



LOUISE SNIDER

'Providence' is complex, superb

French director Alain Resnais' new film "Providence" is one of the most visually exciting and intellectually stimulating movies to come along in years.

In his first English-language film, Resnais (director of "Hiroshima, Mon Amour" and "Last Year at Marienbad") again ventures into elusive territory, exploring the slipperiness of fact, the irony of fancy and the trickery of time.

He builds a complex structure in mystifying darkness and exposes it with sudden light that illuminates, but doesn't clarify.

The film is laced with verbal and visual references to politics, psychology, artistic style, philosophy, man's mortality and a host of other subjects. The instinct for exploring these areas is the mind of the creative artist.

JOHN GIELGUD, as Clive Langham, is a dying novelist with a lively imagination and lecherous instincts. He writes through a long, painful night, bracing himself with wine and running about his life.

Memory and imagination mingle as he works out scenes for his last novel. Enjoying his omnipotence, he casts his family in roles that complicate and disorder their lives.

His principal personae are his son Claude (Dirk Bogarde), a successful barrister, as rational and self-controlled as his father is sensuous and spontaneous; his daughter-in-law Sonia (Ellen Burstyn), whose good looks and warm personality he feels are wasted on Claude; his illegitimate son Kevin Woodford (David Warner), who he casts as Sonia's lover; and Helen (Elaine Stritch), Claude's mistress.

Ms. Stritch also appears as Molly Langham, Clive's wife who committed suicide when terminally ill.

Underlying his inventive meanderings is his fear of dying and his feelings of guilt for neglecting his family while indulging in his own visceral and egotistical appetites.

AS CLIVE DIRECTS the twists and conflicts, he comments on them. Events which are the foundation of pedestrian melodrama become fraught with irony and sardonic humor.

"What did I do with your mistress?" Clive wonders aloud as he fantasizes an encounter for Claude. "Damn if I mislaid her!" Claude and Sonia watch Kevin eat. "Do you like the way he masturbates?" asks Claude. "I'm more interested in how he fornicates," responds Sonia.

Sometimes the novelist's musings are interrupted by staccato and shocking images that relate to his fears of death. The movie strikingly resembles a cubist collage, fragmented and layered. Chunks of reality and slices of times are compressed and interpenetrate. There is no preferred point of view, no singular truth.

When, suddenly, the darkness and trauma of the long night are over, Clive sits in bright sunlight celebrating his 78th birthday with his attentive family.

It's a pleasant and warm scene, and it brings to mind Clive's assertion that "After certain dreams, nothing in waking life can have much intensity."

As Clive, Gielgud gives a brilliant performance. He is reflective one moment, ranting the next. He doubles up with pain, then chortles gleefully as he plots his next scene.

Bogarde is equally compelling as the son, Burstyn, Stritch and Warner all give competent, if less distinguished, performances.

"Providence" is a complex and challenging film. It demands an attentive audience. One may be dazzled or perplexed by it, but not bored.

Like many of the most stimulating forms of modern art, it is ambiguous and open-ended, and its conclusion is optimistic. It also suggests that we are not cast from molds: we each have countless possibilities.

As long as we live, we can continue to change and define ourselves. Like the cubist collage, there is no fixed perspective; all points of view are valid.

"Providence" will premier by the Detroit Film Theatre at the Detroit Institute of Arts Auditorium Friday and Saturday. Show times are 7 and 9:30 p.m.

Detroit Film Theatre

A bargain for movie-goers

By LOUISE SNIDER

Where, for \$2, can you see a first-run movie, read informative program notes, and get a free cup of coffee? At the Detroit Film Theatre (DFT).

The DFT opens its eighth season at the Detroit Institute of Arts Friday with the Detroit premiere of Alain Resnais' new film "Providence." This is the French director's first film in English and one that has aroused a great deal of advance interest.

Its premiere at the DFT is one of many "firsts" among the 59 films scheduled for showing on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings through Dec. 18.

This commitment to showing new films of importance, as well as the older masterpieces and the historical-landmark films, provides the formula for the continued success of the DFT. According to Elliot Wilhelm, the director of DFT, "on a per day basis, we are the highest attended museum theater in the country."

AUDIENCES IN the 1,150-seat, air conditioned theater also enjoy the advantage of superior projection equipment. The DFT is equipped to show all films in their original aspect ratios. This means that if you are watching a film with subtitles, for example, you see the whole picture; the heads are never chopped off.

Friday evenings are devoted to screening new films or those which

have had insufficient commercial exposure. These include "The Marquis de O," awarded the Grand Special Jury Prize at the 1976 Cannes Film Festival; "Under Milk Wood," the screen adaptation of Dylan Thomas' play with Elizabeth Taylor, Richard Burton and Peter O'Toole; and "Harlan County USA," which won the Academy Award for the Best Documentary Feature of 1976.

Saturday evening presentations include films which have come to be regarded as classics or have been pace-setters in some way.

Among these are John Huston's 1951 hit, "The African Queen," with acclaimed performances by Humphrey Bogart and Katherine Hepburn; and one of the curiosities of movie history, the 3-D film "Creature from the

Black Lagoon," which the audience will view with special glasses.

SUNDAY EVENINGS will consist of two series: a 10-week retrospective of the major films of Charles Chaplin and "Treasures From the Past," eight new 35-mm prints of rare, early silent films and sound films from the United States.

Discount books of 10 tickets for \$15 are a "best buy" available at the DFT ticket office in the Institute of Arts or by mail. For a free season brochure or ticket information, call 832-2730.

The schedule for the first four weeks follows, with director, country and year in parentheses:

Friday and Saturday, "Providence" (Alain Resnais, France, 1977); Sunday, "The Chaplain Review" (Charles Chaplin, U.S., 1918/1923).

Friday, Aug. 5, "Next Stop Greenwich Village" (Paul Mazursky, U.S., 1976); Saturday, Aug. 6, "Diary of a Country Priest" (Robert Bresson, France, 1951).

Mt. Clemens theatre will present 'Count Dracula'

Symphony officers are re-elected

Don Newman and Robert Irwin have been re-elected president and board chairman, respectively, of the Pontiac-Oakland Symphony Orchestra, which begins its 24th year this fall.

Fred Brode of Bloomfield Hills was one of 13 others elected to the executive committee and board of directors at the annual meeting held recently.

The curtain will rise an hour later at the Macomb Theatre at the Barn in Mount Clemens from Friday through Aug. 7, to accommodate the nocturnal habits of its latest leading man.

"Count Dracula," a tale of suspense and the supernatural, will be the attraction for those dates. Based on Bram Stoker's classic novel of the "undead" man who preys on innocent young women to quench his thirst for human blood, the play captures all the flavor of a bygone age when castles were equipped with dungeons,

and stormy nights were guaranteed.

The cast includes Randy Gianetti in the title role, Dale Franks as Van Helsing and Ronald Merkin as the fly-casting madman Renfield.

Others in the cast are Joe Lannen, Tom Carney, Jane Shaffmaster, Greg King and Felicia Nowak.

"Count Dracula" plays Friday-Sunday and continues Aug. 3-7. For further information and reservations call the box office at 286-4822 Tuesday-Sunday from noon to 6 p.m.

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