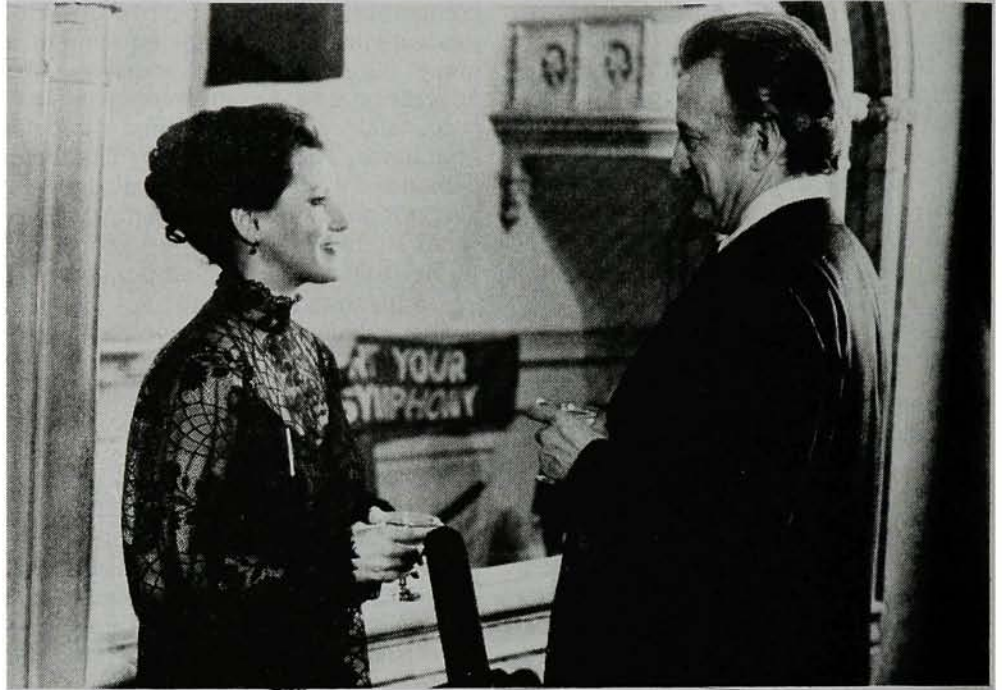


FILM REVIEWS

Peter Medak's The Changeling

p.c. Chessman Palk Productions Ltd. p. Joel B. Michaels, Garth H. Drabinsky assist. to p. Christine Pittel p. co-ord. Susanne Lore p. man. James Margellos, George Margellos (assist.) loc. man. Rondi Johnson p. sec. Catherine Howard p. assistants Frederick Frame, Wayne McLaughlin, Kimberley Richardson, Tom Braidwood loc. auditor James R. Westwell account. Heather McIntosh, Sandra Palmer (assist.) d. Peter Medak a.d. Irby Smith (1st.), Fiona Jackson (2nd) screenplay William Gray, Diana Maddox story Russell Hunter props. John Berger, J. Hipman Chow (assist.) art d. Reuben Freed scenic artist James Woods set dec. Keith Pepper, Steven Shewchuck (assist.) d.ph. John Coquillon cam. op. James R. Connell cam. assist. Thom Ryan (1st), Benton Spencer (2nd) sd. mix James Pilcher boom Herb Heritage original mus. Rick Wilkins mus. arrange. Kenneth Wannberg mus. box theme Howard Blake ed. Lilla Pederson, Doris Dyck (assist.) ward. Kerry Holmes, Maureen Hiscox, Anthony Scarano cost. design. Roberta Weiner make-up Delbert Acevedo, sma; Ken Brooke, Linda Brown hair Roberto Fernandez, Renate Leuschner, Salli Bailey gaf. Frank Heeney, David Anderson best boys Art Collier, Rick Allen grip Alan White, Ron Gillham, John Scott, Frederick Ransom, Paul Abram, Frederick Wharton stills Philip Hersee special effects Gene Grigg (co-ord.), Michael Clifford, Barry Madden, William Orr (assist.s) stunt co-ord. Max Kleven cast. Nancy Isaak (Vancouver), B.C.I. Casting (N.Y. & L.A.), Canadian Casting Associates (Toronto) l.p. George C. Scott, Trish Van Devere, Melvyn Douglas, Jean Marsh, John Colicos, James B. Douglas, Madeleine Thornton-Sherwood, Roberta Maxwell, Bernard Behrens, Frances Hyland, Ruth Springford, Barry Morse, Eric Christmas, Helen Burns, Chris Gampel, Janne Mortil, Louis Zorich cont. Patti Robertson pub. Lynda Friendly, First Performance Public Relations col. 35mm length 107 min. year 1979 dist. Pan-Canadian Film Distributors (Can.), Associated Film Distribution — an I.T.C. company (U.S.A.).



