

French theatre-goers strain for insight

by Dovilio Binotto

In *La Voix Humaine* Jean Cocteau compromises his "personnage" between numerous petty delusions and seldom voiced sincerity. She finds herself face to face with the prospect of being no longer young and no longer having a lover. Her affair is over and her life more than half gone. Anguish, loneliness, and despair have become her normal world and she craves a last lingering tie to her lover.

At the outset of the

telephone conversation she resolves to maintain a disguised composure by stepping lightly into a casual and no doubt familiar mask. But as the monologue progresses, the false bravado falters, cracks, and despite herself, a real anguish filters through. She oscillates between composing this facade and suffering its breakdown. She is pitifully vulnerable with no apparent solutions. While her lover has the security of a future

marriage, she is constricted, held by the encroachment of a successful suicide. To cling to the telephone is anguish, but to put down the receiver is worse.

Claire Ifrane gave a fitting interpretation of this most difficult "personnage". Difficulty of script, difficulty inherent in delivering the monologue, and difficulty caused by audience noise contributed to produce lapses in her role. These lapses, however, were offset by moments of fine insights, revealing her sensitivity of the character portrayed.

In contrast to the tense atmosphere of the first presentation, *Sammy* moved flowingly and effortlessly. Gerard Guenette applied his own brand of versatility to a very versatile trickster named Sammy. Guenette stepped in the chameleon skin, left it a few times and stretched cunningly to accommodate the most elastic morals of this character.

Sammy is a manipulator and a con artist. He possesses a natural inclination for the ruse and its logical consequence, a hastily packed suitcase. He works out of dingy rooms in Paris, converses only by telephone and pays only by cheque. Despite his slippery craftiness, *La Pegre*, a Mafia-like French organization, have found him out, have forced him into an ultimatum and have given him only a half day to do what he does best, to turn a profit. Sammy must generate the necessary cash owed, so as to break even with his life.

The telephone is a life line and he uses it to manipulate customers and suppliers to appease his slow-sitted messenger, and to pacify his exasperated girlfriend. The dexterity with which he accommodates each foil amplifies Sammy's aggressive opportunism. He probes, discovering his liberties *vis a vis* the situation. He grapples

to get the upper hand in order to create an opportunity. Sammy cajoles, persuades, and manipulates frenetically working against time. As death is slowly impending, Sammy stalls inroads with his only weapon, double-edged quips, ironic and black humour. Despite the length of the monologue, Guenette worked convincingly to superimpose Sammy's fight against time. Guenette moved well on stage. His gestures and capable range of voice, coupled with precise timing complemented the pauses and the responses. Perhaps the true criterion of Guenette's successful performance could be gauged by noting a concentrated, directed attention, conscious on the part of the audience, focused upon Sammy's telephone receiver. The audience strained to hear the invisible foil and impatiently waited for some insight into what was unheard.



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Hundred-yr. dash out of breath

by Lindsay Brown

There are moans of disappointment coming from the *Friends of Dustin Hoffman* offices on eight-floor SUB these days.

And there are also tsk-tsk's of icy disapproval emanating from the *Sir Laurence Olivier Fan*

Club cubicle on seventh-floor Humanities.

The reason for all this dolorous head-shaking? A movie: *Marathon Man*, starring the above-mentioned stars and directed by John Schlesinger.

One cannot accuse the film of false advertising. It is billed as a thriller, which as an accurate allegation.

Babe (Dustin Hoffman) is a student and marathon runner who through a series of wildly diverse events is pitted against Szell (Olivier), who as the dead White Angel seeks to continue his Nazi-murderer practises in modern-day America.

The film contains no shortage of throat-slitting, blood-eyed killers, scarred assassins and bloody corpses. It's all very effective: in particular, one torture scene has the audience almost crawling away from the screen rather than face a graphic portrayal of sadistic dentistry.

Even with all this excitement the film is disappointing. Why? Because one walks away wondering why Schlesinger made the film, and why actors as skilled as Hoffman and Olivier signed for it. Because, unlike marathon racing, the film wanders all over the place for no discernible reason. Because unlike marathon race Babe's "thriller" experience, in the movie, is brief and eventful.

The movie was definitely a 100-yard dash.

Yes, yes; Babe was in a bit of a hurry for time. And of course, his long distance stamina and endurance was what saved him. But it's a dubious metaphor to begin with and definitely not durable enough to service the entire film.

But Olivier, as an exiled murderer who returned to the USA to pick up a cache of diamonds gained from sellings fillings extracted from the teeth of soon-dead Jews, was menacing. In fact, his performance saved the movie from a long-winded, sweaty fate.

The American film industry seems to be playing on justifiable public paranoia these days. Recently we saw Redford as an innocent bystander sucked into a small vortex of intrigue in *Three Days of the Condor*.

And now Hoffman plays an identical role in *Marathon Man*, complete with overtones of vague CIA-FBI involvement. In this, after that tribute to intelligence reporting: *All the Presidents Men*.

Are we finished with the disaster-movie genre, and the creeping paranoia one these days? Sure seems like it.

Next thing you know, Nicholson will star in *Two Weeks of the Night-Watch*, a political thriller about CIA involvement in ARNA (American Registered Nurses Association).

Marathon Man is now playing at the Capitol Square Cinemas.

What if there were a list?

A list that said:
**Our finest actors
weren't allowed to act.
Our best writers
weren't allowed to write.
Our funniest comedians
weren't allowed to make
us laugh.**

What would it be like if
there were such a list?
It would be like America in 1953.



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