of Part II was being done at the time. As for me, my part is done. My contract is only SUPERMAN I. If I was to be in the second part, it would have been in the contract and been a totally different deal. They won't use any more footage of me, not even a voice-over, from now on — not unless the contract is changed first.

What about Chris? Well, he's careful to distinguish between his name Reeve and that of George Reeves, if that tells you anything. We got along very well. He's so perfect, I just wonder if he's going to be able to get out of the role. We were sitting in the trailer one day playing chess and he says, "You know, if SUPERMAN doesn't work out for me, I'm going to buy a plane ticket for Venezuela." And I said, "Oh, terrific, Chris. Why?" "My God," he says, "can you imagine being stereotyped as Superman and having a bomb on your hands." And I admitted that, but asked, what if it isn't a bomb, what if it is a success? And he just said he would think about that when it came.

A lot of people ask me, why didn't I fly? Dick Donner and I had many discussions while we were doing the train sequence (we spent a month in Canada, Canada on that); and every day we talked about different aspects of the maturing young Superman. I said, why don't they fly? Dick said, "When you run, I want you to almost, almost fly. It's like you're growing; your physical as well as your mental strength matures as you grow older." Young Superman is dealing with both kinds of power, dealing with growing up. Those twelve years he spends in the Fortress of Solitude, he's learning, asking questions: Who am I? So Dick kept saying to me while I was running: "Reach for the roof, reach for it, lift up your feet, almost do it..."

"minimum payment for a low-budget half-hour television script was $65.00," for example. The first twenty-six episodes of THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN averaged about $15,000 each. That is a far cry from the millions that Warner Brothers sank into the current production. On April 8, 1953, Variety, reviewing the TV premiere, remarked: "It was only a matter of time before 'Superman,' long-awaited comic book and radio favorite with the kids (and some adults, no doubt), should be put on film." It is surprising, I think, to realize that the same psychology might apply some fifteen years later — and a tribute to the durability of the Superman legend.

At least one reviewer has objected to the pontificating tone of the first part of the movie, but surely the Krypton sequences have to be played seriously if the whole picture is going to avoid becoming merely a spoof. Apparently Vincent Canby of the New York Times regarded it as a spoof anyway, objecting to the foolishness of the movie that springs from humble comic-strip origins, exactly as one might expect of a middlebrow critic who writes for a newspaper that refuses to print comics.

The producers of SUPERMAN certainly recognize that inherent foolishness, and to protect themselves against it, they have chosen to camp up the latter part of the movie. The problem is that the movie cannot be both things at once — serious science-fiction (bordering, perhaps absurdly, on the sacred at times) and comic-strip camp. But it tries to do just that, and the inconsistency of tone constitutes a flaw.

Gene Hackman does a marvelous job with the terrible role that has been written for him — Lex Luthor, the supervillain whose machinations are wrapped up in nuclear terrorism and (appropriately, in these inflation-ridden times) real-estate specula-

tion. Ned Beatty, an actor whom I admire (remembering him as the victim in DELIVERANCE and as an unlikely Mafia hitman in MIKEY AND NICKY), plays Luthor's dimwitted henchman, Otis. The movie would be better, I think, without him. This twosome — actually a threesome, if one includes Valerie Perrine (and if one includes all of her, it almost becomes a foursome) — is gruesome. They provide the movie with its dumbest lines and certainly with its most forgettable sequences. Their harebrained scheme gives the movie its harebrained conclusion.

In the character of Lois Lane Margot Kidder finds a nice balance between belief and mocking incredulity. It is Lois Lane who quite by accident finds a name for our hero: "What a super man!" she exclaims after interviewing him, and the name sticks. There are no pretentious echoes of the Ubermensch idea here. Ms. Lane, essentially a bubblehead, would never be able to spell Nietzsche's name, let alone quote him. But there is something dumbly lovable about her too, which might even turn the head of the invincible Man of Steel. Here, as nearly elsewhere, the casting is superb.