Claire Norman (Trish Van Devere) exchanging pleasantries with composer John Russell (George C. Scott) in *The Changeling*

loses his wife (Jean Marsh, in what might be the briefest star-billing performance on record), and his daughter in a car accident in upstate New York. In his grief, he accepts a teaching post in Seattle where he soon meets a woman called Claire Norman (Trish Van Devere).

Given that a prerequisite of this genre is an audience's agreement that it will suspend a considerable amount of disbelief, there are moments in this story where granting permission for a pre-frontal lobotomy might be more in order. One such moment occurs when Van Devere, who works for the local historical society, finds Scott a house — a neglected old mansion of utterly staggering enormity and magnificence. We must accept that he lives in it completely alone.

As might be expected, the house is possessed; and it isn't long before its ghostly and somewhat familiar repertoire of messages begins, with Scott being awakened one morning by a loud metallic pounding. (This same sound was last heard in the 1963 film, *The Haunting*.)

Later, the sound of a window smashing at the top of the house leads him to a hidden attic room filled with the dusty

effects of a young child, including a small wheelchair, and a music box which, astonishingly, plays the same melody, note for note, that Scott composed the day before.

Van Devere is soon drawn into the mystery, and when presented with the bizarre evidence of the music box, responds with perfect poise and utter calm, stating, "It's a startling coincidence."

This prompted the first sniggering from cynics in the audience, who apparently were not suspending disbelief quite far enough to accept such a blindly incongruous understatement.

To check out the house's history, Scott goes to the Historical Society, where Van Devere's superior, Minnie Huxley (played by Ruth Springford, in a role lying somewhere between a Nazi Commandant and the innkeeper's wife in a *Dracula* movie) states, "That house is not fit to live in. It doesn't want people." Such creaky and unnecessary lines serve little purpose but to generate unwanted giggles and cause an audience to pull even further back from their disbelief agreement.

For some unfathomable reason, Scott chooses not to question Huxley any further, even though she appears to know a

Amidst the general state of apprehension about the quality of last year's film crop, Garth Drabinsky's and Joel Michael's gothic-suspense picture, *The Changeling*, seems to be such a ray of hope that it has caused considerable rejoicing. The film is, without doubt, the classiest-looking imitation of an American film ever shot in Canada. If this was its goal, then congratulations are in order.

Much of the story is familiar. A composer, John Russell (George C. Scott)

lot more than anyone else. Instead, he organizes a seance, where Helen Burns turns in a terrifyingly believable performance as a psychic medium. Through the rather nebulous connection of Scott's recent bereavement, it evolves that a 'presence' is not only trying to communicate with him, but also gain his assistance to settle an old score.

Ultimately, this brings Scott to old Senator Joe Carmichael (Melvyn Douglas in an excellent performance). However, in the final confrontation, even Douglas is unable to overcome the inconsistencies built into his character, and the result undermines a scene on which so much hinges that it sets a wonky tone for the bang-up, no-holds-barred, burn-down-all-the-sets ending.

With few exceptions, there seems to have been little restraint in any area of this production.

