

Even the butler shows up in Orient Express

Stylish Murder film will satisfy crime fans

By IAN BALFOUR

Pramount describes the cast of *Murder on the Orient Express* as a veritable "who's who of Hollywood".

Since this category might include such luminaries as Burt Reynolds and Raquel Welch, they might have gone so far as to say "who's talented in Hollywood". The cast, which includes Albert Finney, Lauren Bacall, Ingrid Bergman, John Gielgud, Anthony Perkins, Vanessa Redgrave, Jacqueline Bisset, Michael York and others, is staggering in its depth and variety of talent.

The film is based on the novel of the same name by Agatha Christie, the queen of British crime writers, and author of scores of deservedly popular mysteries.

Lest the movie be spoiled for you, the plot cannot be discussed in this review. The basic strategy is, of course, similar to many of Christie's other stories. All the characters are presented in such a way as to make them equally suspect.

The mystery-story rule of thumb is normally that the culprit is usually the one you least expect, so in this case, the choice is a singularly difficult one. There are, however, a sufficient number of clues planted for the attentive viewer. Most or all of them, though, with only become evident through the miracle of hindsight. You'll be able to say you "knew as soon as so and so did such and such" even if you didn't.

FINNEY NOTABLE

Albert Finney is impressive in his portrayal of Hercule Poirot, the inimitable Belgian detective of international repute and immense knowledge. He is the guest of Bianchi (Martin Balsam), a railway magnate who secures him a last-minute place on the posh sleeping car of the Orient Express. A murder is committed in the car en route, and Poirot is called upon to solve the case before Yugoslavian police reach the train, which has been stopped by a massive snowdrift.

Of the dozen passengers on the car, every one a star, some are particularly outstanding in their performances. Lauren Bacall, who has not made a film in the past seven years, is magnificent as Mrs. Hubbard, a wealthy American gum-chewing woman. Anthony Perkins is lovably neurotic, with an even greater number of nervous twitches than in *Psycho*. No English murder mystery would be complete without a butler, and John Gielgud plays this film's with consummate skill.

Director Sidney Lumet, whose credits include *Serpico*, is more than adequate in his creation of suspense (the silences are often thundering) and, among other things, an intelligent use of flashback, a device often misused.

If many of the shots are seen through layers of gauze to prevent the drooping of aging stars' egos, it is a minor quibble. All aspects of the film are satisfying, from the convincingly realistic set to the spectacular costumes. A very fine addition to the tradition of English crime films.



Albert Finney, as Agatha Christie's famed French sleuth, is flanked by Martin Balsam (left) and

George Coulouris in Sidney Lumet's *Murder on the Orient Express*.

"I'm getting angrier but I'm controlling it more," Irving Layton remarks after lively poetry debate

By TED MUMFORD

It was a formidable line up: Irving Layton, poet and English professor; Eli Mandel, poet and humanities and English professor; Ioan Davies, master of Bethune College and sociology professor; Roger Kuin, English professor and senior tutor of McLaughlin College, and Maurice Elliott, English professor.

These five colourful York faculty members conducted a lively discussion of the politics of Layton's poetry before a sizable audience at last Thursday's session of Bethune's Heroes and Beers series.

The evening started with Layton's recital of a selection of his politically inclined poems. This was followed by largely spontaneous analysis by professors Elliott, Davies, and Kuin,

Layton's rebuttal, and finally, a question period open to the floor. Chairman Eli Mandel kept things on topic and at a spirited pace, and acted as amplifier and interpreter of questions.

Layton started by saying, "I'm not so sure I have any politics in my poetry," but he was obviously refreshed by the chance to discuss something other than the eroticism of his work. (The topic was chosen by Davies.)

As he read his poems, he commented on their politics, attributing to them the "politics of imagination" or "eternal politics". Poems like *The Gardener* revealed Layton's belief in a poet's responsibility to "remind people of the eternal perversity of the human heart." Other poems revealed his ideas on terrorism, Marx, Communist Russia and the Middle East.

Elliott commented after the recital on Layton's sometimes excessive use of rhetoric, and Davies discussed his "politics of schizophrenia". Kuin brought up Layton's habit of taking a central position, and then splitting rapidly to

both ends "when he sees a danger of being neuter".

Layton answered the challenges of the panel with surprising calm and modesty for a man who has made himself Canada's best known poet largely by his own deliberate brashness. He admitted that he had overworked rhetoric in some poems, written some poems to make a point rather than good poetry, and even that "I have failed in many of my poems." To Davies' comments on his schizophrenia, Layton answered, "Schizophrenia is a mark of maturity".

Professor Mandel, an intimate of Layton's for 25 years, was surprised by his calm reaction to criticism. After the discussion Mandel said, "Maybe he's getting mellow with age." However, Layton himself says, "I'm getting angrier and angrier, but controlling it more and more."

The ensuing questioning from the floor was timid, and most of the questions concerned themselves with Layton's personality rather than his politics. When interviewed afterwards, all the panelists felt this was the only weak part of a

successful discussion. Davies said that the audience expected a personal manifesto from Layton.

When Layton saw that there was no avoiding a definitive statement of his beliefs, he delivered an impassioned and eloquent declamation against the ignorance and apathy that has so many times betrayed the human race.

"To forget history is to repeat it," he stressed. This final emotional speech gathered the first applause of the evening. The discussion was concluded by Layton's reading of *What I Told the Ghost of Harold Laski* from his latest book, *The Polevaulter*.

Layton afterwards said that although some points were missed and some of the questions were off topic, the evening was a success because of the attentive and friendly atmosphere.

The next Heroes and Beers will discuss the Politics of Toronto Theatre. Guests will include Tom Hendry of the Toronto Free Theatre, Canada Council member and actress Frances Hyland, and John Juliani, director of the graduate theatre programme at York, February 13.

Bengal's sweeping dance

By IAN BALFOUR

The Performing Arts Series offered a rare opportunity to its spectators last Thursday as Chhau, The Masked Dance of Bengal, presented a series of five tribal dances.

This particular form of dance is practiced only in a very small region of India, an area of approximately 25 square miles located 200 miles west of Calcutta. The dances are presentations of stories from the Ramayana, an Indian epic which combines secular heroes with gods and demons.

But the stories serve primarily as a springboard for the movement. The action of each story can be adequately sketched in two or three sentences, while the movements require from 20 to 30 minutes to be realized.

These Chhau dances feature little of the subtlety and refinement associated with the classical dance of India. The graceful, fluid movements of the classical dance, where the change of finger position can significantly alter meaning, are replaced by broad, sweeping gestures, the legacy of the war dances from which they originate.

The dancers, all male, are farmers by trade, and so one might expect a greater deal of enthusiasm than expertise. But the dancers, with few exceptions, had remarkably good body control; in some of the frenzied battle scenes where timing is crucial, the dancers never faltered.

What struck me immediately about the performers (especially the three musicians who provided the accompaniment) was how profoundly out of their environment they were. The dances are rarely performed outside of Bengal and the exposure to North America must be a very alienating one.

The troupe was confined to a small auditorium with seated spectators, whereas the dancers usually wander throughout their village. This element of spontaneity could not possibly be transported to Burton Auditorium.

Furthermore, a western audience is very distanced from the mythic narratives of India, to the extent that the power which myths have when supported by a cultural heritage was completely lost.

It was difficult to gauge whether the audience was truly appreciative, or was clapping for something it would have liked to have understood but really didn't.



Bethune's Heroes and Beers session last week focused on the Politics of Irving Layton's Poetry. Layton (centre) read several of his works, as

Roger Kuin, Eli Mandel, Maurice Elliott and Ioan Davies prepared to comment.