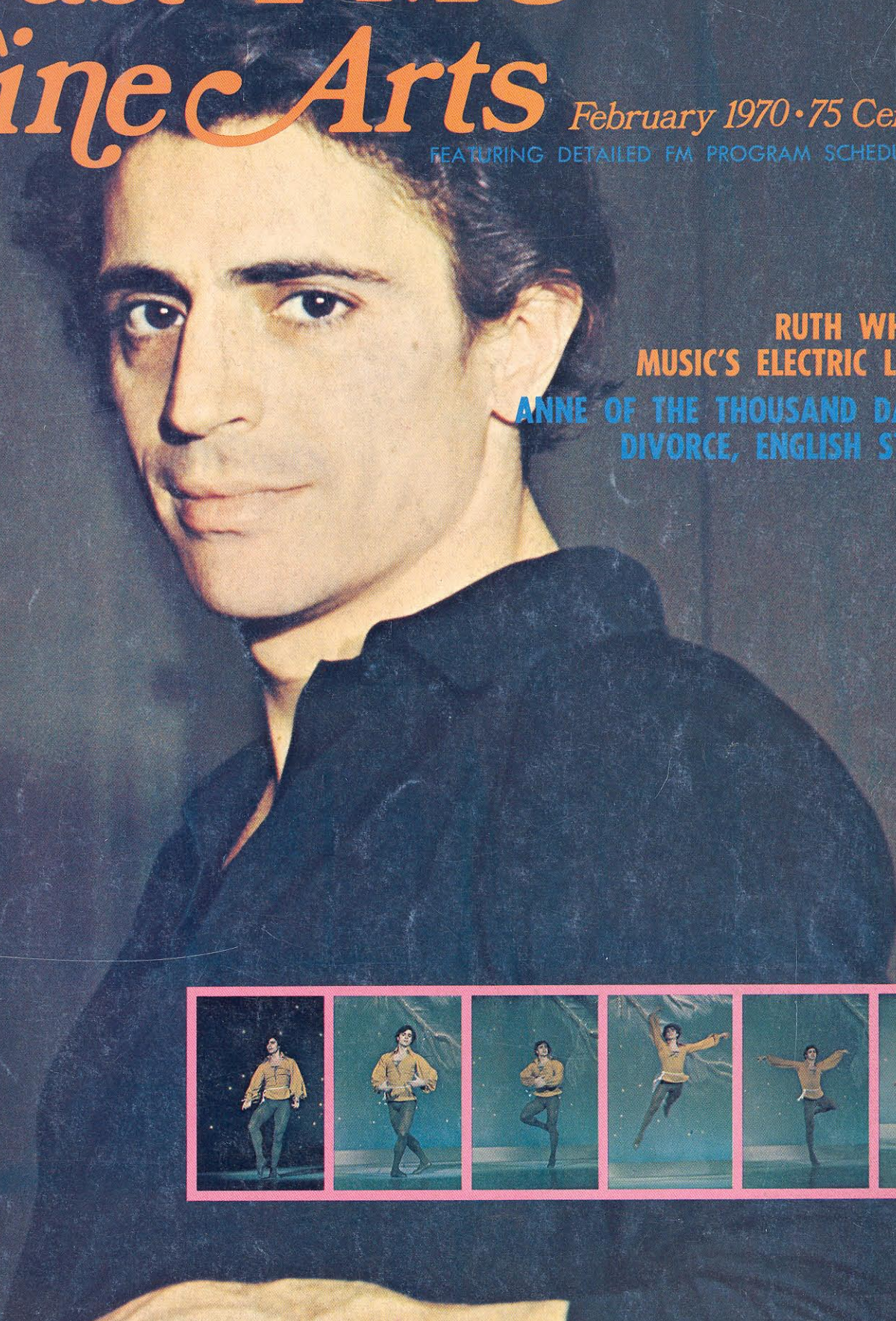


2 Coast FM & Fine Arts

February 1970 • 75 Cents

FEATURING DETAILED FM PROGRAM SCHEDULES



**RUTH WHITE:
MUSIC'S ELECTRIC LADY**

**ANNE OF THE THOUSAND DAYS:
DIVORCE, ENGLISH STYLE**

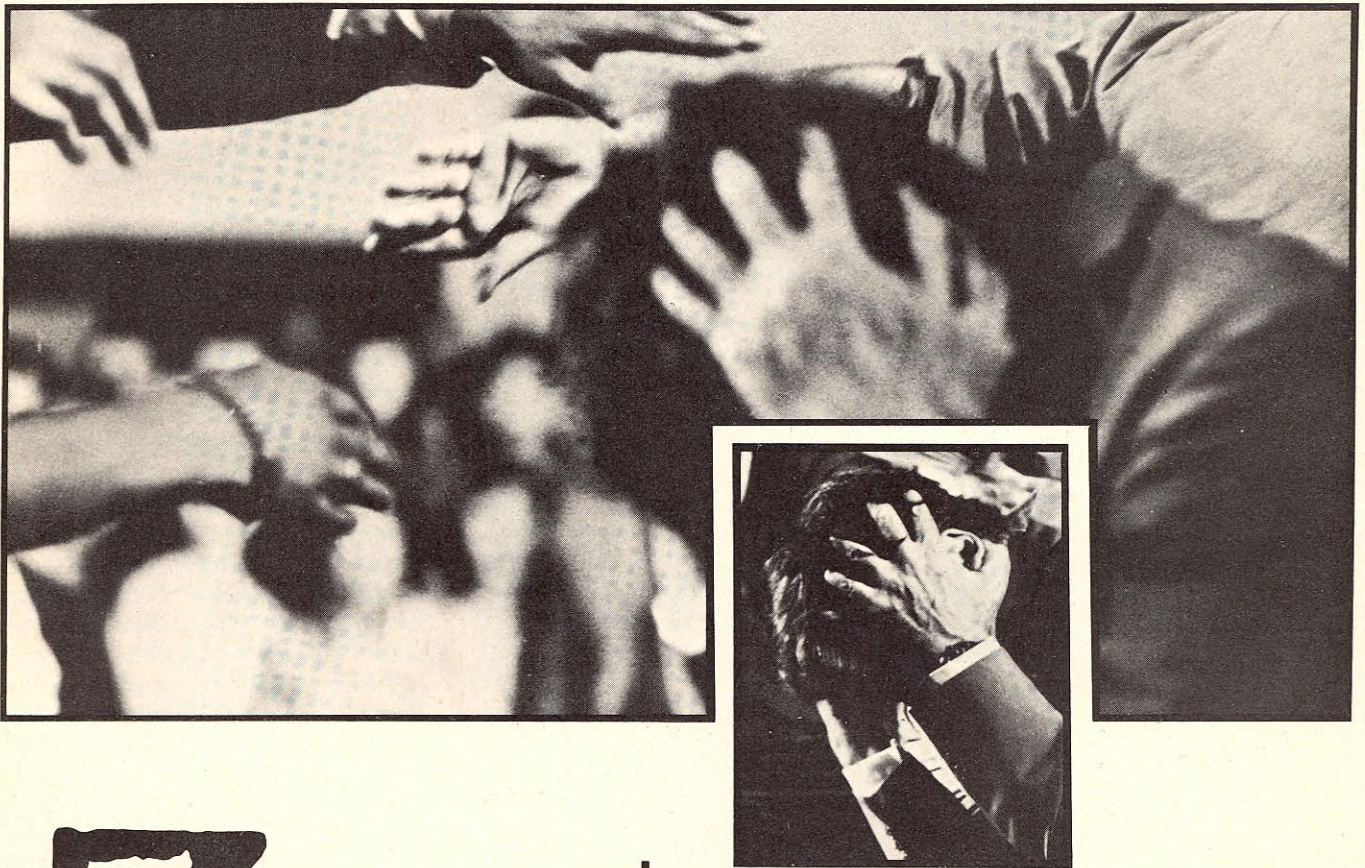


Costa-Gavras's *Z* is so shattering, so viscerally potent that you are naturally suspicious of it, thinking you've been duped into accepting a left-wing ideological package in the same way people accepted social liberalism in the Thirties or anti-communism in the Fifties. The viewer will have been duped, of course, but by nothing so conventional as plot or theme. He has been enticed and manipulated by a new manner of experiencing events and ideas. Costa-Gavras has touched on the tip of a stylistic iceberg which, I think, will increasingly

emerge in the next few years, engulfing any ideologies which may stand in its path.