The script by William Gray and Diana Maddox, from the story by Russell Hunter, brings into play all the well-worn tactics of the genre, though many of them, on their own, work effectively — largely due to George C. Scott's almost consistently intelligent performance.

Rick Wilkins' score contains a sweet and haunting melody and the cues are admirable. But in the end, the music is laid on too thickly, as though silence behind scenes is almost unthinkable, and the audience must be continually reminded of how nervous it should be.

Trevor Williams' art direction is another area where the film goes overboard. Costumes are intrusively tasteful, and the sets so sumptuous that one can't help wondering how these people got so filthy rich.

Director Peter Medak's overall pace is languorous, too often dwelling on the scenery and plot points that are already more than clear. The resulting film runs about twenty minutes too long. Though a good line of tension runs through certain sequences, the meanderings and credibility problems make it tough to maintain.

The most serious error of excess has to do with the character of the 'spirit' in the house, which seems to have been delineated not by the writers, but by what must have been an enormous special effects budget.

If this spirit can make thunderous sounds, open and slam doors, strike piano keys, break windows, switch on lights, turn on taps, make its voice heard on tape, dictate musical compositions to Scott's unconscious, throw glasses, instantaneously retrieve a child's ball thrown into a distant river, push wheelchairs around, make gold chains slink up

out of the ground, appear to a child in another house, shatter mirrors, cause fatal car accidents, violently shake massive pieces of furniture in an office miles away, set fires and cause hurricane winds (even indoors), what does it really need Scott for?

With its four, major, foreign stars, the one area where this picture has managed to show restraint is in its use of Canadian performers. Much has been made of this lately, and with good reason. It's amazing to see just how tiny these token cameos for indigenous talent can become; and taking co-star billing for a three-minute part seems a humiliating concession.

Most noticeable among the locals, aside from those mentioned, is a flash of Barry Morse as a parapsychologist, and a single scene of John Colicos in a broad, eye-popping parody of a police chief.

Trish Van Devere's performance so often relies on bland and elegant poise, and an impeccable wardrobe, that one is

tempted to speculate that her participation, and name above the title, could be one of the perks that goes along with being Mrs. George C. Scott.

The Changeling won 'Best Picture' at Canada's Genie Awards; but alas, these things are relative. In the American system, this would be comparable to something less than **The Omen** or **The Offering** winning a Best Picture Oscar.

In addition, **The Changeling** will undoubtedly do business, and could even garner good reviews in certain places. But there's something vaguely dishonest about this picture. At its core, it has not been well enough constructed to offer much more than a rehash of some of the gothic-suspense genre's most tortured clichés, and no amount of spectacular production value is really able to compensate.

Roy Moore

Jean Beaudin's Cordélia

p.c. National Film Board in collaboration with Radio-Canada p. Jean-Marc Garand p.man. Laurence Paré d. Jean Beaudin a.d. Jacques Benoit sc. Jean Beaudin, Marcel Sabourin, based on novel **La lampe dans la fenêtre** by Pauline Cadieux cont. Monique Champagne art. d. Denis Boucher, Vianney Gauthier d.ph. Pierre Mignot sd. Jacques Blain mus. Maurice Blackburn ed. Jean Beaudin cost. Louise Jobin chief elec. Kevin O'Connell l.p. Louise Portal, Gaston Lepage, Raymond Cloutier, Gilbert Sicotte, James Blendik, Pierre Gobeil, Jean-Louis Roux, Marcel Sabourin, Claude Gauthier, Jean-Pierre Masson, Julie Morand, Michelle Rossignol, Olivette Thibault, Lionel Villeneuve, Rolland Bédard, Françoise Berd, Roger Garand, Jean Gascon, Henry Ramer, Serge Thériault pub. Les Films Mutuels col. 35mm length 118 min. year 1979 dist. Les Films Mutuels.

"Guilty for having loved life... Condemned for having lived it passionately." So cry out these lines from the advertisement which, along with a picture of Cordélia (Louise Portal) pulling at prison bars, announces that this is a tragic film of injustice. Cordélia Viau's husband was murdered in 1897, and the film is about the unjust trial and hanging of Cordélia and her supposed lover, Samuel. *La Presse* claims the affair "still haunts the memory of the population" of Quebec, and that it has become a legend here.

