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ANXIETY (INQUIETUDE)

(DRAMA — PORTUGUESE-FRENCH-
SPANISH-SWISS)

A Madragoa Filmes (Portugal)/Gemini Films (France)/Wanda Films (Spain)/Light Night (Switzerland) co-production. (International sales, Gemini, Paris.) Produced by Paulo Branco.

Directed, written by Manoel de Oliveira. Camera (color), Renato Berta; editor, Valerie Loiseleux; production/costume designer, Isabel Branco; sound, Philippe Morel, Jean-Francois Auger; associate producers, Jose Maria Morales, Patricia Plattner; assistant director, Jose Maria Vaz da Silva. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (noncompeting), May 19, 1998. Running time: 110 MIN.

THE IMMORTALS

Based on a play by Helder Prista Monteiro.

Father Jose Pinto
Son Luis Miguel Cintra
Marta Isabel Ruth

SUZY

Based on a story by Antonio Patricio.

Suzy Leonor Silveira
Gabi Rita Blanco
Him Diogo Doria
Friend David Cardoso

MOTHER OF A RIVER

Based on a story by Agustina Bessa-Luis.

Mother Irene Papas
Fisalina Leonor Baldaque
Fiance Ricardo Trepa

By DEBORAH YOUNG

Anxiety" marks yet another turning point in the career of Portuguese maestro Manoel de Oliveira — a three-part omnibus of stories vaguely linked together by the theme of death. A work certain to be of interest to Oliveira's arthouse and festival followings, it is probably too quirky and full of longueurs to be a good intro for new viewers. Without major actors (except for a cameo by Irene Papas), auds will have little to grasp onto apart from the director's reputation.

Still turning out intellectually engaging work at age 89, Oliveira is easy to interpolate into the first episode, "The Immortals." A father who is 80 (the passionate, irascible Jose Pinto) and his son who is 60 (laid-back Luis-Miguel Cintra), both famous doctors, argue about whether or not it is better to die before getting senile. Lensing and dialogue revel in the tale's origins as a stage play by Helder Prista Monteiro, but witty as Pinto and Cintra make the nonstop chatter, the story is terribly, if deliberately, static. A clever ending lightens the mood and

provides a surprise transition to "Suzy," set in the 1930s.

Suzy (Leonor Silveira) and her friend (Rita Blanco) are beautiful young courtesans in the Oporto demimonde. A languidly handsome dandy (Diogo Doria) falls hard for Suzy, whom he sees as a sensitive soul, an exploited woman and a real pro in bed. Just before she dies on the operating table, Doria makes her see that her life has offered her everything but happiness. Story by Antonio Patricio is somewhere between Dumas and Proust, while Oliveira's favorite muse, Silveira, lends Suzy a bewitching melancholy and sophisticated, fatalistic perversion.

To console Doria's character, his friend (David Cardoso) tells him the legend of Fisalina (Leonor Baldaque), a girl from a remote mountain village who pays a visit to the "mother of a river" (Papas).

Based on a short story by Oliveira's regular scripter, Agustina Bessa-Luis, "Mother of a River," is an eerie fable about the possibility — and personal price — of eternal life. In addition to Papas' intense cameo, it finally gives Renato Berta a chance to do some interesting camerawork in the night scenes of black-cloaked villagers carrying torches and chasing the gold-fingered "witch" out of town.

No strong connecting thread winds through this trio of stories, unless it is an obsession with the encroaching end. From the comic-tragic anxiety of the old doctor who cries, "We're half of what we were!" to the concluding fantasy of merging with nature, "Anxiety" keeps death at a finely literate distance, a good place from which to contemplate it.

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