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HAVING WONDERFUL TIME

"...There's a new pacing, a delicious touch of the bawdy and a sort of rowdy raucousness to Truffaut's picaresque tale..."

One of the fascinations of the film industry (or art, if you'd rather) is where the fun lies. We cynics, professional or avocational moviegoers, are prone to feel from time to time (i.e. seasonal slump-time) that we're seeing more movies and enjoying them less. Is the fun behind the camera? Alas, we've learned that the more we hear of jolly good times on set or location the less we ought to expect from the finished product. (Remember when reports of the delights of working on *Catch-22* were as numerous as the current ones on Maria Schneider's sex life?)

But there's that rare and wonderful film that does transmit a feeling of joy, a pure pleasure syndrome, the feeling that the moviemaker had a hell of a good time doing his thing and gave everyone else a share of the mood. Of course those professional myth-smashers or academic cinéastes can or will come along with gossip and/or scholarship to prove that it was all psychopathy and slavery behind the scenes and a real rotten drag for all involved, despite our voyeuristic euphoria—but who cares? Bergman's pleasure in his comedies, Fellini's absolute reveling in *The Clowns* or *Roma* and Truffaut's sheer love of film per se in *Jules and Jim* and his love of the people therein in so many of his films are ours to cherish.

I don't know—and really don't want to know—what went on during the making of Truffaut's *Une Belle Fille Comme Moi*, which is slated to follow *Traffic* at the 68th St. Playhouse as **Such a Gorgeous Kid Like Me**. Sufficient unto my enjoyment thereof is the glowing good humor with which Truffaut takes on and tells his delicious little tale of the bad girl who makes good and the good guy who gets taken. At the heart there's a black comedy, replete with unpleasant social truths and ironies, but the artist has set it aglitter with gem-like performances and a sheer delight in all the rotters and pretenders and bluenoses brought low and the gorgeous kid who does the bringing. He's made the ungentle art of murder a razzle-dazzle gamble by a gal who's a born survivor—and the wide-eyed, he warns, had best beware.

There's a new pacing, a delicious touch of the bawdy and a sort of rowdy raucousness to this picaresque tale that somehow seems un-Truffaut-like, a change from the gentle humanism of *Stolen Kisses* and *Bed and Board*, although indeed his compassion for the young and foolish duds of this life is again apparent here. There's a touch of Philippe de Broca, or early Louis Malle to enhance it, and a mature playfulness, a twinkle in the expert camera eye to supplement the lucent style that is Truffaut's alone.

The source is a novel of the same name by Henry Farrell, author of *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* and co-author of *Hush . . . Hush, Sweet Charlotte*. The screenplay is by Jean-Loup Dabadie, who co-authored Claude Sautet's *Les Choses de la Vie* and has written for de Broca as well, with Truffaut, as always, co-scenarist. Their story is of a serious young sociologist working on a dissertation on "Criminal Women," interviewing a young prisoner who is only too willing to tell him exactly what he wants to know—replete with deprived childhood, perverted adolescence, a triple-scoop of all the abuses a poor put-upon creature has to endure out in the wicked world. The prisoner is, of course, that gorgeous kid, a brunette and bulging sexpot with the morals of a guttersnipe and a vocabulary to match. She is also a lady willing to gamble, making what she terms "fate bets" when the chips are down. If mean old daddy up in the loft noticed that she'd removed the ladder, she'd have earned just another kick in the backside; if he didn't—well, things couldn't be worse in the orphanage. If her skinflint mother-in-law didn't happen to go poking in the old oven with the rigged door—if her money-demanding lover and her dreary husband didn't inhale enough rat poison—if the pious exterminator didn't close his eyes as part of their joint suicide pact . . . ah well, nothing ventured, nothing gained by a girl who just wants to be a singing banjo-playing star.

The sociologist, of course, loves every minute of her total recall: deprived of love, no wonder she felt the need for appreciation and certainly there is that relationship between sex and music, for isn't a banjo a phallic symbol? He is enthralled by this walking textbook case, who fixes his tie and flatters him and tickles his ego as few textbook cases have. Let a guard tell him that the boys back home regarded her with the affection usually accorded a "public utility," let his fond young assistant note that she has heard of "emotionally insecure alley cats"—to no avail. He's hooked—and up comes the delightful explanation of why the thesis on "Criminal Women," announced for publication a year ago, has not appeared in the bookstores.

Illustrated by chas b slackman

The lusty busty quite irresistible gorgeous kid, Camille, is played with infectious gusto by Bernadette Lafont, who appeared in Truffaut's first featurette, *Les Mistons*. Bristling with self-righteousness and blunt language, Miss Lafont puts forth a strong case for the put-upon woman of today, coping with a sex-mad wheelchair-bound husband ("Divorce a man with 27 fractures? I got too much class!"); a sex-mad nightclub singer (who needs the soundtrack of the Indianapolis Speedway for encouragement at intimate moments) in the hopes of a career; an ambulance-chasing lawyer who demands sex and money to pursue her husband's accident claims, and a high-minded exterminator who plies her with money and high-mindedness and philosophic explanations of his profession. It's all enough to set a sociologist's thesis—and his lust—aglow. The sociologist, with tape recorder and heart in hand, is depicted with all the empathetic understanding Truffaut brings to that special breed of bumbling young idiot and portrayed with charming naïveté by André Dussollier, a drama student making his debut herein. Another Paris Conservatory student, Anne Kreis, does an equally attractive portrait as his typist who is left, alas, holding her carbons and her unrequited love.

Truffaut fills his comedy with sparkling characterizations by seasoned professionals as well. Charles Denner is superb as the mealy-mouthed but dedicated exterminator; Claude Brasseur is slimily callous as the sleazy lawyer; Guy Marchand is fine as the nightclub entertainer only too anxious to provide the heroine with that "loving contact with reality" the sociologist recommends, and Phillipe Leotard is a perfect blend of shrewd oafishness as the husband Camille's too classy to ditch. And quite irresistibly, taking a variety of professionals and fools to pieces as he goes, Truffaut takes a poke at moviemen as well, with a vital piece of evidence in Camille's case found in the hands of a small boy, an ardent filmmaker who won't show his movie in rushes before it's edited.

Bright, sunny, with the emphasis on a heroine who remains single in purpose and pure in dedication, if nothing else, Truffaut essentially gives us a feeling of having shared in his own good time—while providing pleasures aplenty for us to savor on our own.