Christopher Reeve was finally selected to play Clark Kent/ Superman after a talent search that began with producer Hy A. Salkind's first going after superstar Robert Redford and Paul Newman (both of whom turned down the role), then considering, as long ago as 1976, Steve McQueen, Clint Eastwood, Charles Bronson, Nick Nolte, Ryan O'Neal, and a host of others, including decathlon champion Bruce Jenner and a Beverly Hills dentist named Don Voiney. (Could it be that a successful dentist might increase his earning power by becoming a mere movie star?) After the decision had been made to pay the big money for supporting roles (Brando and Hackman, in particular), the producers were then free to go with an "unknown" for the title role, so long as he
looked the part and so long as he could act. Their choice was an inspired one.

Christopher Reeve could act, and after a body-building course he was made to look the part. He is wonderful both as the "mild-mannered" Clark Kent — a sort of superclutz in this movie — and as the Man of Steel. Even the corniest of lines ("I never lie, Lois," or "I fight for Truth, Justice, and the American Way") somehow fall naturally from his lips. At one point, in Lois Lane's apartment, as Clark Kent he almost discloses his true identity to her. In an instant his voice changes from Clark Kent's to Superman's, then immediately back to Clark Kent's so smoothly that one is convinced that Mr. Reeve is an actor perfect for the role. (Rumor has it that Lois Lane will discover Clark Kent's true identity in SUPERMAN — PART II, the sequel which is advertised at the end of the credits for the current movie.)

The producers believed that the key to the success of this movie depended on the special effects creating the illusion convincingly that a man could fly. The real trick, however, was to find a man who could play both Superman and Clark Kent convincingly. I believe that this movie was ultimately "saved" by the casting of Christopher Reeve. I do not agree with the Variety review (of December 13, 1978) which concluded that "though the stars played brilliantly, the game here was won in the technical trenches by the long list of craftsmen." The movie obviously owes much of its spectacular visual quality to the cinematography of the late Geoffrey Unsworth (whose earlier credits included 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY) and the army of technicians whose inventiveness helped to create the special-effects magic necessary for the film's success. But without human interest, convincingly created (for the most part) by a talented cast, the movie would have been "merely" spectacular. A merely spectacular movie would of course have made money, but it would not have been placed on anyone's "Ten Best" list of films for 1978. I can only hope that the sequels are up to the quality of the original version. And there is reason to hope.

Is there anything left to be said about Superman?

In a word, yes. Those other great fictional American flying heroes, aviator Ted Scott and inventor Tom Swift, flew largely by virtue of their grit and engineering genius. Ted Scott vaulted the Atlantic in his monoplane; Tom Swift confounded Siberian smugglers in his beloved airship, "The Red Cloud." Goggles tilted, wrench and hammer upraised, they personified the aspirations of a whole generation of young readers in the twenties whose heroes, like plucky Ragged Dick, no longer could just come to the city seeking their fortune, they must kick away gravity and fly to their reward . . .

The parallel of Superman to the Alger heroes is, perhaps, unjustly neglected in all the hoopla today about The Man of Steel. The average Alger hero was a boy of fifteen or so, usually fatherless (in the best Victorian tradition), who must journey to the corrupt city to both make his way and support his widowed mother. His only resources rest in learning to stand on his own two feet and accommodate himself to a dubious world. His success was the definitive demonstration of the great and abiding American belief in individual effort. The young Clark Kent evinces all these characteristics. And, like Alger's Ragged Dick, whose real father is finally discovered to be a wealthy bank president, Superman's real father is never really absent, orphan though young Clark be, his legitimacy is assured all along.

Everyone, it seems, in the fictional works of the past 150 years, especially in America, has looked for a father. The drive for proper parentage in a country without traditions of its own has become emblematic of the push for roots that have distinguished America's most recent of Alger sagas, the works of Alex Haley. Superman is but one member of a motley throng of American orphans who find they are heirs to mighty traditions after all — Owen Wister's Lin McLean, Twain's Huck Finn, a host of Doug Fairbanks' cowboys, Billy Batson, Don Sturdy, Ragged Dick, Pollyanna, Little Ford Faunterley, etc. So many of their fathers, interestingly enough, were linked to the "Old World legitimacy" of Europe. America itself was an orphan who was pleased to remind itself of its European origins: legitimacy generally was not to be found on native soil, it lay somewhere across the ocean. Thus it is not surprising that Clark Kent found his father in the clouds, a sort of cosmic Daddy-Long-Legs. The insignia on Jor-El's chest was the equivalent of an ancient family crest, the sign of the aristocracy America has always yearned for.

