

Two Foreign Films *USA*

Clay, Larkin Have Remarkably Fine Examples of Movie-Making

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Symphonic Pastorale film

By JOHN HOBART

Two remarkable films—one French, the other Italian, and both representing the most adult school of foreign movie-making—arrive in town today as a double-decker Christmas gift from the Clay and Larkin Theater management.

The French film is "Symphonic Pastorale," at the Clay, which is nothing less than a masterpiece. Based on a little-known story by Andre Gide, it unfolds a tragedy as inexorable as any composed by the ancient Greeks—and yet it is wholly French in its clear-eyed appraisal of human emotion, in its profoundly moral outlook and in its subtle irony, which is the irony of a compassionate philosopher.

For this is the story of one man of good will, acting (so he thinks) always from the purest and most selfless motives, who brings down crushing disaster on himself and everyone he loves. He is the Protestant pastor of a remote Alpine village, an austere, upright man whose charitable instincts persuade him to take into his household an orphaned blind girl. Under his watchful care, she grows to womanhood, and without realizing it the pastor falls in love with her. His wife, however, fully realizes it and senses oncoming calamity. So does their grown son, who also loves the girl and who is self-righteously rebuffed when he asks his father for permission to marry her.

HONEST APPROACH

But "Symphonic Pastorale" is no ordinary study of a hypocrite. The pastor is hypocritical only in the sense that he does not understand himself. Quite honestly he believes that everything he does is for the girl's best interest; the role he plays is that of her protector. He refuses to admit that his cruelty to his son is prompted by jealousy, or that the reason he is willing to postpone an operation on the girl's eyes is his own secret, selfish desire for her to be dependent upon him.

Eventually the operation is performed. But the girl's new-born vision proves to be no boon at all. Rather, it is the cue for double-distilled tragedy—tragedy for the pastor, who realizes at last to what moral depths he has sunk; tragedy for his wife, who understands that their marriage is wrecked forever; tragedy for the son, whose own chance for happiness has been destroyed by his father; and finally tragedy for the girl herself, who sees her "protector" for what he is and who has no other recourse than to drown herself.

The special beauty of "Symphonic

Pastorale" is the thoroughness with which Jean Delannoy, its director, has explored the relationships of all these characters, not only in their explosive moments of passion but in the quieter interludes, when emotion is slowly gathering beneath the surface. The film reveals everything we need know about them, without condemnation, prejudice or over-emphasis—which is why the final cataclysm is so overwhelming.

And the acting is superb. As Gide's blind girl, Michele Morgan automatically establishes herself as a great screen actress. Her face is a beautiful tragic mask, which when lit by a smile can become heart-breaking. Mlle. Morgan, in this extraordinary, haunting performance, manages to convey to the full the bitter loneliness of the blind, but she is even more poignant in the scenes when the girl is gropingly making her acquaintances with the world that she had only pictured in her mind.

No less impressive are the performances of Pierre Blanchar as the pastor, Line Noro as the wife, Jean Desailly as the son and Andree Clement in her brief but memorable scenes as the son's fiancee, who recognizes the beauty of the blind girl as an enemy.

A VIVID ITALIAN FILM

There is a timeless quality to "Symphonic Pastorale" (somehow emphasized by the crystalline sparkle of its snowy Swiss scenery); it deals with emotions that could have existed anywhere and at any time.

On the other hand, "Woman Hunt," the Italian film at the Larkin, is rooted in time and space. It is a specific picture of the misery and poverty that overwhelmed Italy in the period after the war.

"Woman Hunt" (it has been shown elsewhere under the more fitting title of "Tragic Hunt") is grittily realistic in the tradition of "Open City," "Shoeshine" and "To Live in Peace." It concerns a peasant who is an anti-Fascist and an ex-prisoner of the Germans, and who is yet capable of turning traitor against his own people. The causes for his actions are complex, but they are related to the despair and hunger of the times—as well as to his earthy passion for a young woman who was a notorious collaborationist.

Heading a small but highly-organized gang of bandits, this man robs the members of a resettlement firm of desperately needed funds. To ensure a safe getaway (in a stolen ambulance), he also kidnaps the newlywed bride of one of the farmers. "Woman Hunt" is primarily the story of how the farm commu-

nity stages a mass pursuit of the bandits across the desolate (and still mined) Italian countryside, but it is the story, too, of the peasant's growing realization of what his treachery implies. Directed by Giuseppe De Santis and acted by an exceptionally vivid, forceful—and disturbing—film.