

FRENCH FILM DIRECTOR ROBERT BRESSON HONORED BY MUSEUM RETROSPECTIVE

Robert Bresson, cited by some international film critics as "one of the finest of living film directors," has been more talked about than seen, particularly in America. Now, the Film Department of The Museum of Modern Art is showing all of the French director's films -- a total of ten -- including his rarely viewed debut film, "Les Anges du Péché," and his latest, "Une Femme Douce," which has not yet been released here.

Beginning January 29 and continuing through February 10 in the auditorium of the Museum, the series also includes "Balthazar," and "Mouchette," as well as his most famous picture, "The Diary of a Country Priest."

It was this film which called worldwide attention to the director, though cinema-lovers had long known an earlier work "Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne." Based on the celebrated novel by Georges Bernanos, who also wrote the book upon which "Mouchette" is based, the film was acknowledged as a masterpiece. It was also the picture in which Bresson's "first-person approach" was clearly seen -- a quality which experiments with what Susan Sontag has called the "forms of spiritual action," and which she refers to as "the physics of the soul."

Better known in this country was the film that followed, "A Condemned Man Escapes," which Miss Sontag has described as having a "lyrical, almost humanistic warmth." Bresson, she points out, like Brecht, emphasizes form and is, consequently, the master of a detached art which demands reflection.

Bresson himself began his career as a painter and made his first film, the short, "Les Affaires Publiques," (not included in the Museum's show) in 1934, though it was not until ten years later that he made his first feature film. From the first he was in complete command of the medium. For him, as he later expressed it, "cinema is an exploration within. Within the mind the camera can grasp anything."

(more)

Bresson's films are models of tact and candor and, perhaps for this reason, he has also been called a maker of "linear" and even "anti-dramatic" films. He has been compared to both Carl Dreyer and the great Japanese filmmaker, Ozu, and if an economy of style is the criterion, then a comparison is apt. Certainly, he shares with the other directors, a revolutionary theory of acting. Bresson's idea of acting is a kind of non-acting, and Bresson is well-known for the expressionless acting style which he finds necessary to create tension with and distance from his audience. "Acting," he says of traditional acting methods, "is for the theater," which he finds "a bastard art." The film, on the other hand is "the true art" because "the author takes fragments of reality and arranges them in such a way that their juxtaposition transforms them."

The result is, as Daryl Chin writes in the program notes on "Les Dames du Bois de Boulogne," an extraordinary film experience: "The dialectic of Bresson's vision is impressed on the spiritual memory with a subtlety and an unpretentious ease as consummate as Mozart's."

The Robert Bresson program follows:

Thursday, January 29 (2:00, 5:30 & 8:00)

LES DAMES DU BOIS DE BOULOGNE. 1945. Directed by Robert Bresson. Screenplay by Bresson after the novel "Jacques, le Fataliste" by Denis Diderot. With Maria Casares, Elina Labourdette, Lucienne Bogaert.

Friday, January 30 (2:00, 5:30)

DIARY OF A COUNTRY PRIEST (Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne). 1950. Directed by Robert Bresson. Screenplay by Bresson after the novel by Georges Bernanos. With Claude Laydu, Nicole Maurey, Nicole Ladmiral.

Saturday, January 31 (3:00, 5:30)

ANGELS OF SIN (Les Anges du Pêche). 1943. Directed by Robert Bresson. With Renée Faure, Jany Holt, Sylvie. No English subtitles.

Sunday, February 1 (2:00, 5:30)

A MAN ESCAPED (Un Condamné à Mort s'est Echappé). 1956. Directed by Robert Bresson, Screenplay by Bresson after the account of André Devigny. With Francois Leterrier and Charles LeClainche.

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Monday, February 2 (2:00, 5:30)

PICKPOCKET. 1959. Directed by Robert Bresson. With Martin Lassalle, Pierre Leymarie, Jean Pelegri.

Thursday, February 5 (2:00, 5:30)

THE TRIAL OF JOAN OF ARC (Le Procès de Jeanne d'Arc). 1961. Directed by Robert Bresson. Screenplay by Bresson after the records of her trial.

Friday, February 6 (2:00, 5:30)

MOUCHETTE. 1966. Directed by Robert Bresson. Screenplay by Bresson after the novel by Georges Bernanos. With Nadine Nortier, Jean-Claude Guilbert, Maria Cardinal.

Saturday, February 7 (3:00, 5:30)

AU HASARD BALTHAZAR. 1966. Written and directed by Robert Bresson. With Anne Wiazemsky, François Lafarge, J.-C. Guilbert.

Sunday, February 8 (2:00, 5:30)

UNE FEMME DOUCE. 1969. Directed by Robert Bresson. Screenplay by Bresson after a story by Dostoevski. With Domyrique Sanda, Guy Frangin, Jane Lobre.

Monday, February 9 (2:00, 5:30)

UNE FEMME DOUCE. (See Sunday, February 8)

Tuesday, February 10 (2:00, 5:30)

ANGELS OF SIN. (See Saturday, January 31)

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Additional information available from Lillian Gerard, Film Coordinator, and Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Department of Public Information, The Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N.Y. 10019. (212) 956 - 7296, 7501.