

## Film captures childhood's more poignant moments

By CHERYL RUDERT  
Of the Emerald

There is a scene in Francois Truffaut's *Small Change* that typifies the attitude with which he made the film. Richet, the schoolteacher, is watching the birth of his child, intending to photograph the event. Nervously trying to focus his double reflex camera he freezes at the crucial moment. A brisk nurse passes in front of him. "You'd better take it now," she tells him. But, wide-eyed and awe-filled, he has become oblivious of the camera as he rigidly gazes, like a child himself, at the birth.

The scene is not without co-incidence. Truffaut is also behind a camera watching children in reverence; only his fingers have not frozen. Plunging into the many-faceted world of childhood he avoids the sort of sickly-sweet tone that too many adult directors tend to impose on children. Instead he gives us a bitter-sweet glimpse of the awkwardness, vitality and impetuosity of being a child.

Instead of a defined plot, the film is a strung-together montage of characters and incidents surrounding a young boy's school in Thiers, France. Beginning and end form a matching bookend-like structure that reveals a subtle cohesion. It is a viable technique which, along with a slight progression in the focal character, Patrick, gives just enough shape to a sporadic form. Rather than feeling like we've sat through a series of mini-anecdotes the film is wrapped up neatly.

As in some of Truffaut's earlier classics there are certain scenes that have a sort of pristine clarity in their detail. While Gregory's (the toddler in red overalls) mother chats with Richet's wife he proceeds to empty mom's shopping bag onto the floor. Truffaut cuts back and forth between unaware socializing adults and an increasing disarray of loose spaghetti noodles, rice, carpenter tools and Gregory. When the adults finally notice the mess, a remarkable expression of glee sweeps across Gregory's face and there is a split-second freeze—long enough to capture the expression and short enough to keep it from being overt.

While not as dramatic a statement as the freeze of Antoine Doinel at the end of *400 Blows*, Truffaut's technique here is still admirable. *Small Change*, as a whole, lacks the sobriety of his first feature film. It is, rather, an elaboration of *400 Blows*' lighter moments. The character Doinel, a combination of adolescent bungler and social outcast has been split into two characters — Patrick (Gregory Desmoucheaux) and Julien (Philippe Goldman).

Patrick's plight is a familiar embarrassing one. He is a slow moving, naive sort struck with his first

attraction for the opposite gender. His first target is quite out of his means — his school chum's voluptuous hair-dresser-mother. Spending all his francs on a bouquet of roses his heart sinks a few feet when she mistakenly tells him to thank his father for them.

The second attempt ends in another disaster. Picking up a pair of comparably aged girls outside a cinema, Patrick doesn't know what to do with his date once he gets inside. His more aggressive schoolmate ends up with two girls tucked under his arm instead of one.

The film's culmination reveals a tinge of success for his third attempt—but he has had to learn to bring his goals down to a reasonable level to achieve them.

The figure of Julien brings the elements of mystery and tragedy to the film. Living in a run-down shack with a crazy, alcoholic mother and grandmother, Julien is the sobering stigma that haunts all childhood—the abused, unwanted child forced to fend for himself with adult means. We are never shown the inside of his home or the bruises and scars on his body; we only see him sleeping on doorsteps and picking his classmates' pockets. But through these outward manifestations of his mistreatment, our image of the bliss of childhood becomes somewhat jarred.

A child is naturally "in a state of grace" remarks Richet's wife after watching Gregory fall nine stories onto a patch of grass and bounce back up, giggling, unharmed. They have a special kind of durability and only when the harshness and experience of the adult world is imposed upon them do they fall from this grace, prematurely.

At the end of the film Richet (Jean-Francois Stevenin) gives a moving speech on children's rights. His audience of small faces, keyed up for vacation, remains impassive. The children do not feel the tragedy because they are so far removed from it. Their faces are unblemished and open, cushioned by their loving environments, and fitting naturally in with their role as children. This is the way they should be.

The only major drawback to the film is the use of dubbing instead of subtitles. Because the film can also be appreciated by younger audiences who might not be able to read, this must be tolerated. However, a totally different effect could be had without the sometimes stilted, unreal voices.

The delight of *Small Change* is a welcome relief from *Adele H.* Truffaut's sojourn into psychosis. He is more at home here, blending the tragic, the comic and the poignant. In his finer moments he captures a microcosm of the nuances of life on film. Some of those moments are in *Small Change*.



