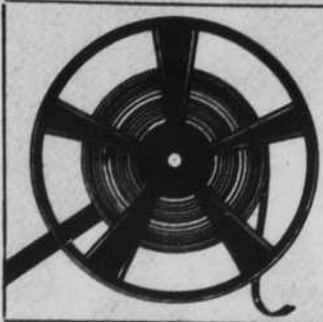


Renoir returns capturing man in nature

The River
Directed by Jean Renoir
Based on a book by Rumer
Godden 99 min. 1950



By DAVID COURSEN

Jean Renoir is one of the supreme masters of the cinema, so the first local showing in a quarter of a century of *The River* (1950) would be a major cinematic event even if the film were one of the

director's lesser works. In fact, *The River*, a film of astonishing physical beauty, explores the harmony of nature and the

scenes, or even words or gestures, the essence of a person, is the result of a warmth, a caring, and a genuine empathy that is at times almost miraculous. The fusing of these elements, executed with a meticulous precision that is just short of perfection, makes *The River* one of the masterworks of the cinema, a film whose pleasures we have been deprived of for far too long.

From the opening sequence, a series of shots (of the life of the river) focuses continually on man in nature, human experience as part of a larger order that encompasses all forms of life on earth. With these introductory passages of river life, and the sequences exploring Hindu beliefs and ritu-

als, the film shows a genuine feeling for the textures and rhythms of Indian life.

Just as the setting is both specific to India and universal, so, too, the story encompasses not just its specific subject, first love, but a whole range of human experiences. Renoir is able to do this in large part because of his extraordinary ability to develop, with precision and economy, the nuances of behavior that form individual characters. In *The River* we are both watching archetypes, following patterns of experience so universal they are almost rituals, and individuals, animated by private visions and concerns that

are utterly unique and personal.

At the heart of the film, and near its center, is a short story about the birth, maturation, marriage, and child-bearing of a young woman. The sequence, perhaps the most visually beautiful in the film, is a magically lyrical testament of faith in natural life cycles. As such, it perfectly summarizes the substance of the vision of the entire film.

From the opening credits, superimposed over a drawing in progress, *The River* is an ongoing process of creation, where one form, or one life, gives way to

(Continued on Page 9B)

Love You Live

(Continued from Page 2B)

opens with Muddy Water's "Man-nish Boy," a raunchy rhythm and blues voo-doo song.

"Crackin' Up," hitherto unrecorded, is probably the best cut on the record. A Jamaican concoction of rhythms and off-beats, the Stones reworked the musical framework of Bo Diddley's hit, Rasta Style. Richard and Wood's exchange of lead riffs and the sizzling percussion are tributes to the group's command of the Reggae medium. Willie Dixon's "Little Red Rooster" is classic blues and is performed as such. The "El Mocambo" side closes with Chuck Berry's "Around and Around," four-chord fifties rock n' roll. The "El Mocambo" side displays the Stones' mastery of the spectrum of contemporary black music.

The other feature so entertaining on the "El Mocambo" side is Mick Jagger's between-the-tunes rap. The vocalist greets Margaret Trudeau, "Allo Margaret, you're lookin' good tonight." He also warns the guitarist of an aggressively affectionate fan, "It's the bottom pincher from last night, watch out for your bottoms Keith." The 300-person capacity of "El Mocambo" lent to the intimacy and humor exchanged with the audience.

"Star, Star" is one of the finest cuts on the album, and one of the Stones' hardest rockers; even the rhyme scheme of the lyrics is a pounding rhythm. The offensive lyrics, which nearly kept *Goat's Head Soup* off the market, are enunciated on this track in contrast to the original version which had to be slurred in the studio before it could be released.

"It's only Rock n' Roll," "If You Can't Rock Me," and "Brown Sugar" are cases in favor of Ron Wood as new Stones guitarist. These live versions of older songs reflect the influence of Wood's axmanship on Stones material. Wood's fiery fuzz tone bolsters the Stones style and is reminiscent of the disbanded Faces.

Ian Stewart plays piano on the Paris tracks. Stewart is a mysterious figure among the Stones. Having played with the band since its creation in 1962, an early manager felt his straight appearance clashed with the group's image, but Stewart has played with the band on various tours and albums since.

"Jumpin' Jack Flash" has been released six times in various forms, and is growing decidedly tired; the powerful chords don't seem to pinch the adrenal gland like they used to. Jagger's involvement isn't as intense as he

belts out basic syllables instead of lyrics.

A laid-back "You Can't Always Get What You Want" is eight great minutes of musical development. Jagger addresses the audience in French to direct a sing-along in English; the Parisian audience makes a tremendous chorus. Described as "portable Bedlam," *Love You Live* proves the Stones still worthy of the title "The World's Greatest Rock 'n' Roll Band." Despite the forces of time, law and order, and competition the Stones still unleash that mystery element that even starts Grandma's toe tapping. *Love You Live* brings home a remnant of the charge the Rolling Stones have transmitted to audiences for 15 years.



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