

ROUND MIDNIGHT

Bertrand Tavernier's second passion in life is Jazz. His first, he admits, is motion pictures, and for many years the French director has sought the means to combine the two: to put jazz on film. This he has done with great success in **Round Midnight**, a France-US co-production.

It is no secret that the record of Hollywood producers for bringing jazz to the screen is a sorry one, even more regrettable when one thinks that jazz is a purely American music. But the fact that it was the music of America's black people made it a difficult subject for mass market cinema, forever concerned about its profits in a racially divided country.

The Cotton Club, at a cost of some \$35 million, atoned for this

in part but it has been left to Tavernier and his writer, David Rayfiel, to make the first true jazz film in Paris, on a budget of \$3 million!

In the late '50's, Paris was one of the world's great centres of jazz and countless American musicians were lured to the French capital with dreams of fame, fortune and equality, and perhaps the opportunity to play with such celebrated musicians as Bud Powell, Lester Young and Art Farmer in the dozens of well-known jazz clubs in the Saint-Germain section of the city.

between Bud Powell and the French illustrator, Francis Paudras. We felt it was logical too, to have musicians rather than actors play the main roles because they bring the necessary realism to the events. Dexter Gordon was so successful in bringing his own style, rhythm and personality to the character of Dale that he gave all the film's performers a lesson in acting!"

Bertrand Tavernier, whose knowledge of jazz is deep and abiding, said that "since I was 14, jazz has been my passion, my pastime and my pleasure. I hope



Francois Cluzet as Francis Borier



Dexter Gordon as Dale Turner

The story of the film concerns the friendship of an American expatriate saxophonist (Dexter Gordon) and a Frenchman (Francois Cluzet).

Following his instincts Tavernier cast the non-professional Gordon (a 63 year old musician whom he has long admired) as a world-weary artist with a hoarse voice, hesitant diction and lanky shuffle. In the character of Dale, he comes to Paris worn beyond his years by alcohol. Lonely and vulnerable, this is his last chance for redemption. He finds a firm friend in Francis who feels boundless admiration for the great jazzman, whose music has been his salvation during the darkest hours of his existence; now he tries to rescue Dale from his desolation and to revive his zest for life and music.

Producer Irwin Winkler says of **Round Midnight**, "The screenplay is fictional, but we drew on many real-life occurrences of legendary musicians Bud Powell and Lester Young, as well as some of Dexter Gordon's own background. We were inspired actually by the real-life friendship

that my film will make a valuable contribution to the understanding of this fascinating music and those who played it." Irwin Winkler adds, "It won't be a new milestone. It will be the *only* one!"

Nearly all the music consists of 'standards' from the jazz era including Charlie Parker's *Now's the Time*, Bud Powell's *Time Waits*, *Celia* and *Una Noche Con Francis* and Dexter Gordon's *Tivoli* and *Society Red*. Gordon's pieces are played in their original style, while the rest are "slightly modernized" in arrangements by Herbie Hancock.

Saxophonist, Wayne Shorter sums up his view of the film: "Everybody was on guard against one thing. They didn't want this movie to leave that old, negative impression created by so many of Hollywood's so-called jazz films. I think we finally have a movie that does justice to the subject."

Note to Moviegoers: Watch for director Martin Scorsese playing a cameo role.

— Gerald Pratley



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