

# GODARD'S SECOND 'FIRST FILM'

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**W**hatever its merits, which are considerable, the larger significance of Jean-Luc Godard's "Every Man for Himself" (*Sauve Qui Peut/La Vie*), currently playing at the Fine Arts Theater, is that it marks his return to 35mm film making after serious injury and near-death in a traffic accident and after a particular kind of self-imposed political exile lasting, overall, nine years.

"Every Man for Himself," whose passionless pessimism is redeemed by Godard's sly, sardonic and bizarre sense of humor, is good news because Godard is one of the very small handful of truly individual, intellectual and inspired film makers in the world.

Against the films of escape, diversion, reassurance and uplift, his has been a one-man cinema of engagement with and commitment to the real world of such vital matters as rebellious disquiet among students in the '60s (sharply prophesied in "La Chinoise") and of a choking, dissatisfied middle-class affluence (savagely dissected in "Weekend").

In recent years, committed to a rather unspecific but left-wing activism, including a strong posture against U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Godard experimented with videotape and 16mm film, producing with various political partners and a political group a number of works not really intended for normal commercial distribution. They were shown mostly on campuses and to organizations.

Now Godard is working again toward a wider public, and lately has been frequently in residence at Francis Coppola's studio on Las Palmas, seeing not only to the release of "Every Man for Himself" under Coppola's auspices but also planning a remarkable collaborative venture with Coppola.

In effect, Godard said a few days ago, he will make a rough draft of next film, like a sketch for a painting. "It will," he says, "be a vi-



Director Jean-Luc Godard on film making: "If we don't see the new possibilities, they'll be lost."

sual script." He also calls it research, trying out scenes and sequences with film and tape, writing with a camera instead of a typewriter.

Godard's company is putting up

\$250,000 of the cost, Coppola \$250,000 (in the form of the payment for the American rights to "Every Man for Himself"). One ingenious possibility of the scheme, Godard notes, is that the "study" itself can un-

doubtedly be sold, very likely at a nice profit, to pay-television, perhaps, and then to a university or some other entity as an invaluable teaching aid.

Please see JEAN-LUC, Page 2



# JEAN-LUC GODARD

*Continued from First Page*

Among other advantages to the approach, says Godard, is that "One could hire a big star but for only one day, and pay him \$10,000, which is not bad, and try out some key scenes."

The property which Godard has had in mind for the study and the film is Jack Kerouac's "On the Road." He had done a treatment and approached Coppola through Tom Luddy, former director of the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, now associated with Coppola's Zoetrope.

When he abandoned commercial (that is, relatively commercial) film making, Godard says, "The fathers were in command. Now the sons are in command, and they are even worse than the fathers were. They are even more interested in money and even less interested in art. They have no sense of humor and they don't have the slightest doubt about themselves. They don't *need* the movies for their salvation. They like being *in* the movie business, but they should also need to *care*."

There is no passion in them; there is little enough passion in the world. Godard worries about that. "That's the way I feel," he says. "I wish there were more passion in 'Every Man for Himself.' Maybe there'll be more in the next one."

Lack of passion is not the only problem Godard sees in the world film industry. "There is no curiosity about trying new ways," he says. "The industry does no research. It's like a runner who never trains or a doctor who never practices but who operates once very two years or so. Pity the poor patient."

Godard does not think the movies will be around forever as an art form. "They'll last quite a while," he says, "and then they'll disappear like the dinosaur"—succeeded by some variant form of communication.

His pessimism about film as an industry is not a pose, but Godard as an individual film maker is remarkably enthusiastic. He is such a master of irony and sardonic understatement that it is not always easy to appreciate this. But, particularly in light of many recent technological advances—including the excellence of Super 8 and videotape, faster film in all sizes and lighter cameras and other equipment —Godard says, "I have the feeling of a second chance. It's a chance to discover things that have never been thought before; an enormous change that will be found, or lost forever. It's like the end of the 19th Century when the bankers were asking what the movies would amount to. They were saying, 'Tell us about "The Gold Rush" or "Gone With the Wind,"' but there was no way you could. They could have no idea until you've made the idea visible. If we don't see the new possibilities, they'll be lost.

"This is the last chance. Perhaps it's my last chance, but that's enough to go on." Four years ago, Godard made a film he called "Number Two," meaning that it was the start of a second phase. It was shown at Filmex but has not been widely seen, although he says it will now be getting larger distribution. But now he speaks again of making "my second first film," trying for new discoveries in a new day.

In the beginning, Godard and Francois Truffaut were colleagues, fellow writers on Cahier du Cinema, which they always saw as a way station en route to film making. Godard filmed an early Truffaut script. But now they are no longer in touch. "We disagree about everything," Godard says, "how a film should be produced,

*Please see JEAN-LUC, Page 3*

# JEAN-LUC GODARD

*Continued from Page 2*

what it should do, everything.”

Godard, born in Switzerland to prosperous middle-class parents who surrounded him with books and good music, and Truffaut, child of a broken marriage who was a teen-aged truant in trouble with the law, have, in a way, switched roles, Godard thinks.

“He surrounds himself with everything I had as a child; I’m trying to get rid of it.” Godard seems quite serenely indifferent to money and possessions (except as he is enabled to make films). Possibly because he was deeply influenced by American gangster films, to which he has done homage in his own films like “Breathless,” Godard, in his rumpled clothes, tinted glasses and heavy beard (which makes him appear unshaved when he isn’t), seems to solicit a resemblance to a man of menace temporarily at liberty. It works a nice contrast to his sly humor and his intellectual earnestness as well.

He ranks Martin Scorsese at the top of American film makers, although he says he was disappointed that “Raging Bull” was not even better than it was. It could, Godard seems to feel, have risen beyond La Motta the fighter to make a larger comment on the forces shaping the individual. The forces on the individual film maker now tend to work against the bankability of “the kind of picture I’m capable of,” says Godard.

Godard in his critic days was one of the developers of the auteur theory, celebrating the director as the author of his films. It was vital then, he says, “because the director had not received the recognition and the credit he deserved.” What was also true, he admits, was that as authors acknowledging the directors as authors, the critics were also equating themselves with the directors. “Hitchcock as an auteur was our equal,” Godard says, “therefore we were Hitchcock’s equals.”

It was not always an equation that held true, but it was soul-satisfying in the early 1950s. Now, Godard also admits, the auteur theory has a lot to answer for, including the fact that it has become impossible to argue with certain directors who have taken themselves seriously as auteurs.

“There are many things we should discuss among ourselves,” says Godard, “but we no longer can. In the so-called New Wave days, we all discussed everything all the time. That was very healthy. There was passion, and that was the healthiest. That is what is marvelous about what Francis (Coppola) is doing now. He *needs* the movies like he needs air.

“That’s all that matters. Your only hope as a film maker is that you can put together two or three images people will come to see.”