

Films

The Big Fix Directed by Jeremy Paul Kagan Cinema World

Nothing can turn a hard-boiled detective around like discovering his girlfriend dead on her couch, a moist red bullet hole in her left breast.

Until this happens to private investigator Moses Wine (Richard Dreyfuss) in the film *The Big Fix*, Wine is the archetypal burnt-out and cynical former radical of the sixties.

The girlfriend, Lila, (Susan Anspach-Dreyfuss' ex-wife) knew Wine during the good-old days of tear gas in the streets and napalm in Viet Nam. Campaigning for a double-talking liberal California senate candidate named Hawthorne, Lila steps back into Wine's life when she asks him to help solve a mystery.

Someone is distributing phony leaflets that link Hawthorne with

Eppis, an Abbie Hoffman-type radical who's been underground and hunted by the FBI for the past 10 years.

At first Wine isn't intrigued by the political mystery, but he is interested in seducing Lila for old time's sake and getting relief from confrontations with his estranged wife and her est-trainer lover. (Says the lover to Wine at one point, "Being a detective, that helps you realize yourself as a child, doesn't it?")

So Wine accompanies Lila to Hawthorne's campaign headquarters and because he's into loving his kids — paying child support — he hires on as an investigator. Wine thinks Hawthorne is an idiot but says, "Sure, I'll sell out for a \$150 advance."

Lila's murder rekindles his crusading spirit. He has a new cause for which to fight — her lovely memory.

Bogart in his best mid-career pictures usually started out hard-nosed until something such as a great injustice or a staggering memory turned him around.

But whereas in classic Bogart detective flicks (i.e. *The Maltese Falcon*) plot and character are of prime importance, in *The Big Fix* the plot is sacrificed for the sake of ideology and atmosphere.

After Lila's death, the plot becomes so incredibly intricate we are nearly forced to forget about it. In classic detective films incidents fall into place like the tumblers of a wall safe. Here, scenes are mashed together at the end like the bits of refuse in a trash compactor. Everything is neatly put together, but nothing truly fits.

Director Jeremy Paul Kagan is more concerned with what is on Wine's mind, his past, how Wine's thinking mirrors current attitudes, and Wine's transformation than he is with creating a good mystery.

To the accompaniment of a strangely eclectic musical score provided by Bill Conti, pot-smoking and Volkswagen-driving Moses Wine, child of the Sixties and man of the Seventies, has seen the error of his apathetic ways and wins the good fight against many of the stereotypes and dogmas from the liberals' Hall of Infamy. Wine is a counter-culture hero. And he sings lullabies to his kids over the phone.

Dreyfuss is making a Statement at a time when Statements are not the trend in movies. But he's not

stupid, he knows not to be heavy-handed and he knows how to persuade by entertaining and letting a message sneak up on his audience.

The final scene embodies the philosophy behind the film. One of Wine's kids asks him to sing a song. He begins bellowing a protest number about starving babies and workers rising in revolt. The kid is bored and asks him to change his tune, whereupon he calms down and sweetly sings "I went to the animal farm...."

Wine may not be seduced by Lila, but Dreyfuss and director Kagan have made a very seductive film. Dreyfuss is manic, funny and winning in *The Big Fix*, a refreshingly different film that will inspire sadness over lost dreams and hope for new ones in anyone old enough to remember the tragedy and promise of the Sixties.

One Sings, the Other Doesn't Directed by Agnes Varda Cinema 7

Hollywood has always been too capitalist-status quo-oriented to be overtly political; thus the pattern in American fiction film has been toward political films disguised as melodramas *High Noon*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* or melodramas disguised as political films *Coming Home*. So resistant are American filmmakers to politics that when Godard went overtly political, he lost much of his already limited audience.

But Europeans are different: They wear their politics like soup stains on their sleeves. They argue politics incessantly, and they argue in broad swatches like the slogan painted on the fence in Jules and Jim. Perhaps that explains the disquietingly simplistic politics of Agnes Varda's new film *One Sings, the Other Doesn't*, playing at Cinema 7 with Jeanne Moreau's *Lumiere* tonight through Wednesday. Nowhere is the film more heavyhanded than in Varda's sledgehammer lyrics that the feminist Pomme (the one who sings) performs. They comprise the most uncertain element in the film's structure.

But aside from that lapse in taste, or perhaps more accurately a cultural difference in taste, *One Sings* is technically well-managed. To tell her story of a friendship between two women that begins accidentally but en-

dures the social, political and personal changes of the Sixties, Varda employs an objective visual style. There are virtually no close-ups in the film, only formally structured medium shots. Varda establishes that she can do the nuts and bolts work of the film as well as most male directors working today.

But the content is more troublesome, partially because of the problems with making a political film. *One Sings* is no melodrama; it's hardly a drama at all. It is more like the postcards that the friends constantly send to each other than a novel. But despite the tendency toward post-card politics, Varda manages to make a political film that is also a touching personal document of a friendship that survives more than ten years of almost no communication. Varda may be a feminist, but at heart she is still an old-fashioned French humanist.

A symptom of Varda's conservatism, one which may widen her audience, is her relatively sympathetic treatment of men. Of Suzanne's two lovers, one hangs himself, the other doesn't. But even the suicidal photographer Jerome is touchingly human in his ineffectuality. He's an artist, you see, and it's his aesthetic quandary as much as his maleness that kills him. Her husband Pierre, a pediatrician, seems as perfectly understanding, sympathetic and supportive as women are traditionally characterized.

This role reversal borders sexist stereotype not unlike Varda's suggestion that Woman has special qualities that may mediate problems caused by a male-dominated society. In sum, however, the beautifully-realized friendship between the two women at the core of the film outweighs Varda's conservatism and makes *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* a success. Their bond, extended communally among several friends and relatives, is exemplified by the final, brilliant long-tracking shot that searches each face against the French countryside coming to rest on the feminist future in the person of Suzanne's 17-year-old daughter (played by Varda's 17-year-old daughter). Here the political and dramatic strands of the plot and structure are united into a feminist film that is, if far from perfect, at least quite serviceable. By Bill Lingle

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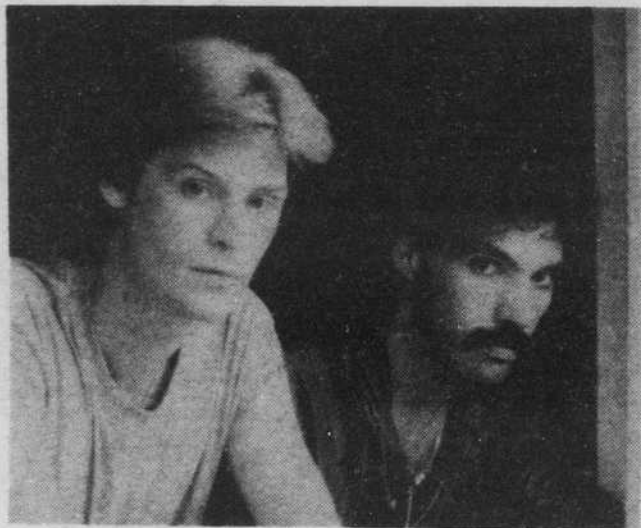
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