Cordélia is a film of social criticism, and in particular, a criticism of Quebec

society at the turn of the century. The overwhelming power of the Catholic Church parallels that of the legal system, and is just as oppressive. The force behind

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No escape for Cordélia (Louise Portal)

these all-powerful and inflexible institutions stems from the social mores of the times, and the intolerance of family-oriented rural society. The village women express most of this intolerance; an intolerance which ranges from the suppressed resentment of the women who watch over Cordélia's mourning for her dead husband, to the blatant, spitting animosity of Samuel's mother. Why do they hate her? Because Cordélia loves to sing and dance and enjoy life? Or is it because she loves to flirt, and spends her time with men, instead of other women? Or, most damning of all, is it because of the social crime she commits by not having any children?

Who the real murderer is, and why Cordélia and Samuel are persecuted, are questions which demand attention in the plot of such a film. But what if the 'whodunit' cannot be solved, as is the case here? The determination of the legal system to find them guilty for, what is presumably, someone else's crime, is carefully documented in the film. But the motivation for this persecution is only half-explained in a rapid series of mysterious meetings between important officials in the city and in strange country châteaux. This issue is inadequately dealt with, perhaps because of a too-strict interpretation of the book on which it is based, *La lampe dans la fenêtre*. In book form, the vague suggestions and hints of a

possible solution to the mystery crime are acceptable; but an unexplained treatment of plot details does not usually work in a film — especially if the film itself introduces details and then ignores them. In doing so, one concludes that the crime's solution would have been better left totally to the spectator's imagination.

Also confusing is the mystery of Cordélia's skin disease. The titles preceding the film suggest that the disease has scarred her psychologically but, strangely, there is only one direct reference to it in the plot. After nearly being raped, she cries out in shame that she has never shown it (her scarred skin?) to anyone. But what she says doesn't seem to make any sense, for her reference to the disease is far from explicit, as is the shot of her exposed abdomen. If indeed the disease has scarred her psychologically and physically, why is this not made clearer, especially in the one scene that explicitly deals with the subject?

Like Beaudin's last feature, *J.A. Martin photographe*, *Cordélia* is also a sumptuous period piece of pastel colours, soft, expressive lighting and glimpses of a visually beautiful past. But occasionally the prettiness of these images creates a discord in the film, not unlike that resulting from the unexplained plot details already discussed. The beautiful light in the jail makes Cordélia's imprisonment appear unnecessarily romantic. And in the hang-

ing scene, some of the beautiful close-up textures, of the wood of the scaffolding, the rope, and the black veil over her face, seem to detract from the emotional climax itself.

Beaudin is a master filmmaker, and he presents the film as a series of short, unified sequences, separate emotional events or comments which are memory units in the building of this portrait of the emotional Cordélia. Often the characters in a sequence communicate entirely through glances or peculiar expressions. Beaudin's camera style is also very interesting. Often the camera does not move, or moves very subtly to follow the central character in frame — usually Cordélia. At other moments, when Cordélia does not move and is alone in frame, (at home or in prison), the camera moves in very slowly to an ever closer close-up. The camera is always discreet, never attracting attention to itself.

An obviously moving camera is used in only three sequences. These are the scenes where the people in the community are all seated together: in the church, at the trial, and at the hanging. The camera tracks slowly across the townspeople in a different way each time, finally, directly accusing the faces of legal murder.

