

ENTERTAINMENT

Two selections from NFT festival's opening weekend

French poetry, Australian shlock

L'Invitation au Voyage
National Film Theatre

review by John Charles

"He said if I left he'd kill himself. I left - he didn't kill himself."

The nameless hitchhiker (Aurore Clement) tells Lucien (Laurent Malet) how she left her lover 15 years ago, and explains that she is now on her way to see him once more. Lucien obligingly drives her to the door, but she sees her friend on the sidewalk, walking the dog.

"He has a dog now," she says, surprised. "I could never live with a dog." And she tells Lucien to drive on.

That regretful, amusing scene is typical of the encounters Lucien makes as he drives through the night, in *L'Invitation au Voyage*. This French film is one of the highlights of NFT's impressive International Film Festival, which is playing 10 first-run movies all this week at the Citadel's Zeidler Hall.

As for Lucien, he's a young man who has just seen his beloved die in a terrible accident. And he's filled with a pain and grief he may never get over. His lover, Nina (Nina Scott), a punk rock singer, was also his twin sister, and therefore doubly significant to him. "I thought with her head, I saw with her eyes," he says. "Now I see nothing, feel nothing."

The story unfolds within the span of one day just one of many devices that stamp director Peter Del Monte, in his astonishing debut film, as an admirer of classic forms. The opening scene is the morning after Nina's death, and what we're first shown is Lucien, who puts Nina's perfect naked body into a double-bass case, straps it to the roof of his little car, and drives off.

It's certainly a grotesque and comic idea, but it sounds funnier than it looks because it's done with a simple solemnity, and we're not shown any problems he might have had in making the body fit. Perhaps it's the audience's own mental images that make them giggle, or perhaps it's the serene confidence Del Monte displays at opening with such an audacious, mysterious scene that unnerves them. *Where is this movie going to take us?*

The title indicates a voyage - and something more. It's a reference to Baudelaire's great, mysterious love poem of the same title. The poem begins (in translation): "My child, my sister, / think of the sweetness / of going to live there together, / to love at our leisure, / to love and to die / in the land which resembles you." The poem's refrain, which never names the destination because it's not of this earth, promises: "There, all is order and beauty, / luxury, calm and pleasure."

Bruno Nuytten's very beautiful color photography sometimes seems to evoke images from the poem deliberately, such as "the setting suns clothe the fields." More importantly the camera always maintains a handsome stateliness that gives the movie its elegaic quality even when what's actually happening is comic.

Some viewers say they're reminded of *Diva's* gorgeous visual style. Nuytten may have been the cinematographer for that movie - I'm unable to verify it. But since both are 1982 movies, it seems unlikely there's influence either way. The decorative, artsy look of *Diva* was a part of its state-of-the-art cleverness, another way for director Jean-Jacques Beiniex to let us know he could play any stylish entertainment game we wanted.

Del Monte has not made a simple, sad movie about loss, which lets us cry along with it, though Claude Lelouche fans might have preferred that. Instead, his story shows us a man hugging his grief as he moves through a world where everyone else has their own problems. And these problems break in upon his brooding memories and force him to respond to others.

At an all-night grocery store a little boy is patiently waiting for a football team that he adores to show up. Lucien offers him a rock

star button to cheer him up, but the boy refuses. He's loyal to his own heroes, and will wait for them.

An old man, who hides in Lucien's car for a ride, is on his way to see his wife. And when he asks to be dropped off, we see he's at a cemetery. It's probably a visit he's faithfully made for years.

Thus we see, in such glimpses and in longer comic scenes, other people's obstinate loyalties, and the many directions Lucien's grief might take in healing, rather than remaining the obsessive focal point of his life.

Nuytten's nocturnal images of Lucien's

journey almost have a mythic force. We watch on a TV monitor as the plastic covering over the double-bass case starts waving wildly in the wind. And Lucien, who's fallen asleep in a deserted disco, wakes up and sees it almost as if Nina is beckoning him to continue the voyage.

The bleak urban landscapes - gas stations, empty pool rooms, a formidable row of toll booths - are used hauntingly to reinforce Lucien's loneliness, as are modern communication devices. In a flashback that shows him lying with Nina's body, before his trip begins, the phone suddenly rings, and an anxious woman, who has the wrong number, pleads

to speak to her lover. And in a scene near the end, Lucien calls his own number, so he can hear Nina's recorded voice once more.

