

Film

Tess Directed by Roman Polanski

Roman Polanski's *Tess* is like an egg salad sandwich — plenty of filling, but no meat. His interpretation of the story of a poor English girl rambles through nearly three hours of 19th century melodrama before coming to its predictable conclusion.

Polanski has created a beautiful, memorable, epic bore.

Yet the film's faults lie not only with Polanski, but also with the original author of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy. As one reviewer of the stage version of *Tess* pointed out, Tess' story is based on an

age-old, threadbare theme that has been "enacted in every country in all ages."

A hint for Polanski: Some books were never meant to be movies.

In creating an epic, Polanski has bypassed the basic ingredient that made the novel work — tragedy. Hardy wrote *Tess* for a handkerchief-toting, catharsis-hungry 19th century audience, who were willing to wade through pages of misfortunes to be able to watch Tess' ultimate defeat.

But Polanski focusses on the events and misses the emotions. Natassia Kinski's Tess is a pouting, passive, wet-noodle of a woman who elicits no sympathy for her

calamitous adventures. Tess is a one-dimensional decoy who seems to draw the fire of all those around her.

The moral of Hardy's story is the corrupting influence of society. Tess is meant to be a child of nature, but her story is disturbing for anyone who believes man is endowed with free will.

Tess is undoubtedly hampered by her circumstances and selflessness. And yet, after she is raped, has a child, is shunned by her husband, works as a farmhand, and watches her family thrown into the streets, her mistreatment calls for some hint of rebellion. But Tess keeps a stiff upper lip and

seeks aid from the man who raped her.

Polanski treats the character of the rapist, Alec, far too sympathetically. He is an arrogant and shallow boor whose motivation for marrying Tess is never quite clear.

Tess' first husband, Angel, is equally obnoxious, in his own way. His wedding night condemnation of Tess' past drew hisses from the audience, but endowed with the qualities of a human ping-pong ball, Tess volleys between the two men during most of the film.

Yet what *Tess* lacks in form it almost makes up for in style. The cast handles the flimsy plot gingerly and the French

countryside where Polanski filmed *Tess* is beautiful — even if it does seem to have been shot through a screen door. Filtered, muted colors only enhance the film's surreal effect: We are watching a fairytale with no one to rescue Cinderella.

Tess, which cost \$11 million to film, is the most expensive French film ever made. And it shows — right down to the buttons that were daily removed and sewn back on Tess' dress.

Artistically, *Tess* may be the film of the year. But from an audience's viewpoint, *Tess* is a bun-numbing voyage through Roman Polanski's fantasies.

— Ann Portal

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LPs

Night Passage Weather Report © 1980, CBS Records

Weather Report fans will not be disappointed in the latest release, *Night Passage*. Nor will they be particularly surprised.

The group is still milking the same vein that brought us *Heavy Weather*, with its popular "Birdland." But the vein has not yet run dry. The music is still hot, tight, finely integrated, and the Weather Report trademark — tonal and rhythmic density, shimmering intensity — is still strong and unmistakable.

Only on two cuts do some of the old formulas seem in danger of getting stale. Wayne Shorter's soprano sax ornamentation on "Dream Clock" is the only thing that keeps this slow, ballad-like tune from becoming indistinguishable from Weather Report's earlier slow, ballad-like tunes.

"Three Views of a Secret," another slower piece, seems the most weakly conceived and realized. The nasal, whining tone that Joe Zawinal puts out on synthesizer is inappropriate, if not corny, and occasionally the brief interplay between Zawinal and Shorter is limp and awkward.

As for the rest of the album, there is little to complain about. "Forlorn" is a strange, engaging composition. The title cut, "Night Passage," sustains a sharp, shuffling groove.

"Port of Entry" is contemporary Weather Report at its best. Jaco Pastorius pairs off with percussionist Robert Thomas, Jr. to give a strong, if typical bass solo — lots of sixteenth notes: very fast, very crisp. From there on the tune keeps picking up, and never lets up, as it moves into some burning, unabashed funk.