What finally removes Clark from Alger's plucky newsboys (Clark is a reporter, after all) and Tom Swift's mechanical aeronauts, is that knowledge of his parentage and fulfillment of his intellectual needs leads to a unique identity — flight. No dirigibles, biplanes, and propellers for him, thank you. Like another great aerialist, Peter Pan, he flies unencumbered. James Barrie, Pan's creator, understood that the real truth of flight is that it is the immortal gesture, unhampered by trivialities like gravity. It promises and promotes our best nature, not just our mechanical aptitude.

But for Barrie, flight was possible only for children. Superman is able to fly only when he kicks away childhood, only when he learns who he is, only when his emotional, psychical, and physical growth can mature.

Thus, Superman is more like Barrie's mature Peter Pan, a character to be found in the novel Tommy and Griz. If I think I am rather a fine fellow when I am flying," that character declares.

And so, Superman reminds us, are we all.
Videodisc Hits Atlanta — First Purchaser Pleased

By Janet Marrs Laughead

The rapid expansion of video technology has created a mass audience of people now watching some or all of their favorite movies on their home television set. The ease of operation offered by videocassettes and the more moderate price of prerecorded videocassettes, cassettes, and discs (as compared to 8, super-8, and 16mm film) will encourage more and more people to utilize this medium, and we believe it deserves a section of its own.

One thing I plan to offer each time in this section is an interview with someone who can give us deeper insight into what is happening and what we can expect to happen next in this fast moving area. As regular readers of this magazine know, ACS has been closely watching the progress of the videodisc and player and has been anticipating its eventual availability. It seems appropriate that our first feature should be a discussion of the MCA/Philips videodisc system by Mr. Ray Kuehne, the first to purchase one when a limited number became available in Atlanta on December 15, 1978.

Those unfamiliar with this system should just think of it as a record player which, besides emitting sound, plays a picture onto your TV screen. The “record,” or videodisc, looks much like a long-playing phonograph record but has no grooves, is bright silver in color, and is coated with two tough layers of plastic which make it hard to damage the disc. The “needle” this player uses is not a needle at all. In this optical system a tiny laser light relays the images and sound. Because it is this beam of light that touches the disc rather than a needle or stylus, disc quality is not affected by repeated handling and use. Each videodisc rotates at 1800 revolutions per minute in the standard play mode (or 900 rpm in extended play). At one separate image per revolution, 30 frames per second is the normal playing rate. With each of these frames having its own index number it is possible to access individual frames randomly. The player also has slow motion, reverse, and freeze-frame modes.

Mr. Ray Kuehne of suburban Atlanta kindly talked to me recently by phone and shared his thoughts and experiences with this new device. Because his background is in computers, he understands the technological advantages of the videodisc. When asked, he explained that it represents a whole new dimension in terms of information density both for home and industry.

“There is nothing close to this size that will store near the amount of information in a magnetic form right now,” he continued. Mr. Kuehne pointed out that with 54,000 revolutions per half-hour side, this massive amount of information forms 108,000 separate pictures on the TV set. With stop-action and slow-motion capabilities, the uses are endless.

“Think about what could be presented on your TV screen,” he said. “One frame of a motion picture is one thing, but think about other applications for a while.

Continued next page.

Laughead Named Editor Of Video Chronicle

SHAWNEE MISSION, KS — Janet Marrs Laughead, assistant editor of AMERICAN CLASSIC SCREEN, has been named editor of The Video Chronicle. In this new ACS feature, she will acquaint the actual and prospective video user with pertinent news and information on this rapidly expanding market. Ms. Laughead welcomes correspondence on these and related subjects. Contact her in care of The Video Chronicle, AMERICAN CLASSIC SCREEN, 7800 Conser Place, Shawnee Mission, KS 66204.
Working with computers, I'm used to looking at CRTs (tv screens) full of printed information. Imagine a tv screen full of text representing about half of a printed page. That's 54,000 pixels per disc. If an average encyclopedia volume contains 300 pages and there are 20 volumes per set, it's possible 2 put nine sets of encyclopedia on one disc. Consider one frame being a painting or picture of a piece of sculpture. One disc could hold the world's art treasures. By attaching a printer that plugs into a CRT it would also be possible to make a print of the text you see on the screen.

