

## Malle's Enfants; childhood and war

*Au Revoir les Enfants* \*\*\*  
Princess Theatre  
October 21-27

review by Shelby Cook

Louis Malle, writer, producer and director of *Au Revoir les Enfants* (*Goodbye, Children*) (1987) has proved himself to be an excellent realist, and his latest effort is a "jouissance" for the eyes. This is the story of Louis Malle when he was twelve years old; the sensitive Julien Quentin personifying the child that Malle remembers himself having been. His friend and schoolmate, Joseph Bonnet, ne Kippelstein, who was killed simply because he was Jewish, plays the other major role in the film. The young prep cook betrays Bonnet in order to gain a sum of money.

The action happens during the French Resistance, when the Germans invaded France and tried to capture all of the Jews in the country. Bonnet succeeded in avoiding the Germans several times, but, because of a subtle glance by Julien, Bonnet is finally taken.

Malle creates a very realistic view of an

adolescent boy's youth. "*Au Revoir les Enfants* is inspired by the most tragic memory of my childhood. In 1944, I was eleven years old... that morning changed my life. It may have triggered my becoming a filmmaker... Time passed, the memory became more acute. In 1986... I felt the moment had come and wrote the script... Imagination used memory as a springboard, I reinvented the past in the pursuit of a haunting and timeless truth."

Perhaps the subject of this film will draw a long yawn. Certainly the second world war and childhood have been more than exploited in films. But, all the same, Malle, who is a creator of films as diverse as *Pretty Baby* (1972), *My Dinner With Andre* (1981) and *Zazie Dans le Metro* (1960) gives us a refreshing vision of such subjects. Usually, films dealing with these subjects — even though they may be very moving — align their perspective with either the victims or their oppressors. In Malle's work, he easily turns this division in favour of a picture more complex than one dealing with only the morality of war. Consequently, while the tragic madness of the war is quite evident, the chain of moral



Raphael Fejto as Jean Bonnet in Louis Malle's *Au Revoir Les Enfants*.

responsibility is not as easy to establish. It is true that Joseph is a contributor to the madness, but Malle does not permit us any simple judgements about him. Joseph is not only an author of the injustice, he is also a victim of a social system where the privileged escape the consequences of their actions and the disadvantaged pay dearly. And, ironically, the originator of this injustice is the father who will

eventually give his life in defense of justice.

A similar refusal to clarify the moral ambiguities is evident in the treatment of the Nazis. Their image is certainly one of cruelty, but it is not without contradictory elements. In this manner, Malle refuses to draw lines of separation of nationality and he forces us to evaluate morality on a foundation more individual, and, without a doubt, more confused.

## Polaris offers good family entertainment

*The Mirrorman*  
Starry Time Theatre at Stage Polaris  
through October 30

review by Cathy Duong

Imagine your reaction upon seeing that your image in the mirror does not always reflect what you do. In the play *The Mirrorman*, the Toymaker discovers this and has the audience rolling with laughter. In this opening scene, the Mirrorman (Jim Shephard) tries to imitate his counterpart, the Toymaker, who lives in the real world. The Toymaker becomes really confused and berserk before finding out the identity of the Mirrorman.

When the two finally meet, they are swept into a series of adventures together with Beauty (Bev Benn), the Toymaker's doll and a wicked witch (Steffni Ault), who is after the Mirrorman's magic book. As an audience participation play, *The Mirrorman* is designed so Beauty can only come to life with the help of the audience. Also, the wicked witch can only be defeated

...strange gestures  
and noises...

by the audience doing things such as screaming "wish, wish, wish..." to wish her away.

The dialogue of the play is simple and the actors are articulate and lively, aiming to please the mostly young audience. The wicked witch, instead of being spiteful, is at times loveable with her bright costumes and quirky manners.

The reaction of the audience may be more entertaining than the play itself. For example, there is one instance where the audience got overexcited and started telling the witch where the mirrorman hid his magic book instead of keeping it a secret as they were supposed to. The children's screams had the parents at the back giggling. Reluctant at first, these grown ups later became involved and started to make strange gestures and noises under the mirrorman's guidance.

*The Mirrorman* is about an hour long though one wishes it could be longer. It is definitely for the young-at-heart only. Others might find it too predictable.

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