"Rockin' in Rhythm," a brilliant, playful adaptation of an Ellington tune, is another fine, cooking piece. Peter Erskine carries "Fast City" with some superb, unrelenting high nervous energy on drums. Shorter gets a chance to cut loose on tenor and does it very well. Zawinal cuts loose too, though he is a little stylized and long-winded about it.

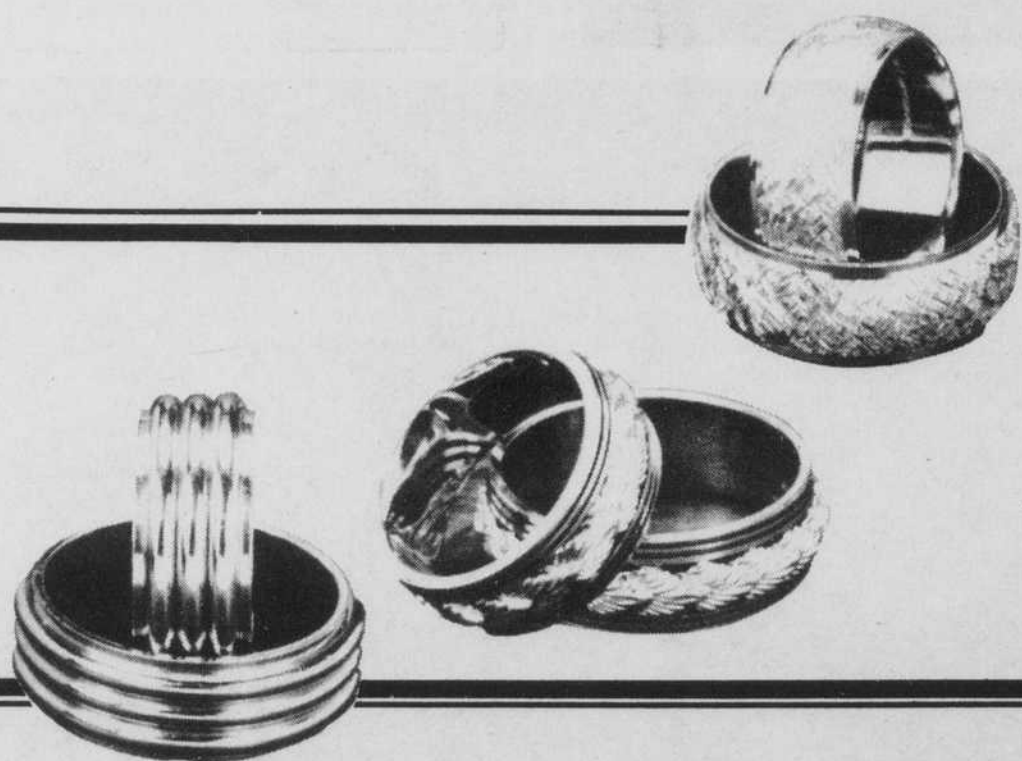
"Madagascar," recorded live in Japan, is a strong cut reminiscent of much earlier work in *Sweetnighter*. The format is loose and extended, allowing the musical ideas to develop more gradually and naturally. The playing seems to have more spontaneity to it, to involve more active creativity.

The original founders of Weather Report, Zawinal and Shorter, are still the backbone of the group. Zawinal, with his unique arrangements and distinctive style on keyboards, is the father and perpetuator of the Weather Report sound. In general, he is more successful in the background, creating texture and mood, than he is in the foreground, compelled to show off his chops.

Shorter, with his thoughtful and expressive playing, keeps the music from degenerating into an orgy of electronics and mere technique.

People who like what Weather Report has been doing for the last four or five years will not be wasting their money on this consistent album by an excellent group of musicians.

— Matthew Taylor



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In an attempt to avoid embarrassing anyone, **THANKS PRODO.** And, thanks Steve for reading and re-organizing such moveable pieces; here's to a Pentangle, Cynthia; a note, also, to the drooling monster, please eat the flies, and Heidi, stay well, as they say in Swaziland! Time to go... and remember, *recherche* is not exactly the same as *outré*. Don't forget to get your stuff to me by Thursday, the week before publication if you want it in the **TRI!** Tah, tah, Erzsi.