

Vagabond: An Emotional Journey

Vagabond
Grange Communications/
International Film Exchange
Princess Theatre

review by Glenn St-Germain

It is winter in the south of France. A teenager, a drifter, is found in a ditch, frozen to death. *Vagabond* is her story.

Vagabond is a very powerful French film which premieres at the Princess Theatre tomorrow night. Written and directed by Agnes Varda, (who produced her first feature film in 1954), this film won the first prize at the Venice Film Festival 1985 and Best Picture, French Critics Union for 1985, as well as a French Academy Award ("Cesar") for best actress for Sandrine Bonnaire, who portrays the ill-fated antiheroine Mona.

Mona is a drifter. She hitchhikes, begs and works for food or money, and sleeps in a tent. It is at the start of the film that a farmer finds her body in a ditch, frozen.

The film is a series of flashback vignettes about Mona's last few months of life, recollections of people who met her on the road.

Mona's almost existential individualism that eventually destroys her is contrasted against the lives of people she meets: the shepherd who puts her up for a few days, the ecologist who gives her a ride, and the young man with whom she shares drugs and a bed . . .

Most of the recollections are from the points of view of those doing the remembering. The visuals are from an outsider's perspective, but the comments are



Sandrine Bonnaire star of *Vagabond*
not. Reactions of the people she meets range from bewilderment to wonder and pity to disgust. As Mona drifts in and out of people's lives, she touches them in different ways. Her effect on other people is remembered.

"I'm worried for her, she's so alone," says the ecological scientist who gave her a ride. "I should have done something. I don't even know her name."

Central to all of this is Mona, if that is her real name to begin with. Sandrine Bonnaire gives an excellent performance as the anarchistic young drifter who only wants to be left alone, and do what she wants. She doesn't come in from the cold because she can't; she doesn't come in because she doesn't want to. She wants to be independent. Totally.

Her desire to be her own person is strong enough that she rarely, if ever, cares about anyone else. A shepherd gives her a place to stay, but when he expects her to work, she leaves. She lives with a young dope addict in an abandoned building until his supply of marijuana runs out.

Yet, she can lower the tough, defiant facade at times. A brief affair with an immigrant farm worker and a visit with an elderly lady (whose nephew is waiting for her to pass on so he can inherit her estate) with whom she gets bombed on brandy show the human and vulnerable side of Mona.

The effect of *Vagabond* is devastatingly powerful in that it elicits emotions ranging from joy to despair in much the same manner that Mona draws them from her surroundings. A certain eeriness permeates the film's sombre atmosphere in that from the beginning the audience knows Mona's ultimate fate.

The film makes no social comments. It does not demand an answer. It simply shows a slice of life of a typical young vagabond and how she affects those she has met. In some cases, there are only bewildered memories; others she has changed forever.

Vagabond is both depressing and, in a strange way, uplifting. It is definitely the most emotional film seen this year. In French with English subtitles, it screens at the Princess Theatre September 12 - 15.

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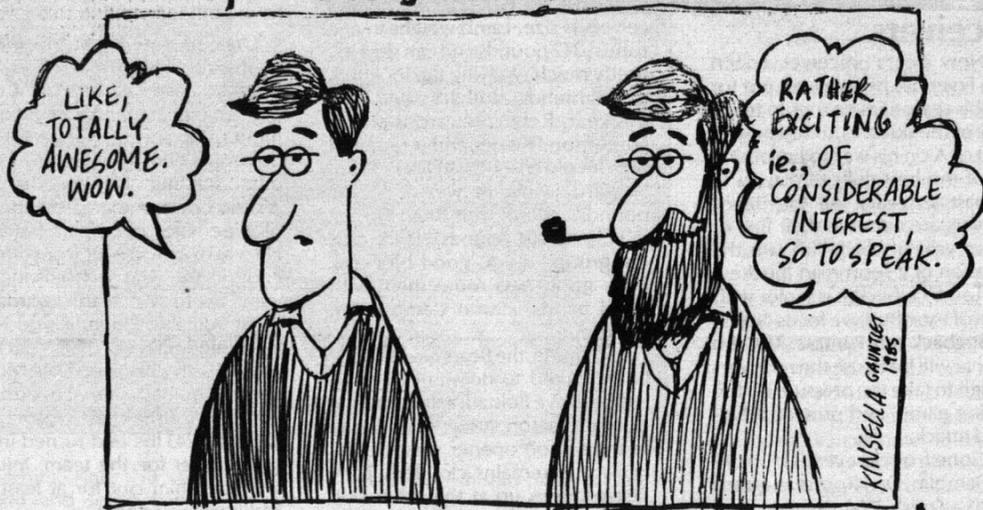
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