

The regeneration of major film artists

MOVIES PAUL SCHRADER

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In the past six months many of the major film artists have undergone a period of personal regeneration. Bunuel, Godard, and Bergman have all set out on bold new paths; Truffaut has re-tread an old path with new freshness. But not all the old-timers are making comebacks: Jacques Demy has made "Model Shop," a further step in the downhill trend which began with "The Young Girls of Rochefort."

Truffaut's "Stolen Kisses" may serve as an example of how far astray Demy has gone with "Model Shop." Both films are drawn from the director's previous work, reusing characters, names, and situations. But whereas Truffaut enriches his past, Demy parodies it. Truffaut turned a precious melodrama into a compassionate comedy; Demy turns a camp melodrama into a soap opera. In his first two features, "Lola" and "Bay of Angels," Demy treated American folk heroes--the gangster and the chorus girl--in a sly continental manner. The mythic types were as romantic as ever, but the second time around the audience was in on the joke and could appreciate the characters both for their old virtues and lack of new ones. The third time around, however, in "Model Shop," the joke has gone sour: the stereotypes, and the soap opera is pure soap. Artists like

Demy who walk the tightrope between the trite and the lyrical run the risk of complete failure. Thus "Model Shop" doesn't look like the failure of an accomplished film-maker, but like the work of a hippie-come-lately hack.

"Model Shop" is Demy's first film in English and is, in his own words, a tribute to the "poetry of Los Angeles." The Los Angeles of "Model Shop" is familiar to Freep readers; it is the LA of Venice oil rigs, Santa Monica peep shows, the Strip, the Spirit, KRLA, and Open City. It details 24-plus hours in the life of George (Gary Lockwood), a draft-age dropout, who finds the will "to try to begin again" after a one night stand with "model" Anouk Aimee.

Although Demy's problem is conceptual, not lingual, his lack of the English idiom does get him into considerable difficulty. The thematic action is carried primarily by a series of overlong, preachy, and jejune monologues which make the "Edge of Night" seem laconic. In "Bay of Angels" Demy at least had the decency to blush when he relived this Humphrey Bogart-Ingrid Bergman dialogue. When Demy's characters aren't baring their souls, they are usually mouthing some bogus hippie argot. Demy reveals himself to be, as he admits, an outsider trying to understand American youth. Demy's hippie youth are far from

moral or political revolutionists; they want nothing more than to impress mom- 'n-dad with their sugary, beatific, holier-than-your-generation put-on. The Spirit play themselves with such self-righteous saintliness that one wonders how they ever put out that gritty music.

"(Model Shop's" only glint of humor comes when George stops at the now defunct Open City offices on Melrose Avenue, and has an editor--played by an actor--inform him that "things are getting better all the time.")

Demy does, however, succeed in making Los Angeles look very poetic, like a sun-basked Mediterranean seaport or a ramshackle Middle East village. That alone deserves some sort of award.

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"The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie" is the sort of picture you can take your parents to (remember them?)- and both enjoy. It is so entertaining in a non-condescending manner that the trade critics began waving their Oscar pennants like a conditioned reflex. If you don't mind sharing a critical bed with the likes of Alpert, Champlin, and Crist, you will find "Jean Brodie" suprisingly enjoyable for a film which has been "acclaimed."

The secret of "Jean Brodie" lies in Maggie Smith's dazzling rendition of Jay Presson Allen's script. Miss Smith's performance is in the best English tradition of such elocutionary actresses as Beatrice Lilly and Edith Evans. She charges headlong through the stiled Victorian



... Gary Lockwood (center), discusses employment with underground newspaper editors Jon Hill (left), Jon Lawson (right), and Duke Hobbie (back to camera), in this scene from "Model Shop". Photo was taken in the now defunct offices of Open City.

dialogue, flaunting prepositions, bantering predicate clauses, and unerringly landing on the punch line. It is an art of English comedy which has been lost to us for several decades.

Since the critics seem to have been privy to Maggie Smith's talents all along, there is no use describing her in length. I would only add that I find Miss Smith very sexy, a word not often used to describe "great actresses." Maggie Smith's appearance as a Star hopefully marks the final demise of Hollywood's mammary madness.

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"To Ingrid My Love Lisa" is a reassuring film because it

demonstrates that a 26-year-old New Yorker with no talent can still scrape up enough money to make a dirty movie in Sweden and get major distribution in the States. It's the American Dream. "Lisa" was made by Joseph Sarno to capitalize on the lucrative sex-art film market. "Lisa" and films like it ("I A Woman," "Therese and Isabelle") are aimed at the great horny middle-class which would be horrified to see a beaver flick but falls sucker for a subtitled import with all the accouterments of respectability. "Lisa" may even be a sincere effort, but it shows no glimmer of talent; the sex scenes, the dialogue, the cutting, the music, and the finale are completely predictable.

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some counter-balancing force, something that can apply itself to the spirit of man? And I begin to think about what is the mean-

INTERMEDIA

its potential. As an example I offered the new generation's intuitive grasp of the human condition, the way young people are satisfied

viewed. Therefore, I said, passive reaction to such films will result in a meaningless experience, and the

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The only audience shock comes when you happen to hear the simultaneous sound of the background combo and a car horn-- it is the first time you've heard a sound mix.

"Lisa" is reassuring because most art-sex films are no longer a matter of private enterprise, but have fallen into the hands of such market exploitation experts as Joe Levine. Levine's Avco-Embassy company is currently distributing a film called "Baby Love," the saga of a 15-year-old nymphet who corrupts an upper middle-class English family. Unlike "Lisa," "Baby Love" shows a considerable amount of talent. It is well photographed and at least three scenes stand in the memory as being very well cut. But after one trims away the peripheral elements, like its fashionable hipness, heavy lesbianism, and pop psychology, there is nothing left but a cheesecake film. "Baby Love" treats the audience like voyeurs: our only true reaction is to goggle. Sex may be sufficient justification to make a film, but why revile us with that pop psychology?

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Mindless Entertainment Department: veteran screenwriter William Bowers has written a funny script for a film with the suspiciously corny title of "Support Your Local Sheriff." It concerns the breakdown of corruption in a small gold rush town. Jim Garner plays the only role he can-- a casual, bumbling fast gun who mysteriously finds everything going right for him. Excellent comic performances are given by Joan Hackett, a "Group" discovery, and Harry Morgan, a veteran TV and film actor, both of whom have yet to receive the major comic role they deserve.

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There has been a great deal of talk about Czechoslovakian cinema but very little corroboration as far as the United States is concerned. If you think Czech humor is limited to "Loves of a Blond," and Czech tragedy to "Shop on Main Street," then you should see Vera Chutilova's "Daisies" showing Saturday at the County Art Museum. This film and one shown earlier, Jan Nemeč's "Report on the Party and the Guests," are enough to justify all that hullabaloo about the New Czech Cinema.



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