As for the acting, the performers are generally excellent; particularly Gaston Lepage as the "haunting" face for the country bumpkin, Samuel, and Raymond Cloutier, as the loathsome family friend and public prosecutor, Jos Fortier. Louise Portal's performance as Cordélia is also superb, and suffers only in comparison with Monique Mercure in a similarly challenging role in *J.A. Martin*. Unfortunate as it is, this comparison will be made almost automatically by anyone who has seen both films, because of their similar subject matter, and their shared directorial vision and style. However, Portal brings to the character a liveliness, vitality and range of emotion absolutely essential to the film's success. For example, one of the most moving scenes in the entire film is highly improbable, and would easily be unbelievable were it not for Portal's talent. Cordélia, seen through the bars of her cell, is singing under the window. It seems absurd, but she is half-singing, half-screaming about how happy she is, and how beautiful life is. For a very long time, we are captivated by Cordélia, her depression, her strength, and her humanity.

Cordélia is a fine and moving film. It is a flawed masterpiece. Not surprisingly, it is also a success, both at the box office and with the critics.

Mark Leslie

Claude Pinoteau's Jigsaw

p.c. Cinévidéo (Mtl.), Les Films Ariane - F.R. 3 (Paris) exec. p. Joseph F. Beaubien p. Alexander Mnouchkine, Georges Dancigers, Denis Héroux d. Claude Pinoteau sc. Jean-Claude Carrière, Claude Pinoteau adapt. Charles Israel art.d. Earl Preston d.ph. Jean Boffety sd. Richard Lightstone mus. Claude Bolling ed. Marie-Joseph Yoyotte l.p. Lino Ventura, Angie Dickinson, Laurent Malet, Chris Wiggins, Hollis McLaren, R.H. Thompson, Donald Pleasence, Lisa Pelikan, Murray Westgate, Olivier Guespin, Peter Hicks col. Eastman colour, 35mm length 105 min. year 1979 dist. Ciné 360 Inc. (Fr.-version), Creswin Films (Eng.-version)

As the English title suggests, **Jigsaw** is supposed to be a film of puzzles. As the French title, **L'homme en colère** (The Angry Man) implies, it is supposed to be an action-adventure story. The Canadian-French co-production has some impressive persons associated with it; director Claude Pinoteau and star Lino Ventura previously collaborated on a taut, low-key drama called **The Silent One**. Co-writer Jean-Claude Carrière has worked with the legendary Luis Bunuel on **The Discrete Charm of the Bourgeoisie**, **The Phantom of Liberty**, and **That Obscure Object of Desire**. But, sad to say, that talent is largely wasted here.

The film begins promisingly enough. A mysterious courier, smuggling himself across the border from New York to Quebec is killed by the man who meets him. Shortly thereafter, the murderer himself dies in a shoot-out with Provincial Police near Mirabel Airport. Soon, retired Air France pilot Romain Duprey (Ventura) arrives in Montreal to claim the body, whom the Mounted Police have told him is his son Julien. But when Duprey and the stolid Colonel McKenzie (Chris Wiggins) view the corpse, it turns out not be Julien at all. So the puzzle begins. For McKenzie, it is to find an illegal immigrant and break a smuggling ring with links to the Mafia. For Duprey, the situation is more elemental: it is his opportunity to find his son — with whom he has been at odds since his wife's tragic death — and be reconciled with him.

Decent films have been made from worse dross than this, and, to his credit, Lino Ventura tries hard to make something out of his role, much as he did in Jack Gold's misbegotten **The Medusa Touch**. But Pinoteau gives him little help. Instead, he throws him from situation to situation

in a somewhat frantic attempt to keep the plot moving. Thus, Duprey is beaten up outside a disco for two reasons — so that composer Claude Bolling can throw in a 'number,' and so that Duprey can be introduced to the romantic interest, a rather inept waitress named Karen (Angie Dickinson), into whose car he is dumped.

That Pinoteau does not really know how to keep the story on course is clear from this, and he continues to lead characters off and on at random. McKenzie and his men pop up from time to time, as does a sleazy character named Rumpelmeyer (a perfect name for Donald Pleasence), who is also looking for the younger Duprey. Meanwhile, Romain's search for Julien leads him to the surly weightlifter/pinball arcade clerk Keefer Bork, and his pregnant girlfriend Nancy. After some perfunctory fisticuffs are exchanged, Romain's off to the Montreal Forum, where he finds Julien's girlfriend, Anne, working a concession in the stands.

