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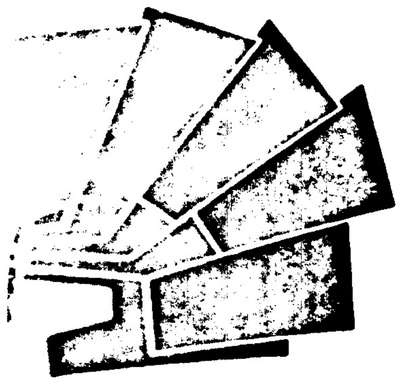

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NEW SWISS FILMS

February 5 -- February 28, 1975

Saturday, February 15 (4:30, 8:40)

LA SALAMANDRE. 1971. Alain Tanner. Produced by Svociné (Geneva), Alain Tanner, Gabriel Auer. Screenplay by Tanner in collaboration with John Berger. Photographed by Renato Berta and Sandro Bernardoni. Music by Patrick Moraz and The Main Horse Airline. Sound by Marcel Sommerer, Gerard Rhône. Edited by Brigitte Sousselier and Marc Blavet. With: Bulle Ogier (Rosemonde), Jean-Luc Bideau (Pierre), Jacques Denis (Paul. In French; English subtitles. A New Yorker Films release. 125 minutes.

"A sensational new Swiss film? It sounds like a contradiction in terms. Who ever heard of the Swiss cinema? But LA SALAMANDRE, by a 42-year-old Swiss film critic turned director named Alain Tanner, is the most interesting foreign film of 1972 and vaults both Tanner and his fascinating star, Bulle Ogier, into the front ranks of European filmmaking." -- Paul D. Zimmerman, Newsweek, May 15, 1972

"I first saw LA SALAMANDRE last March, when it was the best work in a fine - and greatly underpatronized - series at The Museum of Modern Art called 'New Directors/ New Films.'...Most of the films in the Museum's series expressed the necessary advanced political opinions. (LA SALAMANDRE also expresses certain advanced political opinions; and Rosemonde, who mentions a general pleasure in hearing windows being broken, must be taught that there are some windows to break and some to be left alone.) But there was none of the rigid collectivism that had been in the air a few years ago and that seemed so likely to infect young cinema...It isn't a very cohesive plot; and much of its charm, and some of its meaning, depends upon its proceeding by way of a series of gentle non sequiturs. One reason for the slight critical oversell that has accompanied the New York premiere of LA SALAMANDRE may be that it is a dangerously appealing movie from which to extract the beauties. Appealing especially because they are interestingly unusual, rather than obviously beautiful, beauties - like the fascination of Bulle Ogier's haunted face, the casual imperturbability of Jean-Luc Bideau and Jacques Denis as Pierre and Paul, or the generally unscenic scenery of the gray wet countryside.

I think that Tanner means his discontinuities rather seriously, however, and that he is by no means unambivalent toward any of his characters - especially toward his heroine. The salamander of the film's title is a mythical being that survives fire. But a salamander, as any kid can tell you, is also a lizard that it is hard to spot or put your finger on. And a perpetual elusiveness seems more a part of Rosemonde's character than any excess of passionate intensity...This is moviemaking in lovely style. Not yet great moviemaking - but in its own terms sufficient, surprising, unsettling, refreshing for once to the active mind rather than the complacent senses."
-- Roger Greenspun, The New York Times, Sunday, August 27, 1972

Alain Tanner was born in Geneva in 1929. In 1951, he founded the University Film Society. After navigating in many parts of the world, he returned to Geneva and wrote, but he departed for London in 1955. In London, the new climate of the "free-cinema" movement stimulated him; it also represented a different way of thinking.

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His encounter with Lindsay Anderson was essential to his life. Thanks to Anderson he worked for two years at the British Film Institute. Claude Goretta, another young Swiss, joined him in London and together they made, for the British Film Institute, NICE TIME (20 minutes, 1956-57). In 1958, Tanner worked on six documen for the BBC "Living With Dangers" series. In 1959-60, he worked as an assistant o some commercial films in Paris, learned nothing, and returned to Switzerland where he made a 27-minute short, RAMUZ, PASSAGE D'UN POETE, in 1961, and a sponsored fil in polyvision, L'ECOLE, in 1962. Before CHARLES MORT OU VIF? (1969), Tanner made an 80-minute documentary, LES APPRENTIS (1963-64), a 50-minute commissioned film o the city in India conceived by Le Corbusier, titled UNE VILLE A CHANDIGARH (1966), and numerous documentaries for Swiss Television (often co-produced with French TV) His recent films include CHARLES MORT OU VIF?, LE RETOUR D'AFRIQUE (1973), and LE MILIEU DU MONDE (1974). Tanner has written for many film magazines since 1958, and in 1962, with four friends, he founded the Association of Swiss Filmmakers.

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