Photo courtesy of Artists Records

## He cuts his jazz with poetry

Prolific singer, social critic, topical poet, and composer Gil Scott-Heron, with Brian Jackson and the Midnight Band, will be making a rare concert appearance in Eugene tomorrow evening at 8 p.m. in the EMU Ballroom.

Gil Scott-Heron's musical and lyrical statements have deeply moved his listeners with his intense feeling and awareness of the problems of our country and the world. His musical renderings are jazz and soul tinged, laced with exciting African rhythms.

His music moves from themes of protest, political corruption and escapism (booze, smack and nostalgia) to Pan-Africanism, black pride and peace, all connected by poetic raps.

Scott-Heron issues what frequently amounts to rather scathing indictments of the body politic. His monologues, which have been known to last over half an hour, are often the high points of his shows. The brilliant imagery of his lyrics usually

makes its appearance in everyday street language so as to make his message clear to everyone.

The intricate Afro-Cuban rhythm and instrumental sketchings achieved by The Midnight Band provide an almost hypnotic mood behind Scott-Heron's dry, throaty vocals. The band consists of Danny Bowens, electric bass; Victor Brown, vocals; Bilal Sunni-Ali, tenor sax and flute; Barnett Williams, congas and percussion; Tony Duncanson, congas and timbales; Reggie Brisbane, drums and percussion; and Delbert Taylor on trumpet.

Their latest Arista Records release *It's Your World* is a live 2-record set that exemplifies the true Gil Scott-Heron/Brian Jackson and the Midnight Band concert.

However, one may see and hear them first hand tomorrow night for \$4 (University students) or \$5.50 (general public). Tickets for this Cultural Forum event are available at the EMU Main Desk and Everybody's Records.

## French film rated high

By K.G. HAWTHORNE  
Of the Emerald

*The Clockmaker* tells a story of murder, attempted rape, two young lovers fleeing from the law, political strife and corrupt journalism. But a brief touch, a broken window and a man dumped into a river is about the sum total of thrills for the sex-and-violence crowd in this film, which opened the French Film Festival last night at the Waco Cinema on Franklin Blvd.

Michel Descombes is a watchmaker who leads a serene, placid little tradesman's life in Lyons until his high-school aged son kills a factory owner for a girl. Descombes has never met. Then he must learn about his son, who has lived under the same roof with him all his life, from the police and the aged governess long ago dismissed. This leads not only to a slow unveiling of the alienation and distance between father and son, but a rapid confrontation with the cynicism and corruption of modern society.

The right-wing press wants to hang the son in print; the left-wing wants him to give himself up before the elections. The police label him a murderer before he's apprehended. The powerful victim's goons break the windows of the watch shop. The lawyer's idea of a defense is, "Damn his wishes! I'm trying to build a case." And the son refuses to talk to his father once he's been arrested, saying only that he killed the owner because he was filthy.

But there is a proverb in French, "the more things change, the more they stay the same." Although the clockmaker's world of simple values crumbles, it is replaced by one perhaps not as happy, but just as peaceful. He is the kind of person who can say, "I've only been miserable twice in my life," and be telling the truth.

Philippe Noiret is superb in the role. His marvelous face is the face of a sensitive peasant, warm and simple yet somehow eternally sad. It is this face that is the movie. Noiret observing in disbelief as

tourists photograph each other in front of the victim's burned-out car; Noiret groping for the words to ask the governess how he'd failed his son; Noiret enraged with his left-wing friend when the union throws his son to the wolves.

Jacques Denis, as the leftist, and Jean Rochefort, as the police inspector who likes Descombes but must do his expeditious job, are both excellent complements to Noiret's performance.

The visual artistry of director Bertrand Tavernier tells much more than the basic plot and dialogue. He is in control, even of his visual one-liners; these little subtleties give the film its texture. This artistry and Noiret's combine beautifully and reach an exquisite height when the father sits alone in his shop listening to his son confess to murder, "as a sort of wedding present," on a tape cassette.

As the final credits rolled, there was no question in my mind why *The Clockmaker* won Best picture of the Year in France.