Z is a propaganda film, retelling the "Lambrakis Affair" which, during the period from 1963 to 1968, brought about the fall of Greece's Caramanlis government, the rise and fall of the Papaandreu regime, and the instatement of the present military government. The names of the characters are changed, but not to protect the innocent. A title card reads: "Any resemblance to persons living or dead is not coincidental, it is intentional." A Deputy (Yves

Montand), depicted as saint-like, pacifistic and professorial, is killed during a political rally by what police term "a regrettable traffic accident." Because we see the event through the eyes of the Deputy's followers, we know his death was no accident, but a police-condoned murder. What we don't know but come to realize — through the even-handed investigation of a young magistrate (Jean-Louis Trintignant) — is that the highest levels of the political establishment are permeated with corruption and criminality. Our awareness of this



Z: a modern greek tragedy

by paul schrader

mass malfeasance grows wide-eyed until we confront the political reality of the present: the colonel's police state which eliminates any hope of justice.

On the most superficial level *z* has an immediacy and urgency rare to propaganda films. The film-makers of *z* are not concerned with a movie mogul's platitudes, but with the principles and reality by which they live and possibly die. The creators of *z* themselves comprise a list of expatriates and political prisoners: Costa-Gavras, the 36-year-old director (whose previous films include *SHOCK TROOP* and *SLEEPING CAR MURDER*) is a former Greek ballet dancer, now living in Paris. Jorge Semprun, the script-writer, fought his battle with police-state facism not in Greece, but in Spain. He also scripted Resnais's film about the Spanish underground, *LA GUERRE EST FINIE*. Mikis Theodorakis, composer for *z* and *ZORBA THE GREEK*, is under house arrest in the Peloponese Islands. And Vassili Vassilkos, author of *z*, fled Greece, where his novel is banned.

The film-makers' sense of immediacy transforms itself into style. *z* is a film in a hurry, always trying to get ahead of itself, to explore itself. *z* gives the impression that although it cannot tell the *whole* story, it will squeeze in as much as possible. Often Costa-Gavras will begin a slow zoom on a stationary character, then jump cut to the end of the zoom, as if he didn't have time to allow it to run its normal course. The cutting and camera-work follow the mind of an investigator, momentarily concerned with incidentals, but always pressing on. Scenes often visualize as quickly as the viewer can assimilate them. A witness's evidence materializes as he tells it, giving the viewer more visual information than he is prepared to accept.

z's style does not simply speed up or complicate an event (it is not a political *HIS GIRL FRIDAY* or a political *RASHOMON*), but it tampers with the very fulcrum of the art

experience — the relationship of spectator to spectacle.

New styles in art do not evolve simply because the time is right, or because a particular artist chooses to explore new paths. But most stylistic departures seem to be pragmatic decisions. They occur when an artist realizes that he cannot convey his message in any of the conventional forms, but must devise his own. *z* follows in the tradition of films like *STRIKE*, *OPEN CITY*, and *THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS*, whose political messages were so intense and urgent that new cinematic styles were created to realize the subjects. Costa-Gavras's *z* serves to invalidate the myth that propaganda degrades art. Shoddy propaganda tends to spawn inferior art, but deeply-felt political themes can also be catalysts for lasting works. Great films have often served two masters, or more.

The innovative style of *z* is not unique to Costa-Gavras, but it is rare in fiction films. This style has been used fully and effectively in the short documentaries of Ray and Charles Eames, whose films pursue an Idea (Time, Space, Symmetry) which, in the final accounting, must stand alone, apart from any psychological, social, or moral implications. This idea is presented through an overload of information. Eames's recent films (*A RESEARCH FILM*, *NATIONAL AQUARIUM*) give more information than the viewer can possibly assimilate. The viewer must rapidly sort out and prune the information if he is to follow the swift progression of thought. This process of elimination, the theory goes, continues until the viewer will have pruned away everything but the disembodied Idea.

