



LOUISE SNIDER

# 'Clockmaker'; Inner conflicts

The Clockmaker (PG) is based on a novel by Georges Simenon. A successful novelist but not many of his books have been transformed into successful movies. Why? Because Simenon is concerned with the "inner man" with strengths and weaknesses of character. This kind of interest does not lend itself easily to visualization.

French director Bertrand Tavernier takes up the challenge and with the expert help of screenwriters Jean Aureche and Pierre Bost succeeds in finding the visual counterparts to reveal the inner conflicts.

The simple facts of the story are these. Michael Descombes is a contented middle-aged man who repairs clocks. He enjoys his work, savoring a cool food and wine, and likes to meet with his friends and talk politics. His comfortable routine is jolted when the police inform him that his son, Bernard, disappeared by a girl killed a man in his shower, burned his car and fled.

The devastated father has no idea of what motivated his son to kill. Quickly he is pulled by the police, bagged by the media and individuals with suspicious political convictions. Descombes spends the better part of the film in a wild search. As the police wait for his son, he searches for the answers. Descombes struggles to come to terms with his own subconscious, to understand his son's actions and to remain loyal to him.

Meanwhile, the media and various officials try to connect the murder of Jean in with political parties, workers' demands, terrorist groups. They are all disappointed when Bernard is captured and the motive laid out in official, legal and political terms. It must be a crime of passion that, they say. The murdered man, Razin, must have mistreated Bernard's girlfriend, they reason, and Bernard became enraged and killed Razin.

As the film unfolds, Bernard explains that he killed him, because he was truth. He never elaborates on that explanation. Only Bernard's father can shed clouds of conventional thinking, accept his son's way and establish a new, harmonious relationship with him.

Tavernier's steady persistence in concentrating on character and avoiding the easy explanation of the storyline is awesome. The actual murder is never shown. The hunt for the killer and the subsequent trail are westerns and farce. Tavernier keeps the focus on the father. He is the nucleus and the acting of Philippe Noiret as Descombes is the great strength of the movie.

Noiret's face and body as sensitive as a seismograph are perfect instruments for revealing his thoughts and feelings. A strong, a quiet stare, disarming stammers—his countenance tells everything.

Pierre Williams' calm, the cinematographer, captures every nuance of the movie and sets them against contrasting backgrounds that understate the sense of conflict. The beautiful countryside of France and the daily traffic jams, the modern high rise buildings and the 19th-century Gothic cathedral. The most memorable image, one that is essential to the movie, is that of a burning automobile.

The Clockmaker opens with a shot of the automobile engulfed in flames, seen at first from a passing train. The image is at once beautiful and terrible. Noiret's references to French political life throughout the movie suggest that Tavernier might be using the automobile as a symbol of both capitalism and dehumanization. In the movie, "Weekend" director Jean-Luc Godard used burning cars and destroyed houses to signify highway carnage that referred symbolically to the Viet Nam war. The burning auto might be a far more subtle reference to the same.

But the movie's main strength is the film. Bernard and the painting quickly by surrounding the crime are the weaknesses. For one thing, Bernard is too smart and innocent looking to be committing such a heinous, premeditated, cold-blooded murder.

For another thing, the moral issue raised by the crime is inconsistent or applied to the father and son are reversed. What happens if we take Bernard the man to execute judgment and sentence. Even if the man he killed were a "war" criminal, Descombes can accept his son's explanation and stand by him; this is asking too much of an audience.

# GLIMPSES

- NEW RELEASES**
- THE ADVENTURES OF A WILDERNESS FAMILY (G)** City dwellers face evolution and its trappings for rugged pioneer existence. Family link.
  - THE AMAZING DOBERMANS (G)** Five canine canines share star billing with Fred Astaire, James Franciscus and Barbara Eden in fun picture.
  - BUGSY MALONE (G)** Gangster musical starring all kid cast. They sing, they dance, they act like toughs and showgirls, and their average age is 12. A novel idea, some people find amusing.
  - CAR WASH (PG)** A day in the life of a car wash with a sprayer, a car, a dog, and anal jokes. The large ensemble includes Richard Pryor, The Pointer Sisters and George Carlin.
  - CARRIE (R)** Sissy Spacek plays Carrie, a teenage girl with the power of telekinesis—the ability to move objects by psychic power. She exacts a terrifying revenge on those who offend her.
  - COUSIN COUSINE (R)** A delightful romantic comedy enacted by a relatively unknown but sparkling cast. The mature lovers conduct their romance against a lively background of family action.
  - THE FRONT (PG)** Woody Allen shares in political comedy-drama with Zero Mostel, Hershel Bernardi and Andrea Marcovici. They recreate the ely and tragedy of blacklisting era of the 1950s.
  - MARATHON MAN (R)** A spy thriller which overwheals a terrific cast with a surfeit of blood and violence. Laurence Olivier, Dustin Hoffman, William Devane and Roy Scheider give it their best.
  - THE NEXT MAN (R)** A suspense thriller of political intrigue with Sean Connery as Aristotle Thorne and Corinna Chase as his lover. Assassins are after Connery and he's after Corinna.
  - OBSESSION (PG)** Suspenseful romance with Cliff Robertson as a man who falls in love with a woman who looks just like his dead wife. Some bizarre consequences are the result.
  - SHOUT AT THE DEVIL (PG)** Lee Marvin, Roger Moore and Barbara Parkins see action in the movie about a group of vandals who plot to destroy the most powerful German battleship of WW II.
  - SMALL CHANGE (PG)** French director Francois Truffaut relates childhood in the uncommonly good movie about children and the special quality of their lives. "Small Change" makes a lot of sense.
  - THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME (PG)** Film of the 1973 Led Zeppelin Madison Square Garden concert in stereophonic sound. Concert footage is interspersed with scenes of bandmembers' antics, fantasies and personal lives.
  - TWO-MINUTE WARNING (R)** All the action (all at the line of scrimmage) when a mad sniper starts picking off the crowd at a packed football stadium. Charlton Heston, match, takes command.

### MOVIE RATING GUIDE

G General audiences admitted  
 PG Parental guidance suggested All ages admitted  
 R Restricted Adult must accompany person under 18  
 X No one under 18 admitted

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