

LookBackInAngerTonyRichardsonRichardBurton1959TextTVS

By Tim Van Schmidt

Look Back in Anger ***

Every time actor Richard Burton's character starts in on another of his abusive tirades in "Look Back in Anger," his wife and friend's eyes roll back in their head. This guy is so relentlessly negative and offensive that there is no talking to him about it, just surrender. As a viewer, that's what I had to do too- just let my eyes roll back in my head and give up trying to figure the guy out. What makes him so angry?

The truly puzzling part of this movie is why do the people in his life take the constant yelling and insults? Why do two attractive, intelligent women find this train wreck of a fellow so irresistible? Why is this romantic drama- heavy on the drama- of interest?

The bile that Burton's character spews is well spoken and clever in its way, suggesting there is more here than meets the eye. He is also a rabid jazz fan, playing his trumpet for appreciative crowds at the local jazz club- and at inopportune times in his little crowded apartment, decorated with jazz posters. This recalls the strong jazz theme in "Odds Against Tomorrow," perhaps reflecting a strong interest in the music in 1959.

Also like "Odds Against Tomorrow," the black and white photography aptly reflects the grim emotional landscape of the characters and there are some innovative set-ups, like a scene between the angry jazzman and his wife, performed completely in the mirror. However, the constant yelling and intense sadness that it creates negates any form of happiness here- and pretty much any enjoyment of the movie.

One interesting connection I can make between "Look Back in Anger" and the 1959 western "Warlock" is that both movies feature a very strong bond between male characters. In "Warlock" that relationship is between the gun slinging marshal and his gambling business partner. In "Look Back in Anger," the relationship is between the trumpeter and his buddy, who works a town market pushcart with him and shares the tiny apartment with him and his wife. Both relationships break up in the course of the stories and affects all the men with as much emotion as breaking up with a lover. Gary Raymond plays the buddy with a friendly charisma.

Directed by Tony Richardson...1959...98 min...featuring Richard Burton, Claire Bloom, Mary Ure, Edith Evans, Gary Raymond, Donald Pleasence.