Coming Home syrup smothers message

Coming Home, a United Artists release, starring Jane Fonda, Jon Voight, and Bruce Dern, screenplay by Waldo Salt and Robert C. Jones, cinematography by Haskell Wexler, directed by Hal Ashby and produced by Jerome Heilman, playing at Sack Charles, rated R.

By Leigh J. Passman

When one considers that Jane Fonda, the most intelligent, controversial entertainment figure to oppose the Vietnam War was the moving force behind the most consequential Vietnam retrospective to date, it seems highly appropriate. Fonda led the conception and screening, starred in the movie, and used her influence and money to push the project through. Simply said, Coming Home is Fonda’s baby.

With Fonda, activist cinematographer Haskell Wexler, and liberal director Hal Ashby (who directed the war satire Harold and Maude), one might hope for cogent political and social commentary. On the contrary, what resulted is a mawkish love story which serves as the medium for a sympathetic and tenuous study of the emotional effects of the war.

The plot, a love triangle, centers around Sally Hyde (Jane Fonda), the patrician wife of an even more patriotic and gungho marine, Capt. Bob Hyde (Bruce Dern) and a paraplegic veteran, Luke Martin (Jon Voight) with whom she falls in love.

Den’s character, a stereotypically gung-ho patriot and an emotional and sexual weakling, is tempered solely by his attempt to oppose the Vietnam War. This is perhaps the film’s most damaging fault, for it destroys the film’s credibility and sense of fairness by reducing the naturalism of the period, who may have felt a sense of duty, to little more than socially shuffling militeration.

After sending Dern off to ‘Nam, Fonda befriends Viola Mascon (Penelope Millford). Eager to pass the time, Fonda volunteers at the local veteran’s hospital where she meets the bitter and stubborn paralyzed Voight. Fonda’s firmness and warmth engage the seedy Voight, softening his bitterness and turning his attention to rehabilitation.

As he warms, Voight’s boyish charm and good looks take over, and he and Fonda fall in love. Voight is a breath of fresh air in an otherwise lackluster acting roster. And while that acting is merely a function of a script worthy of a weekday soap-opera, Voight brings forth a lovable charm, while preserving his, the most forceful charter.

As the title implies, Coming Home, is the story of the men who came home, and the film’s effect on their home and family. The movie treats Voight’s condition with frankness and sensitivity. Yet when Dern returns as a shattered man, the attention shifts to Fonda and the decision between the two men in her life, which she seems to have to make, but has already made.

For all its diverse charm, Coming Home can be amusing. Throughout the film an irritating barrage of period 1960 songs punctuate the dialogue, with the lyrics coordinating with dialogue in an awkward and suspicious fashion. However, the greatest disappointment is that the film which sets out to study war’s effects on soldiers, often the greatest sufferers of war, treats them in a terribly condescending tone. Dern is miscast, and his brashness and shallowness add to that tone.

Rather than a social commentary or emotional documentary, Jane Fonda and Hal Ashby, instead have gone with a sure thing—a love story—subordinating the main themes we had hoped they would have addressed.

The Tech’s movie rating scale:

- excellent
- very good
- good
- fair
- poor
- the absolute pits

NOTICE

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1. Undergraduate class receiving a Bachelor’s degree during the current calendar year (1978).
2. Graduate students completing their terminal-year of study and receiving an advanced degree during the current calendar year (1978).
3. Those who graduated from the Institute or received a graduate degree during 1977.
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If you should have received a ballot but did not, please contact Rosemary Carpenter at (617) 253-8221.

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THE BALLOT MUST BE RETURNED TO THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BY MAY 12, 1978.

Laurence Söricht ’71
Chairman, Corporation Screening Committee
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