The potential appears almost limitless. Technologically and beyond that you have the entertainment value — the sheer fun of it,” Mr. Kuehne continued. He sees a big application for classic movies because the picture offered by the disc is much sharper than with videotape and since the discs are made from top quality original film prints they are not washed out and flickery. He was able to buy discs of Boris Karloff in the 1931 FRANKENSTEIN, the Marx Brothers' ANIMAL CRACKERS and some vignetted with Abbott and Costello and is pleased with all of them.

Since stereophonic speakers can also be attached to the player, the audio portion of a presentation is greatly improved, too. This not only has implications for movie soundtracks, but for operas and dance performances as well. Both by nature call for a blending of high quality sound and picture. Mr. Kuehne has discs of CORTEGE OF EAGLES, (a Martha Graham Dance Company performance) and THE BOLERO with Zubin Mehta conducting the Los Angeles Philharmonic. THE SLIPPER AND THE ROSE and JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR were also purchased primarily for their musical character.

When asked if he owned or had owned a videocassette recorder Mr. Kuehne responded that he hadn't as he did not see enough on tv that he would want to record to see again later. Besides the high prices on pre-recorded videocassettes, he indicated that another disadvantage to them when compared to disc was the sound and picture quality. He did not consider the inability of the disc system to record a draw-back to its usefulness or appeal.

"Think about audio for a minute," he said. "I've got a stereo system that has a turntable and I've got tape in both formats — cassette and reel-to-reel. Most of the time I play a disc. The only thing I use my tape recorder for, as a matter of fact, is to record cassettes to play on my car player. The reason for that is that anything you want musically is available on disc. That is the format right now. Since a disc is inherently a random-access device, you can go to any piece of the disc rapidly without having to wind through all the tape to get there. Given the availability of sufficient pre-recorded software the disc is going to become the medium of choice. You will be able to go over to your shelf and pick up a record that's the same size as a phonograph record and drop it on and look at any part of it you want, or the whole thing.

"Assuming that the software gets off the ground and they really come up with the diversity of discs they are promising, the thought of taping anything off your set or watching anything that isn't prerecorded is going to go away. Why go out and pay $25 for a reel of tape or a cassette to record something with low-fi, mono sound complete with commercials, complete with censoring, complete with time editing to make it fit into the format of the program?"

He went on to talk about the durability of the disc and the options that opens: "With the optical system there is no wear on the disc. It doesn't matter if you touch it with your fingers because it is protected with plastic. Even the degradation in quality from a scratch is completely unnoticeable. You may mess up one scan line for a little while but you'll never see it. The potential for trading or having a lending library full of them is great. It makes a lot more sense to lend them out at the public library than it does phonograph records."

There is one dark cloud on the horizon, Mr. Kuehne pointed out. That is the fact that several other companies — RCA, JVC, and Matsushita, for example — are at work developing videodisc systems that will not be compatible with the MCA-Philips system and perhaps not even with each other. If this happens it could cause buyers to delay making their purchases while they wait to see which format will win out. As Mr. Kuehne said, "This is really a new information and entertainment age that is upon us and the potential for sales is great. The manufacturers are going to do themselves, and especially the public, a major disservice if they refuse to standardize. I really feel like they're understanding the case when they imply that it's the biggest thing since color television. It's a lot bigger than that."

Compact "MAGNAVISION®" optical videodisc player by Magnavox is as easy to operate as a conventional phonograph.

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**Newsletter Industry**

WASHINGTON, DC — VideoNews is one thing everyone interested in video, cable and pay tv should read. This newsletter is published bi-weekly with an index every six months. The coverage of industry and technology developments is quite complete, timely, and far-ranging.

One recent issue covered an agreement between MCA and GM on industrial videodiscs, the latest on the Sony vs. MCA Betamax case, and the increase in VCR sales as well as notes on companies and equipment, a new cable/satellite program supplier, and the threat new technology presents to the networks.

