



Supernatural spirits are after Carol Anne Freeling (Heather O'Rourke) in "Poltergeist."



the movies
Louise Snider

Spielberg's effects provide excitement in poltergeist tale

Recently, a Hollywood flap has erupted over just who was the creative force behind "Poltergeist" (PG), Steven Spielberg, the co-producer and co-writer, or Tobe Hooper, the director?

The evidence, that is the movie, points toward Spielberg as the dominant influence. His participation really shows in the overall conception of the movie with its succession of special effects, humorous incidents and shocking jolts.

These were achieved without the gristiness associated with Hooper who directed "The Texas Chainsaw Massacre."

Spielberg's hand is evident, especially in the first half of the film which presents a vignette of family life that is rich in anecdote and detail. The family in focus is a middle-class suburban household consisting of mother, father, older daughter, middle son, younger daughter, dog and, briefly, a bird.

THE DOG ADDS an extra dimension of interest to the movie whenever he appears. He is a wonderfully laid-back, California canine with the most doggy personality (as opposed to cute, noble or smart movie dogs) I've ever seen in a film.

He is the kind of nighttime growler who lopes through the house nibbling potato chips and polishing off leftovers wherever he finds them.

Suddenly, this contented, mock-ordinary household is disrupted by a series of strange experiences. At first, what happens is just odd and amusing, but the frequency and intensity of the supernatural occurrences increase rapidly and the amusement quickly turns to fear and terror.

The youngest child disappears, although her voice can be heard calling to her mother to come and get her.

The family brings in experts in supernatural phenomena to help retrieve the daughter. It is at this point that the movie loses what coherence it has. We might say, the more impressive the special effects, the less coherent the story.

RUN TO THE light, the missing child is told. No, don't run to the light, it's dangerous. Run, don't run. No wonder the kid's in limbo when her parents always give her contradictory instructions. But that's not the worst of it. The end of the film has a tophole big enough to drive a subdivision through.

As a moving van is shown loading furniture from the house, the father goes off to work saying he will try to get home early and take the family to a motel for the night. Yet, we see the mother sending the children off to bed for the night — and in a house which still seems chock-full of furniture.

For many people, however, what matters about a movie like this is not the logic of it but the look. The story is simply a skeletal framework (pun intended) for hanging a passel of special effects.

The effects are marvelous — inanimate objects in a flurry of motion, twisting forms of light gliding down a staircase. Shiver and shriek time.

With all these wonders and all this expertise, why the inconsistencies? Is this an instance of too many people directing the film or is it just a poltergeist playing tricks on us?



Steve Freeling (Craig T. Nelson) defies the spirits in an attempt to rescue his wife and daughter.

A savvy star: Patrice Munsel

By Ethel Simmons
staff writer

IT'S A GLAMOROUS life for singing star Patrice Munsel — years filled with a whirl of shows, concerts and attendant publicity. And if it all sounds a little hectic, well it isn't really, because this performing artist has so much show-business savvy.

The musical revue "Tintypes" was adapted to focus on her considerable singing talents, and she's the name in the ensemble company of five appearing at the Birmingham Theatre.

"Tintypes" is a witty and nostalgic show recapturing the tunes and times of the early 1900s in New York City. Playing the Birmingham Theatre through Sunday, the production then goes East to Hartford, Conn., and Hyannis, Mass., and next to Toronto. In September, it moves along to the Northeast and the Southeast.

"IT WILL BE quite a long tour," Munsel said, during an interview in the living room of the Birmingham apartment where she is staying during the show's Detroit-area run. "I'll be in and out of it through April."

In between, she will be able to enjoy her homes in New York City and in the country. "We have a house in the Adirondacks on the lake. The baby ducks go by with Mama. There are about 18 teams of ducks," she said, smiling at the image.

Munsel has been married for 29 years to Robert Charles Schuler, who has produced her shows on television and in Las Vegas. They have four grown children — two boys and two girls.

The youngest son still lives at home, and there are frequent opportunities to get together with the other children.

Her husband was here for the previews of the show, Munsel said. A son manages Trackside Souvenir for the Grand Prix and was in Detroit last weekend. The youngest daughter, an artist, just graduated in Spokane, Wash. (where Munsel was born), and stopped out recently. The oldest daughter is in Las Vegas.

"WE JUST GOT back with our youngest son from a tour to Italy, Bombay and South Africa," Munsel said.

The years when the children were growing up were not ones of family hardship and separation. The entire family packed up and traveled together, along with the help — a couple, a secretary and a nanny — and a turtle and hamsters.

Munsel is strong in her praise for husband, Robert. "He understands theater and my needs to be continuing in it," she said. They share common interests. "We're both tourists, and we see things the same way."

Schuler also has the knack of smoothing the way. "My husband is German. He's very well-organized, and also funny, a nice combination," she said.

Munsel was only 17 when she auditioned for the Metropolitan Opera and was signed to a contract. She sang with the Met for 15 years and recalls those days with affection. "The years at the Met were very exciting, very demanding. But there's nothing like an operatic audience."

AMONG HER favorite roles were "Lucia de Lammermoor," "Die Fledermaus" and "La Perle." Some of her singing co-stars were Jan Peerce ("He was and is an absolutely wonderful man"), James (Jimmy) Melba and Nino Martini.



Patrice Munsel, star of "Tintypes," keeps in shape through exercise and jogging.

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