Since Costa-Gavras's intentions are similar to the Eames's, it is not surprising that he uses some of the Eames's techniques. "The theme of this 'adventure film,' which is represented by the letter 'z,'" Costa-Gavras has stated, "is not a plea in favor of a political party, but a plea in favor of a Man and an Idea

(even before this Man became identified with 'Government' and the Idea had a 'political label')." Costa-Gavras uses a mild form of the Eames's "information overload" technique to convey his Idea. On this level, *z* is a search for information. Individual psychology and even political reality become secondary as the audience itself assumes the role of super-investigator, examining every bit of evidence, demanding more. Political reality may occasion the evidence, but an almost apolitical, insatiable curiosity comes to dominate the action. The classic movie staple is the chase, and *z* is a new kind of chase, a chase through a set of information in quest of an Idea.

Costa-Gavras prepares the spectator to accept an Idea, not a necessary set of circumstances. By gradually giving the viewer more and more information (without simplifying the plot, as in conventional detective drama) and heightening his lust for information, the director slowly reveals a full range of characters (at least 30), each one of whom seems to square the possibilities for interpreting the action — as in a logarithmic series. Third person point-of-view flashbacks increase the psychological tension to the point where the audience is willing, at any given time, to accept *any* new visual information. Because the viewer is getting so much information, and because he is unable to act morally on every bit of information he receives, he begins to postpone some decisions and strive for other patterns of thought. The pattern he is striving for, Costa-Gavras no doubt hopes, is an Idea of Pacifism.

In her review of *z* in the *New Yorker*, Pauline Kael points out that Costa-Gavras uses his actors exclusively as types — Francois Perier is weak, Renato Salvatori enjoys hitting people, Irene Papas is a suffering widow, Jean-Louis Trintignant is civilized and intelligent, and so on. She writes, "I'm not sure exactly how Costa-Gavras

has accomplished it, but in this movie — in contrast to so many other movies — the fact that we vaguely know these people works to his advantage, and enables him to tell the story swiftly.” I agree with Miss Kael, because a viewer who is in pursuit of information, and ultimately an Idea, is willing to cast off many things he would normally be concerned with. The spectator, like Costa-Gavras, realizes that there must be a wealth of psychology in each of these characters, and that they are most likely not what they seem, but he is willing to let them stand as types so that his search may be facilitated in other directions. The feeling that every character is complicated (that he may hold a great deal of information) is crucial to the style of the film, but it is not so crucial that each of the potentials be examined.

z employs conventional suspense — we live in the harrowing world of political quicksilver for two hours — and conventional morality: we damn Greece because it beats up people. But the underlying strength of z (and that which makes it truly revolutionary) is that it works on the level of ideas. We damn Greece mostly because it violates the Idea of Pacifism.

For all its nobility, Costa-Gavras’s style is nonetheless corruptable. Even if z is the style of the future, as I think it is, it offers little hope for the pacifist. The style of z is more “intellectual” than previous propaganda films, and the Platonic pacifist may contend that fascism appeals primarily to the lower instincts (emotion) rather than the higher (intellect); but the culpability of German scholarship during the Second World War would discount such an illusion. The new Leni Riefenstahl may very well convince us of the glorious Idea of Fascism. The intellectual film in the style of Charles Eames may possibly be the propagandistic vehicle for a new Nazism, just as pornography and pageantry were the vehicles for the old Nazism.

For me, the three best films of 1969 were Sam Peckinpah’s *THE*



Yves Montand



Charles Denner, Yves Montand
Irene Papas

WILD BUNCH, Luchino Visconti’s *THE DAMNED*, and z. Although Costa-Gavras doesn’t have the depth or personal vision of either Peckinpah or Visconti, z has the greatest potential of the three films. The greatness of *THE WILD BUNCH* and *THE DAMNED* lies partly in their decadence; they are the last drops of blood squeezed from once-vibrant traditions. Both are cul-de-sacs of sorts: Peckinpah’s of the altruistic Western code, Visconti’s of the patronizing obsessions of the nobility. z, on the other hand, is a life-giving film; it expands its universe. The ramifications of z are yet to come: its new manner of perception can be applied to any number of circumstances. Directors like Peckinpah and Visconti are certainly not at the end of their careers, but it is men like Costa-Gavras who are opening new paths for them. □

