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Same Old Song

BY AMY TAUBIN

ARIA. Directed by Bill Bryden, Nicolas Roeg, Charles Sturridge, Jean-Luc Godard, Julien Temple, Bruce Beresford, Robert Altman, Franc Roddam, Ken Russell, and Derek Jarman. Produced by Don Boyd. Released by Miramax.

WORLD GONE WILD. Directed by Lee H. Katzin. Produced by Robert L. Rosen. Released by Lorimar. At the Cineplex Odeon Warner.

A conception whose time had come and gone even before the cameras rolled, *Aria* matches 10 directors (most of them fashionable) with opera composers of their choice (most of them grand). Producer Don Boyd, whose *inspiration* was undoubtedly Malcolm McLaren's *Madame Butterfly* music vid, offered the participants an opportunity to *transgress* the codes of MTV by employing classical music, totally naked women, and a deadly serious tone. Nevertheless, two cuts from this schmaltzy soft-core LP deserve to be reissued as singles.

Franc Roddam (*Quadrophenia*) sets a teenage suicide pact consummated in a Las Vegas motel room to the *Liebestod* (Leontyne Price recording). Sounds embarrassing? It easily could have been, and it's our awareness of the risk involved, as well as Roddam's handle on teenage angst, that makes this the most nervily brilliant bit of filmmaking since *Blue Velvet*. (Cinematographer Frederick Elmes is responsible for the look here as well.)

A car speeds through Death Valley. Inside, the lovers—a pair of achingly handsome California kids (Bridget Fonda and James Mathers). Cut to the Las Vegas strip—Caesar's, White Castle, slot machine widows walking slightly slo-mo. (Roddam, or maybe Elmes, has been reading Venturi.) The car passes a wedding chapel—the bride and groom, a couple of three-time losers. Cut to the motel room. Neon light streaming through the window flickers blue and gold on the bed. The kids look as if they are really making love, not just exhibiting lust for the camera. Cut to a hand smashing a glass. Cut to an translucent white bathroom, the couple embracing in the tub. Then the precisely timed shock—close-up, glass



ANNIE LEBOVITZ

Drifting through Roddam's *Aria* bars

penetrating wrist. They hang on to each other as life goes down the drain. Cut to a car speeding away through the desert.

Jean-Luc Godard sets Lully's *Armide* in a bodybuilding gym—all soft blues and yellows with hits of primaries and glinting steel. In this update, *Armide* (who killed the only warrior immune to her seductions) is a nubile gym attendant mooning over a muscle-bound grotesque; he never stops pumping, even when she's wiping the sweat from his brow. The heroine's equally lithe friend has a knife. She wants her to murder the dude. The young women spend most of their time crouched on the floor, cleaning up after the men. They allay their anxiety by compulsively fondling their own breasts, whipping off their clothes, and whirling around the room. Unlike the bodybuilders, the camera is riveted by the sight of pubic hair. Godard takes every opportunity to break the nonaction with *tableaux vivants* of bodies entwined. Since *Passion*, Godard's been appropriating the history of the nude in Western art as a way of justifying his own voyeurism. In this throwaway, he easily beats the Helmut Newtons at their own game. I admit to being titillated. I hope this frees us both to go on to bigger things.