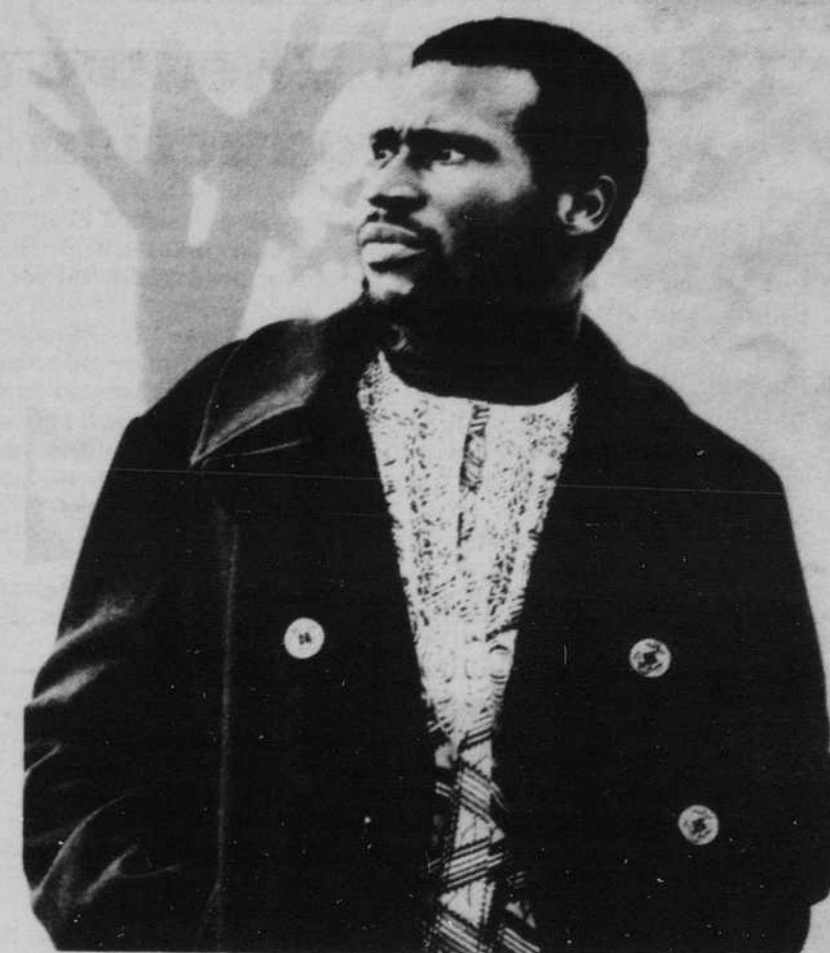


Photo courtesy of Columbia Records

## Taj Mahal taps his roots entertaining us all the while

By BOB WEBB  
Of the Emerald

developing his own artistry, Mahal was gaining a reputation as an excellent blues musician.

Taj Mahal, a highly acclaimed multi-instrumentalist as well as an excellent blues musician, will appear in concert this Saturday at 8 p.m. in the South Eugene High School Auditorium. He will be accompanied by a six piece band.

Opening the show will be a local group, the SchwebkeBros. Band.

Country blues specialist Taj Mahal was born in New York and grew up in the New England countryside. But finding it strange to be "raised away from my people," he sought out his roots in traditional Negro blues and discovered what has now become his life's work.

His father, a noted jazz arranger and composer, introduced him to such artists as Albert Ammons, Meade Lux Lewis, Cow Cow Davenport, Trummy Young, Slam Stewart, Illinois Jacquet and even Leadbelly.

"This used to be the traffic over my head," says Mahal in a recent interview. "I used to hear sounds in my head that I wanted to play on an instrument and things that I put together that I thought would be nice. But when I first heard the blues, I forgot about school and everything else for a while, and the guitar was where it was at for me."

Taj Mahal's personal excursion into blues began with a small record collection and the collecting led him to search out the early bluesmen like Willie Brown, Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson and Kid Bailey. His appetite and curiosity whetted, he delved into Chicago blues and began listening to Jimmy Reed, Bo Diddley, Chuck Berry, Muddy Waters and Howling Wolf.

After college, Mahal continued to study blues music. When not occupied with playing and practicing on different instruments, he hunted obscure record shops, continuing his research. He scouted out forgotten lyrics in the Library of Congress. He searched out blues artists and while he was

The country blues were the final piece in the puzzle. "There was a whole part of my cultural life and my ancestral culture that was beginning to be pieced together. The country blues filled in a big gap and helped me to understand my own feelings, things I felt or knew or understood and did not seem to have any backlog of information on. A great way to discover yourself is to start from the tradition that you came from ... to find a thing to do for the rest of your life. I decided to play whether I made any money or not because this is just what I really want to do."