Subscriptions to Video News are $97.00 per year and may be obtained by writing to VideoNews in care of Phillips Publishing, Inc., 8401 Connecticut Avenue, Washington, DC 20015.
JVC/RCA Discs On The Way

MCA/Philips is the only company to have actually started marketing a consumer videodisc system but other companies are developing their own systems. JVC and RCA are working on capacitive rather than optical systems; neither one will be compatible with that already released by Magnavox.

The JVC player connects to a regular home tv receiver to play a grooveless, 12 inch plastic disc. Each side has a capacity of one hour total playing time. The player is also capable of playing digitally recorded super hi-fi (PCM) discs also developed by JVC. A spokesman for JVC stated that since they have been involved in the audio, video, and record industries for a long time, they recognized “the significance of the Video Disc System and its potential impact on the industries involved. Thus, exhaustive surveys and engineering studies were carried out to develop a system which would be versatile, and have a performance high enough for both home and industrial use, and at the same time would be economical to manufacture.”

One of the goals JVC says they have achieved is the development of a system capable of providing random access and special effects such as still, slow, and quick motion. Also, the player and disc are said to be highly reliable while still being economical to manufacture since existing audio disc pressing equipment is used for the disc and no special components are necessary for constructing the player. The high resolution pick-up system allows for increased technical development, however. A final goal JVC says they have reached is a total playing time of two hours.

In the JVC system both audio and video information are recorded as pits (rather than grooves) on the disc surface. To guide the stylus tracking information is recorded along side the audio and video signals. These signals are picked up electronically as capacitance variations between the disc surface and an electrode on the track-

Illustration of the JVC stylus and disc showing the multiple pits on the disc surface. The information pits are recorded spirally, but the tracking pits between them permit a linear playback signal.

Video Catalog Released

NEW YORK, NY — MCA DiscoVision’s first catalog has been released with approximately 200 titles of available programs. The listings of feature films include some from Universal, Warner Brothers, Paramount, and Walt Disney as well as classic, television, and American Film Theatre movies. Non-feature films consist of sports, self-improvement, the arts, home, informational and educational shows.

Some of the classic films offered are ANIMAL CRACKERS, BACK STREET, DOUBLE INDEMNITY, GOING MY WAY, THE LIVES OF A BENGAL LANCER, MA AND PA KETTLE, and THE WORLD OF ABBOTT AND COSTELLO.

Those from Universal include AIRPORT 77, ANIMAL HOUSE, THE BIRDS, DIARY OF A MAD HOUSEWIFE, FELLINI’S CASANOVA, HOUSE CALLS, JAWS, PSYCHO, SHENANDOAH, THE STING, SWEET CHARITY, and WHICH WAY IS UP?

Walt Disney’s offerings include ALMOST ANGELS, KIDNAPPED, MIRACLE OF THE WHITE STALLEONS, THE MOON SPINNERS, PERRI, THE PRINCE AND THE PAUPER, AND AT HOME WITH DONALD DUCK, and ON VACATION WITH MICKY MOUSE & FRIENDS among others.

Non-feature films include French, Italian and Greek cooking classes and two shows on needlework.

There are also “how-to” sports programs in golf, tennis, basketball, and swimming as well as spectator sports shows featuring boxing, football, skateboarding, and skiing as well as others. Jane Goodall, Jacques Cousteau, and WORLD AT WAR are represented with several programs in the informational grouping. Educational shows include a CPR course and programs on ecology, volcanoes and earthquakes, consumerism, VD, archeology, and women workers.

Several non-denominational programs on religious and moral values as well as several featuring specifically Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish concepts are offered.

Self-improvement programs on such topics as how to stop smoking and offerings in the arts covering dance, ballet, opera, and art appreciation round out the catalog.
Two New Videocassette Recorders Introduced

ZENITH'S BETA FORMAT VIDEO CASSETTE RECORDER has built-in UHF and VHF tuners and automatic timer to allow taping up to three hours at a time. Automatic fine-tuning, six-button keyboard for play, record, rewind, fast-forward, stop, tape eject. Tracking control accommodates variations in pre-recorded cassettes. Remote pause control for editing of tape. Tape counter with memory setting. Price is approximately $1000.00.

