

# Apted's Agatha : ending implausible

by Tom Ozere

England used to be the place that movie studios sent the hacks and the bit players. To be made to work in the land of fog and greasy chips was the greatest indignity any filmmaker could suffer. No more. Today, established artists like Stanley Kubrick have made England their permanent home, and filmmakers are falling over each other to be allowed to make films in the country where the air is thick with history and the people have such classy voices. Always quick to exploit, the English have responded with a plethora of period films (*Murder By Decree*, *Death on the Nile*) of which Michael Apted's *Agatha* is the most recent.

Kathleen Tynan (a close relative of Kenneth Tynan, England's most venerable critic), has fashioned a comfortable-big-budget version of *Masterpiece Theatre* out of an unexplained incident in Agatha Christie's life. The suggestion is that at some period in Agatha Christie's career she disappeared. Tynan's fictional solution to the matter is that Agatha was engaged in plotting the murder of her husband's lover. This is a superb premise for a plot. The idea of the greatest murder mystery author in English literature actually planning homicide offers endless possibilities for

intrigue and suspense. However the direction the film actually takes totally frustrates any pre-conceived notions one may have had. Any elements of suspense inherent in the movie are sublimated to what the team of Tynan and Apted obviously think is of prime importance—sentiment. A young American reporter (Dustin Hoffman) is captivated by Agatha's great beauty and falls in love with her. Agatha (Vanessa Redgrave) is estranged from all men because of her husband's betrayal, and repulses the reporter. Tynan adds another level to the theme of betrayal by having the reporter working on the case of "the missing Mrs. Christie" while he's seducing her. Naturally Agatha finds out and snubs him. Meanwhile, however, the reporter has discovered Agatha's plot and at the very last moment frustrates her plans.

Such is the content of the movie. Trivial enough, yes? Well, not surprisingly, form manages to out-trivialize the plot. In a time when extraordinary photography has become the norm, Vitoria Storaro's cinematography is ordinary. As one would expect the English landscapes are pearly and shimmering enough, but there's only so much one can do with fog. The angles are stagey. Apted

seems to have returned to pre-*Citizen Kane* days, I counted only one in-shot ceiling in the film. The camera is a passive entity in this movie, it remains fixed a great deal and the tracking shots are kept to a minimum. It's as if in his quest to suggest the Victorian period, Apted has made a Victorian movie. It just lies there in a cinematic missionary position.

However, if the technical and psychological elements in the film depress you, you can always just sit back and watch Dustin Hoffman and Vanessa Redgrave act. As Agatha, Vanessa Redgrave is perfect, she gives an almost totally immobile performance, but she looks like a cross between an Amazon and a Pre-raphelite model. She is (from my vantage point) the sexiest giant in the world. She moves with such style and grace that we can never be sure she's really walking, she's like a red-headed blue-eyed swan. Even Oscar Wilde wouldn't have been content to worship her from afar.

In contrast, Dustin Hoffman as the American reporter is diminutive. The idea of making him and Redgrave lovers is so ludicrous, it might have been conceived in Samuel Becket's less than lucid brain. But the extraordinary thing about Hoffman's acting

is that it never occurs to him that his position is absurd, and he blithely pursues Agatha as if there wasn't any height difference between them at all. The scene in which Hoffman dances with Redgrave is such a miracle of sympathetic staging, that even the smug chuckles from the largely unappreciative audience didn't dim the warmth 'five foot five me' felt for these two actors. Hoffman's part isn't particularly original, his reporter is a wise-cracking Yank with impeccable taste in clothing and food, but his smile is so endearing, and his soft-bland

American accent provides such an effective contrast to the clipped British accents around him, that every second this great actor is on the screen is a pleasure.

However, despite these two stellar performances, the film is ultimately a failure. The suspense is tame, and we never quite understand Hoffman's motivation in falling in love with Agatha. The film ends with a twist in the best Agatha Christie tradition, but in all of Christie's novels the ending is plausible. In Apted's film the ending, like the entire move, is not only implausible, it's senseless.



A scene from the Dalhousie Theatre Department's latest production: Jean Anouilh's *The Rehearsal*

## Montoya

# Spanish guitar master

Carlos Montoya, the world famous master of the Flamenco guitar, will perform in concert, Thursday, April 5 at 8:30 p.m., in the Rebecca Cohn Auditorium of the Dalhousie Arts Centre. One of the most widely heard performers in any concert idiom, Montoya has brought Flamenco music to virtually every major outpost of the free world, from the United States and Canada to Europe and the Orient, eliciting critical acclaim and audience approbation everywhere.

In addition to his globe-girdling tours, Montoya also

has won international favor through his numerous recordings. He is, in fact, the most recorded Flamenco artist in history and has become the living symbol of Flamenco music the world over.

A Spanish gypsy, born in Madrid, Montoya was a musical prodigy, achieving national renown by the age of fourteen when he was the toast of the "Cuadros Flamencos" during the heyday of Flamenco singing and dancing. His debut as a concert artist was preceded by years of accompanying such distinguished dancers as La

Argentinian, Vicente Escudero and Argentinita.

When Montoya decided to give a full concert recital of Flamenco guitar music in 1948, he was taking an unprecedented step in to the musical world. Since the Flamenco music "comes from the heart", the repertoire of most Flamenco players is limited. The formidable idea was realized by Montoya with equally formidable success, and he went on to give solo recitals both in Europe and throughout North America.

continued on page 15

## Anouilh's Rehearsal

On April 5, at the Dalhousie Arts Centre, the Theatre Department will present Jean Anouilh's *The Rehearsal*. The play has had a long and successful history.

The *Rehearsal* was produced in 1950 and was the first of Anouilh's plays to be directed by Jean Louis Barrat. It enjoyed great success with the critics and the public both during its long initial run and at its revival in 1954. It proved so successful in London that it was moved to three different theatres in response to public demand.

Jean Anouilh is one of the best of the French post-war playwrights. He became popular in North America in the 1950's. In his plays, he usually favours theatrical situations and gives a theatrical turn to the organization of his dramatic action.

Tickets are available at the Dalhousie Arts Centre box office. Performances will run nightly at eight-thirty April 5 through April 8. There will be a matinee on Saturday, April 7 at 2:30. Special rates for tickets for Senior Citizens and Students.



Grad Week events tickets are on sale at the inquiry desk.

Dalhousie University  
Department of Theatre  
presents:

Jean Anouilh's  
*the rehearsal*

8:30 april 5,6,7,8  
2:30 april 7

tickets  
\$2.00 & \$1.00

dalhousie arts centre  
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