The film might have been salvaged from its lack of focus if the actors had been given some guidance in their characters; but except for Ventura, Wiggins and Pleasence, everyone in the cast seems at a loss. R.H. Thompson looks incongruous as the muscleman Bork, while Hollis McLaren as Nancy, and Angie Dickinson as Karen, are out of place and embarrassed. American actress Lisa Pel-

kan, who was impressive in **Julia** as Vanessa Redgrave's teenage self, finds the part of Anne a straitjacket — not the least helped by the quirky dubbing, from which Dickinson also suffers. To make matters worse, when Julien does appear, he is played with exceptional woodiness by Laurent Malet, who helped sink **Blood Relatives** as Lisa Langlois' incestuous cousin.

In **Jigsaw**, Claude Pinoteau has been unable to reconcile the conflicts between the film's thriller format and his own inclination to deal with characterization. Like other French directors who have recently come to North America — Le-louch, Malle, Chabrol, Gessner, Matalon — he has had trouble adapting his personal style to the formats which are expected in the commercial world of North America. The problems of illegal immigrants in Canada, and the influence of organized crime in a city like Montreal are themes which beg for telling on the screen. Anyone, however, who wants to find out about the underworld fringes that Pinoteau deals with, would be better advised to try and catch the Vitale-Moyle-Lack trilogy of **Montreal Main**, **East End Hustle** and **The Rubber Gun**, rather than **Jigsaw**. Here, the pieces do not fit together.

Paul Costabile



Romain (Lino Ventura) roughing up Kevin (R.H. Thompson) for concealing information in **Jigsaw**

SHORT FILM REVIEWS



"Debbie Van Kiegebelt shows that running 'looks good'"

Born To Run

p.c. Window Films Ltd. p. Martin Harbury, Ilana Frank assoc. p. Ken Gass, Anna Stratton d./ed. Peter Shatalow cfe narr. Debbie Van Kiegebelt d. ph. Robert New ph. assist. Michael Savoie, Mark Irwin, Robin Miller assist. cam. Lynn Rotin sd. rec. John Megill sd. mix David Appleby mus. John Mills Cockell col. 16mm. running time 25 min. year 1979 dist. Viking Film Dist. (Canada), Wombat Prod. Inc. (U. S.)

Born to Run, first screened last September by the CBC, is a well-constructed short film about the pleasures and possibilities of running. An obvious amount of enthusiasm has gone into the project — and it shows.

Any misgivings in the average audience regarding the sport have been anticipated, and are taken up in a positive spirit as reasons to run. This approach is supported by the use of testimonials from a cross-section of runners. For example, those in the audience who doubt their physical suitability, are answered by a doctor from The Toronto Rehabilitation Centre, who prescribes the sport for heart-attack victims. A Toronto chiropractor, who runs herself, advises her patients to run. Another woman, sixty years of age, describes the exhilaration she has felt since she began running, at the age of forty-six. Debbie Van Kiegebelt shows that running "looks good". Footage of 7,500 runners in a Toronto mini-marathon, makes it clear that runners in the streets are no longer "unusual". An executive explains that running every morning does not deter him from his work, but adds to his efficiency and productivity at the office, while relieving stress. The sight of Jerome Drayton, marathon runner, shown in training for the 1980 Olympics, proves that the sport does not require extravagant outfitting — just a good pair of shoes.

This film is of a type: strictly promotional. Promotional film style (using testimonials, building a tight visual rhetoric, and smiles, smiles, smiles) can be offensive if the worth of the subject matter is questionable. Some films, however, are about subject matter which is so obviously worth promoting, that this sort of film style is excusable. The use of a strictly documentary film style, for example, would have been inappropriate: the aim of **Born to Run** seems to be to encourage people to *try* running. Shots of blistered feet, and faces, in the agony of marathon running, would not further this aim. **Born to Run** is not "an objective film" as its press releases state. Nevertheless, it is effective.

Katherine Dolgy

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