GE'S NEW VHS VIDEO CASSETTE RECORDER features a built-in timer, its own VHS-UHF tuner, and a recording time selector for recording on two speeds up to a full 4 hours. It also has remote pause control, an audio dubbing feature, and a program search. The unit retails for approximately $1000.00.

Blackhawk Films Add Video

DAVENPORT, IA—Blackhawk Films, Inc., has long been known to film collectors as one of the biggest and best of film dealers. Now the film buff who prefers to watch and collect movies on videotape can enjoy the same advantages of reputable service and wide selection because Blackhawk now offers cassettes in either Beta or VHS format.

The new winter catalog from Blackhawk contains over 250 titles of contemporary, vintage, historical and inspirational movies in addition to those from the classic and golden eras.

Among the contemporary listings are THE GRADUATE, A MAN AND A WOMAN, HELLO DOLLY, PARADISE HAWAIIAN STYLE, CARNAL KNOWLEDGE, THE FRENCH CONNECTION, CONDUCT UNBECOMING, FANTASTIC VOYAGE, M*A*S*H, and THE LONGEST DAY.

"Vintage Films" include several Elvis movies in addition to others such as HOW TO MARRY A MILLIONAIRE, A FAREWELL TO ARMS, LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON, GLEOPAT-RA, BILLY BUDD, THE STORY OF O, and others.

The "Classic Age" is represented with Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, and Astaire/Rogers movies. MARY OF SCOTLAND, THE HUNCHBACK OF NOTRE DAME, THE GRAPES OF WRATH, how green was my VALLEY, CITIZEN KANE, and SUSPICION are just a few of the others available.

Keaton, Chaplin, Valentino, Mary Pickford, Lillian Gish, and Douglas Fairbanks are among those whose films are offered in the "Golden Age" section. Some of the titles are: LITTLE ANNIE ROONEY, BIRTH OF A NATION, THE MARK OF ZORRO, THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA, SON OF THE SHEIK, and THE YANKEE CLIPPER.

Several cartoons and such historical presentations as THE MOVING PICTURE BOYS IN THE GREAT WAR, FILM FIRSTS, and COUNTDOWN TO WORLD WAR II are among the listed.

For your own copy of Blackhawk's video catalog, write to Blackhawk Films, 1235 W. Fifth Street, Davenport, IA 52808.

Esselte Logs Video

NEW YORK, NY — THE VIDEOLOG: PROGRAMS FOR GENERAL INTEREST AND ENTERTAINMENT 1979 is now available from Esselte Video, Inc., 600 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10022. This helpful book provides comprehensive program information with annotated entries on over 4,800 titles. Of these more than 450 are movies available for rent and/or sale.

Some of the more than 115 different subjects covered in the general interest programs are alcoholism, art, biology, child development, consumerism, dance, hygiene, literature, medicine, music, photography, plants, sexuality, sports, tv and radio, women's studies, and world affairs.

Movies available include recent releases as well as sound and silent classics, documentaries, cartoons, and adult films. The titles are too numerous to mention but the selection appears very complete.

The available video formats of programs include 1/2" U-Matic cassette, 1/4" EIAJ (reel-to-reel and cartridge), 1", 2", and 1/2" Beta, and 1/4" VHS.

THE VIDEOLOG is arranged into four different sections to allow for speedy reference. The first section is the Subject Index which classifies each program or series title in up to three categories. The second is an alphabetical listing containing the fully annotated entries for each general interest program. The third section, Movies on Video, gives the same information on movies. The final section lists the full name, address, telephone number, and contact person for the companies and institutions whose titles are featured.

This is one of the most helpful guides yet seen for the video collector and enthusiast — one which he or she will turn to often.

Cinema Concepts Catalog

CHESTER, CT — More than 20 first-run video features are offered in Cinema Concepts Video Library's catalog. Humor, nostalgia, horror and classic movies are not often shown on television as well as one-hour variety programs of comedy, cartoons, and sports are also listed. Various formats are available, including 1/2-inch and 1/4-inch videocassettes.

For more information contact Cinema Concepts Video Library, 91 Main Street, Chester, CT 06412.