So, fortified with a knowledge of the blues, finding his special place within the blues and gifted with a natural musical artistry, Taj Mahal began to be heard. He soon had a contract with Columbia Records.

Mahal has recorded a total of nine albums for Columbia. After the first three albums, *Taj Mahal*, *The Natch'l Blues* and *Giant Step*, he made a brief return to his early big band influence, appearing for a time with a ten-piece group which included four tubas. His next two albums, *Happy to Be Just Like I Am* and *The Real Thing*, were recorded during this period. But Mahal has returned to his strongest suit with his more recent releases: He sings the blues with a country flavor and a spirit which make both his recordings and his live appearances an experience which is often as magical as it is musical.

His last four Columbia lp's are *Recycling the Blues & Other Stuff*, *Oooh So Good 'n Blues*, the soundtrack from the film *Sounder* (in which Mahal not only scored and performed the music, but acted in an important role as well), and the recently released *Mo' Roots*.

Tickets for the T.D.A. Productions concert sale at Crystalship, Everybody's Records and the EMU Main Desk for \$5 in advance and \$6.50 on the day of the show.

## Impotent script leaves 'Silver Streak' short



Photo courtesy of 20th Century Fox

To escape detention by pursuing police, Richard Pryor, right, shows Gene Wilder how to disguise himself in shoe polish and parody a young black.

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By S. JEFF FOREMAN  
and BARB GEISER  
Of the Emerald

It's easy to tear apart a movie like *A Star is Born*. It at least has some entertainment value. That is more than can be said about *Silver Streak*.

Sex, violence, disaster, suspense and finally — comedy, are interwoven into the movie, *Silver Streak*. The outcome is a contrived and convoluted plot.

Gene Wilder, Jill Clayburgh and Richard Pryor star in what would have, and probably should have been a good movie. Wilder tried to mix drama with humor, and ended with a mixed up bore. In *Blazing Saddles* and *Young Frankenstein* Wilder acted flawlessly in semi-satiric humor directed at another era. This time he finds himself in circa 1976. Wilder has trouble dealing with a serious plot and a love affair, not to mention the sans-satiric structure.

Richard Pryor has the potential to be a superb actor. However, in this particular movie he was confined by a maudlin script. Several times in the movie where Pryor could have been funny, he was forced to conform to the script writer's sense of humor.

Jill Clayburgh is beautiful and sexy — and she can even act a little. What more could you possibly want out of a co-star?

The story follows a minor mystery murder on the Silver Streak express, without a Christie twist at the end. Wilder stumbles on to a murder plot, with the help of Jill Clayburgh. The two get involved, with both the murder and each other. Pryor rounds out the trio half way through the movie.

The sight gags date back to the 30's, without any enlightening changes. The lines are stale, and the violence makes absolutely zero sense.

The movie isn't a total loss. Along the lines of the *Pink Panther*, *Silver Streak* amuses hard-core Gene Wilder fans. For those in love with Richard Pryor, his spontaneity is stilted and his appearance verges on cameo.

But all is not lost. The short playing with *Silver Streak* is hilarious. *The Tennis Lesson* is more than a game played on the courts. At first the audience didn't know how to react to The Prince spewing out tennis balls at his female partner. She responds with strong strokes, and finally, the audience realizes the movie is directed toward, shall we say? — the sexually mature. The result is a climactic fit of laughter at the filmmaker's cleverness and subtlety.

Sex and tennis have always been linked together. Just look at the scoring, love equals zero. And the "Tennis Lesson" teaches its audience there's more to tennis than bouncing balls and smooth strokes.

Thursday, January 13, 1977

## N.W. photographer exhibited

A series of photographs of the nude body by Marsha Burns will be exhibited at the Photography at Oregon Gallery, Museum of Art, until Jan. 30, 1977. The work includes the sequence "White Snow Goose" (shown here),

where two photographs are displayed, one over the other, so that mysterious and beautiful feelings can be fantasized.

Burns, who lives in Seattle, Washington, has exhibited

widely in the United States. However, this is her first show in Oregon.

The gallery, free to the public, is open noon-5 p.m., Tuesday through Sunday.

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