

**"CAN
HIERONYMUS MERKIN
EVER FORGET MERCY HUMPPPE
AND FIND
TRUE HAPPINESS?"**



anthony newley, joan collins and playmate connie kreski star in a wild flesh-and-fantasy-filled flick that more than lives up to its satirical title

AS IT TURNS OUT, the suggestively surnamed Hieronymus Merkin (a pubic wig) can't quite forget the more-obviously monickered Miss Humppe, so he doesn't exactly find true happiness, either. But as the film careens toward an answer to its marathon-title question, one finds that Anthony Newley—co-author, producer, director and star—has created what will be the movies' first Priapean musical comedy. Newley plays a likable 40-year-old rake who moonlights as a Hollywood singing idol and boasts a weakness for angelic nymphets—particularly Mercy, played by Connie Kreski, our January 1968 Playmate, whom Newley literally bumped into on an elevator at the London Playboy Club and later signed for the title role. As Hieronymus, he relives and reflects upon his exuberantly amorous past via film, tape and fantasy, and the result is a zany erotobiography that looks like a Marx Brothers movie shot in a nudist camp. "Like most normal men," Newley says, explaining the genesis of the film, "I have a certain fascination with erotica. I think truthful people are interested—artistically—in how people make love. The erotic films being made by young directors nowadays, however, are blatantly sexual without being either sensuous or romantic. I wanted to make a really erotic romantic movie, because I was brought up in a period when there was still romance." For Hieronymus, romance means an endless stream of delectable female fans whose devotion can be best expressed horizontally. He divides his more enduring passions between Polyester Poontang, his long-suffering second wife—played by Newley's real-life *(text concluded on page 137)*



As Hieronymus Merkin, Anthony Newley is possessed by a single-minded dedication to making hay while the sun shines—and while it doesn't, as well. After discovering dryadic Mercy Humppe (Connie Kreski, opposite page) riding a surreal carousel in the forest, Hieronymus promptly introduces his wood nymph to the mysteries of pastoral passion. Sometimes, though, his libidinous leanings trigger a kind of subconscious schizophrenia that finds Hieronymus flipping out of his own identity and watching The Mask—his windup, keyed-up alter ego—in amorous action with such willing barnmates as Helga Beck (above left), who later opts for a solo replay with The Mask under more civilized circumstances.







Demonstrating the wonders of satanic cookery, Good Time Eddie Filth (Milton Berle, opposite page) gloats, "You can never put in too much yeast," as an outsized dish named Trampolena Whambang (Yolanda) pops out of his smoking oven. Although Good Time Eddie encourages Hieronymus to love 'em and leave 'em, his charge (in company with The Mask) attends an astrological ballet (left) in fashionable undress and blows his usual cool by falling in love with Polyester Poontang, to whom he nobly proposes after getting her with child.



A flashback to his adolescence reveals Hieronymus as a fledgling vaudevillian—and lover—whose on- and offstage act is adorned with statuesque chorines.

As the protagonist in a symbolic Black Mass, Hieronymus ceremonially initiates a young convert.



Hieronymus disports with a frisky extra in a tableau reminiscent of Peter O'Toole's clowning in *Becket*.



Good Time Eddie's campaign to turn the adolescent Hieronymus into the highest-scoring lover of all time begins with an introduction to Little Assistance (Margaret Nolan). Before they do their thing on a handy brass bed, Eddie advises: "She has a very small mind, but the rest of her is very intelligent."





Young Merkin blissfully heeds only the final phrase of the warning sign in this uninhibited interlude set in an amusement-park atmosphere that's meant to suggest his euphoria.



Eschewing the nearby merry-go-round, Hieronymus energetically embarks on a merry ride of his own—moving Good Time Eddie to high praise. "As a rapist and lecher and all-round good fellow," he observes, "there's nobody can touch him—that he hasn't already touched."



But when he is later confronted with films of such carnal carnival capers as the one at left, the older, disillusioned Hieronymus exclaims: "I'm like the bubonic plague—the pubic plague! I should be forced to wear a bell around my neck and yell, 'Unclean! Unclean!'"



spouse, Joan Collins—and Mercy, an archetypal innocent who symbolizes ideal love as well as the perfect roll in the hay. But despite his humming hormones, Hieronymus is too selfish to really fall in love. Feeling, at 40, that his life has been futile and misspent, he is haunted by The Presence of Death, a darkly senile creature—portrayed by George Jessel—who's given to telling shaggy vaudeville gags as pointless parables. The chief cause of Hieronymus' troubles, though, is Milton Berle, as Good Time Eddie Filth. Eddie materializes in a cloud of lavender smoke when Hieronymus is a randy teenager, and thereafter urges him to make a career of lechery. The wild retrospective of Merkin's youth—complete with dream sequences, a stag-film-within-the-film and a trio of critics who watch and comment on the movie-in-the-making—becomes a combination sermon/pep talk that gives him the insight and courage to change his wicked ways. "I am often asked," Newley told us, "to sum up the movie's theme in a few words, but there is no short phrase that will describe it properly. I prefer, like that great one-man band, Charles Chaplin, to say, 'Let the film speak for itself.'" And, as these pages prove, *Hieronymus* has plenty to say—and see.

Co-starring as the wayward hero's much-deceived mate proved quite a kick for Newley's off-screen wife, Joan Collins (opposite). "I enjoyed being Tony's leading lady more than anything I've ever played in my life," she told us. "The part of Polyester—his fun- and pleasure-loving wife—is very like my own character. She's even a Gemini." Their actual marriage, needless to say, bears little resemblance to the wild union in the film. As Hieronymus, actor Newley—below, doubling as director—fondly remembers their wedding: "We were married in front of a 14-inch television set. The ceremony was performed by a suburban justice of the peace whose fly was open during the entire ceremony. You notice little things like that at a wedding." An exotic dancer in her first film outing, Yolanda (bottom left) also attracts Merkin's attention—first as a courtesan who catches him bounce for bounce in bed and then as an animal-loving princess in the stag-film sequence. Also making her movie debut, Playmate Connie Kreski re-creates with Newley (bottom right) the typically atypical circumstances of her contract signing: "I got a telegram in London asking me to fly to Malta—where *Hieronymus* was being shot—and play Mercy. I signed the contract of the continuity girl's desk on the edge of the Mediterranean, where the company was filming a beach scene at the time."