Lucien is haunted by something Nina once said: "If I die, what will you do?" Lucien answered: "I'll make you live again" - but how can he make that happen? Near the movie's end we're shown one startling way in which his answer can become fact, and the serenity of these scenes suggests a final acceptance. But it may be only temporary, since in the movie's conclusive image he begins yet another voyage.

L'Invitation au Voyage will be shown again this Sunday at 7:15 at Zeidler Hall.

Heatwave not so hot

Heatwave
National Film Theatre

review by David Jordan

Heatwave starts with a bang: the camera slowly pans a motley assortment of working class types huddled together in a run-down tenement; a brick crashes through the window; a sweaty construction worker busts through the door, sledgehammer in hand. Director Philip Noyce (*Newsfront*) has a field day with such shock tactics, but the film never follows through with any substance to fill in the long gaps between crashes and bangs.

The story is of a young architect, Steve West (played by Richard Moir) caught between his lofty ideals and the demands of the heartless mega-dollar corporation he works for. Steve's brainchild, The Eden Project, is threatened by union strikes and militant citizens' committees. Steve teams up with Kate, a bomb-throwing anarchist (Judy Davies, of *My Brilliant Career* fame), and as they start digging up shady connections between Steve's employer and a seedy porn-kink, friends begin to disappear. As the plot thickens, we are treated to scenes of one mutilated body after another.

Steve loses both his wife and his dream project; Kate gets beat-up, then arrested; the downtrodden are booted out of their homes; the bad guys win; the good guys get screwed ... but oddly enough, we don't care. Richard Moir's stone face doesn't so

much as twitch throughout his entire performance, and Judy Davies is almost equally impassive. The result is a string of clichés about those nasty business people, with no emotion whatsoever to add even a hint of pathos to the film.

The screen play for *Heatwave* passed through three hands (original work by Mark Stiles, rewritten by Marc Rosenberg, then doctored by director Noyce), and the result is a hodge-podge of sub-plots that don't add up to anything.

The most telling line of the movie comes when Steve's wife yells at him: "You're not

Howard Roarke!" Indeed. And *Heatwave* is certainly no *Fountainhead*. Whoever is responsible for the final script is obviously an Ayn Rand disciple - in fact at least two of the film's scenes are borrowed directly from her novel. *Heatwave* lacks the grandeur of an Ayn Rand novel; without any coherent philosophy to bind the film's random events, the entire production comes off flat.

Heatwave is part of the International Festival of Films at the National Film Theatre, and will be shown next on September 28, at 9:15 pm.

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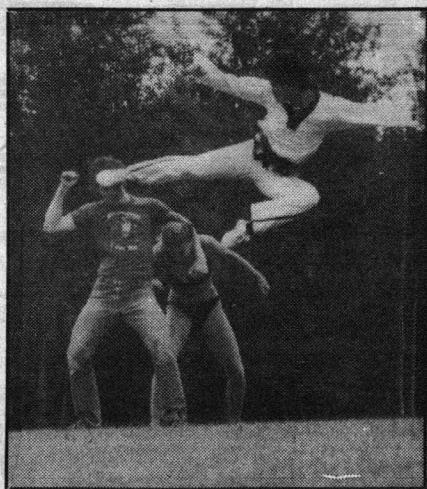
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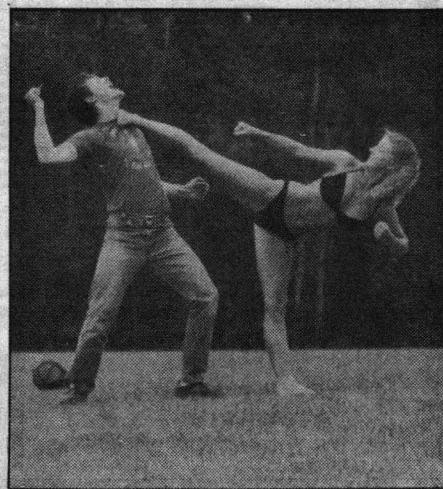
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