



## 'Turning Point' contrasts lives

In the past decade there has been a terrific surge of interest in the dance. After audiences throughout the country see "The Turning Point" (PG), the interest could turn into an obsession. Balletomania will rush to the barre and "pies" will be a household word.

"The Turning Point" is an astonishingly good film: Astonishing because it combines a bygone feeling for emotional binges with a contemporary mood that avoids sentimentalizing and moralizing; astonishing because it avoids the old Hollywood reverence for an "arty" subject and treats ballet with both honesty and passion.

Deedee (Shirley MacLaine) and Emma (Anne Bancroft) are two friends who meet annually when the American Ballet Company makes its one-night stand in the Oklahoma city where Deedee and her family live. Deedee had been a dancer but she gave it up for marriage and children. Emma devoted herself to her career and became a prima ballerina.

Once they both had been contenders for the role that eventually made Emma a star. But, as Deedee sourly puts it, she got pregnant and Emma got 19 curtain calls.

AT MIDDLE AGE, they are prompted to think about options and what might have been. Deedee envies the excitement and glamor of Emma's life. Emma, her career coming to a close, would like security and marriage.

When Deedee's talented daughter Emilia (Leslie Browne) is invited to join the company for the summer in New York, Deedee goes along as chaperone. Emilia's budding career seems to be a replay of Deedee's youthful aspirations and of the choices that must be made.

Emma bestows her attention on Emilia, coaching her and taking her under her wing. The new proximity of Emma and Deedee and their "competing" roles in Emilia's life cause old doubts and antagonisms to surface.

In the movie's most dramatically explosive scene, Emma and Deedee finally confront each other. Bitchy remarks lead to hitting and kicking until they collapse in an emotional catharsis; tears turn to laughter and they end up clinging to each other in friendship.

Sometimes the story and the balletics seem to get in each other's way. Just as we get involved with one, the other comes along. Yet, each is excellent, if too brief. At least, our appetites are whetted, and we're left with a desire for more.

**DIRECTOR HERBERT ROSS**, a former choreographer, and associate producer Nora Kaye, a former prima ballerina with the American Ballet Theatre, have given gritty authenticity to the world of the dance company. The rarefied atmosphere of the classic performance is balanced against the daily drudgery, the perspiration, the bleeding feet.

The dancing of Mikhail Baryshnikov and Leslie Browne provide soaring, beautiful moments. It's worth the price of admission just to watch Baryshnikov's gravity-defying leaps and perfect control.

As Yuri, the tutu-chasing male star of the company, his dialogue is simple and minimal. Browne, as Emma's daughter, plays a more pivotal character. Unfortunately, with her squeaky voice and immobile features, her acting doesn't measure up to her dancing.

Martha Scott is wonderfully entertaining as the grasping, scheming general manager who keeps the company afloat; Alexandra Danilova is a warm and crusty grande dame who coaches the young dancers; and Tom Skerritt is restrained and sympathetic as Emma's husband.

MacLaine and Bancroft, however, have the meatiest, juiciest roles, and they make the most of them. Each gives a terrific performance which complements and counterpoints the other. Bancroft is svelte, proud and arrogant. MacLaine, in contrast, looks frumpy, is unsure of herself and whiney.

"The Turning Point" is admirable for not attempting to idealize or popularize the characters. From television, one might surmise that female friendships and concerns hinge on two neighbors discussing detergents or household odors. Bless producer and director Herbert Ross for showing us otherwise.

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