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By Dr. John J. Fritscher

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Ed. Note: Dr. John J. Fritscher is Assistant Professor of Film and Popular Culture at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.

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The Eyes Have It: Movies & TV for the Catholic Family

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Family films are better than ever. But unwise are the parents who drop their children at the neighborhood matinee, satisfied that the film is rated "G" (suitable for General Audiences). Not every G-rated film has the charming quality of "Good-bye, Mr. Chips" or "Run Wild, Run Free." Two current musts -to-avoid are "The Outdoorsman" and "Wilderness Calling." Both are G-rated: Both are ugly films of hunters slaughtering wildlife which remind the shocked children of little Bambi, funny Bullwinkle Moose, and Gentle Ben.

Technicolor blood

It is unfortunate that distributors are booking "The Outdoorsman" with Walt Disney's true life adventure "The Alaskan Eskimo." The ads read "Family Program." But what family wants its pre-schoolers to see a severed moose head hoisted by the antlers, dripping Technicolor blood.

The kind of tears sobbed at screenings of "The Outdoorsman" are far different from the gentle sniffles and laughter children experience at "Mr. Chips." It's healthy for a child now and again to have a tear trickle at the local Bijou, but they ought to be "nice" tears, not tears of terror.

If the best way to squelch a film is to punch it in the box office, then give these two studies in brutality the old One-Two.

The soft musical:

On the other hand, families can enjoy together "Good-bye, Mr. Chips." This handsome Technicolor musical is the happy-sad kind of film that entertains children without boring their parents (and vice versa).

Recording artist Petula Clark stars with Peter O'Toole who is sure to win this season's Academy Award for his flawless portrayal of the fusty old English schoolmaster who learns for one brief moment how to swing.

Must-see for families

Even if you saw the 1939 non-musical “Mr. Chips,” this 1970 singing remake is a must-see for families who recreate together. One caution, however, and one final word.

The caution: the 2 hour 40 minute film may be a bit long for the pre-schoolers.

The final word: to adults who think they dislike singing films, “Chips” is not the usual musical. It is prime example of the new “Soft Musical.” The score never intrudes on or stops the plot, even, in the two rousing Pet Clark music-hall routines.

Through most of the film, the music is background and the lyrics are sung on the. soundtrack as thoughts in the heads of Mr. and Mrs. Chips. The “soft” use of the musical score keeps the musical part of the film from becoming obnoxiously obvious. Director Herbert Ross has kept the whole of his film greater than any one of its parts; but he has wisely emphasized the talented O’Toole.

The hard musical:

For adults who wish to see Hollywood musicals “like they used to make ’em,” Barbara Streisand’s “Hello Dolly” is a nostalgic trip back to the flicks of Gene Kelly and Judy Garland. Kelly, in fact, directed “Dolly” in the “Hard Musical” style. Every few minutes playwright Thornton Wilder’s plot must stop so a song-and-dance can happen. This 1940’s style isn’t exactly where-it’s-at today, but it is refreshing for a change.

At its worst, “Dolly” is a lavish Technicolor stew with all the meat and vegetables stirred in a Todd-AO kettle. What it lacks is seasoning. And Tabasco is what it gets when Streisand steams on screen. “Dolly” is fun throughout, but “Dolly” becomes Great Fun when Barbra walks on camera. The sheer buoyancy of her comic talent saves the whole ship. The “Titanic” should have had her aboard.

Upstages Louis Armstrong

In the sequence where the hotel waiters sing “Hello, Dolly,” Streisand manages to upstage even Louis Armstrong in his cameo appearance as a singing orchestra leader. Any girl who can do that has got IT, whatever IT is. So even if you think you can’t stomach the controversial Streisand, try giving her ‘Dolly’ a big hello.

Danny Lockin, as the junior store keeper Barnaby, turns in a supporting appearance guaranteed to make adolescent girls breathless. Pueblo’s own E. J. Peaker shines as his sweetheart. Somehow, wandering through it all, Walter Mathau seems lost. (Better to catch him in the current comedy “Cactus Flower.”)

A very special TV special

Bolt your doors and take the phone off the hook Saturday night, Jan. 31. Xerox Corporation has done it again. The current Broadway revival of “The Front Page” will be telecast as a one-shot TV special. And this time “special” means just that.

“The Front Page” is a hilarious comedy by the late Ben Hecht (see the movie on his life “Gaily, Gaily”) and Charles MacArthur (Helen Hayes’ husband and father of “Hawaii Five-O’s” James MacArthur). Robert Ryan stars as managing editor Walter Burns. George Grizzard is his maverick reporter, Hildy Johnson. The name of their game is the Chicago newspaper business.

Time has not dulled the acid wit of the Hecht-MacArthur script. The currently tense relations between Chicago’s Three P’s (press, politicians, and police) make the serious humor of “Front Page”

more appropriate today than ever.

Xerox thought it rather wasteful in our boiling times that only Broadway audiences could see this immensely relevant drama. The corporation decided to spread it around, for what it's worth, across the nation. Their premise is: a bit of a laugh at our troubled times may be the first step out of the dilemma.

"The Front Page" cast includes Susan Watson of Broadway's "Bye-Bye Birdie;" Vivan Vance, well remembered from "I Love Lucy;" and Estelle Parsons, Academy Award Winner in "Bonnie and Clyde."

COMING NEXT MONTH: YOUR CHILD AND SATURDAY MORNING TV.

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