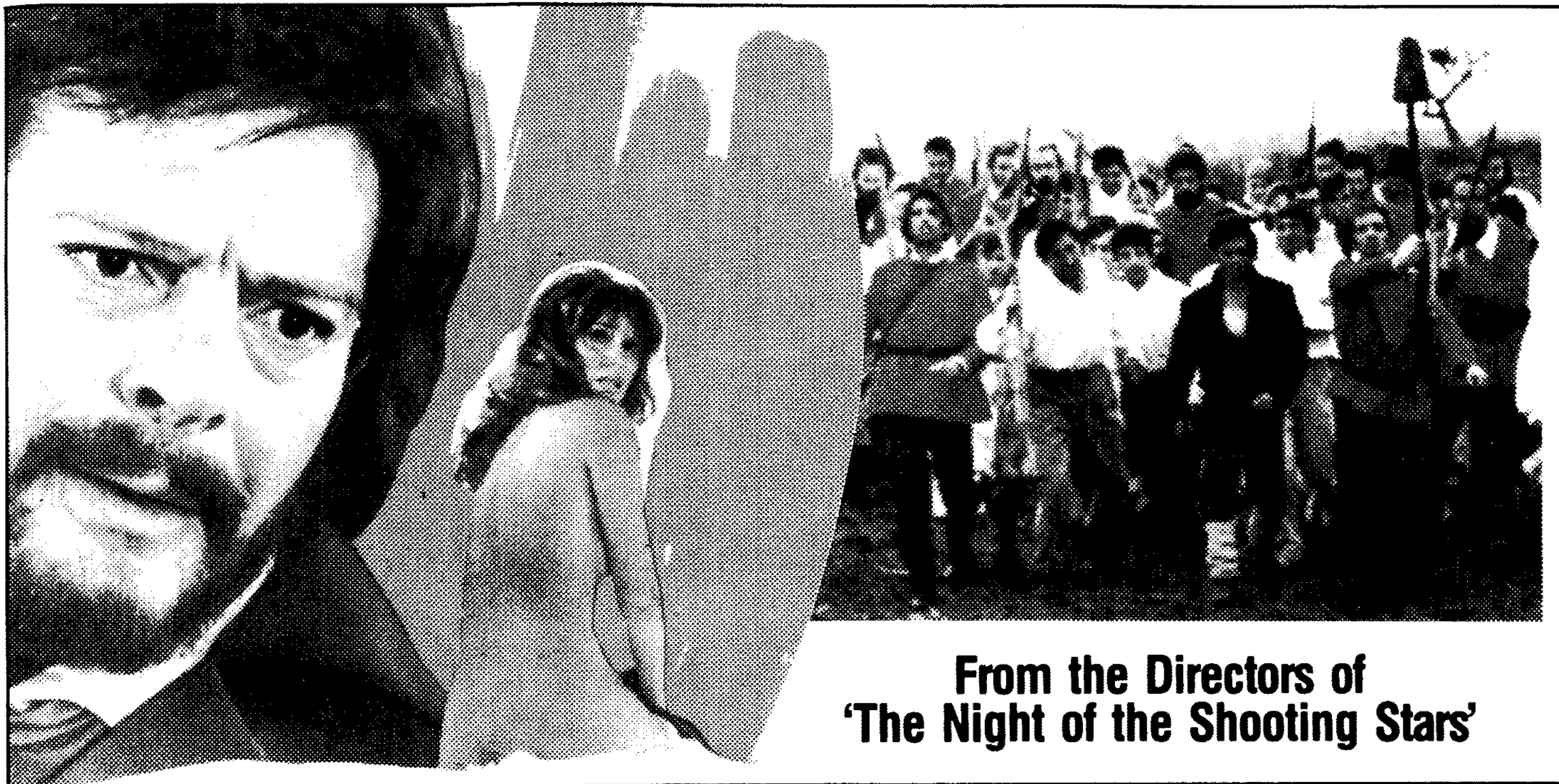


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From the Directors of
'The Night of the Shooting Stars'

ALLONSANFAN

It will be interesting to see if those critics who loved the Taviani brothers' *Night of the Shooting Stars* muster much excitement for the team's 1974 *Allonsanfan*, a brilliant political costume movie now at the Public Theater. Lean, dodgy, and stylized, *Allonsanfan* (which takes its title from a mispronunciation of the first two words of the "Marseillaise") is an altogether more self-contained (read "formal"), less crowd-pleasing (that is, "humanistic") affair than the Tavianis' subsequent films, but it represents the summit of their particular Brecht-Rossellini synthesis.

Although set in 1816, *Allonsanfan* is as much about the period when it was made as it is an evocation of post-Napoleonic Italy. The film concerns the failure of political commitment and makes a sardonic comment on the role of the bourgeoisie in the world revolution. Marcello Mastroianni plays a disillusioned Jacobin aristocrat, released from prison and hoping to return to his country estate (or alternately, start a new life in America). But, although he's come to regard his erstwhile comrades—a quasi-Masonic revolutionary sect called the Brotherhood—as a pack of mooncalves and fanatics, he proves comically unable to disengage himself from his flailing past.

No sooner has Mastroianni decided to

trust his family and relaxed into rural gentility, when his Hungarian ex-mistress (Lea Massari) shows up, her garter belt bulging with booty raised for the Brotherhood. Half of them are massacred on the grounds of his estate—and he still has to deal with the problem of his and Massari's six-year-old son. Once Mastroianni has debased himself frightening the boy to keep him in line, anything is possible. He talks a comrade into making a suicide pact, then seduces the dead man's lover (Mimsy Farmer)—in the midst of some sort of carnival—to insure her silence. Were *Allonsanfan* not so detached it would be deliriously manic. The movie's best joke, however, is its dreamlike sense of overdetermination. Unreliable as Mastroianni is, his comrades perversely refuse to abandon him. Indeed, they even pack the unconscious traitor up and take him along on a foredoomed expedition to foment revolution somewhere in the south.

Mixing elements of opera and farce, *Allonsanfan* is as full of reversals and disguise as an 18th century novel—and about as naturalistic. The Tavianis make bravura use of theatrical lighting and bold color schemes, employing long shots and high angles to distance the action while allowing the supremely expressive Mastroianni full rein. Most impressive

though is the Ennio Morricone score—achingly precise and discordantly modern—which erupts into the action, providing historical forces (as well as characters) with their own themes and the film with a backbeat of lush sensuality. *Allonsanfan* is tough but soulful.

Sailing south, the Brotherhood—a name underscored by the group's amusingly transpersonal mind (they might be Donald Duck's three nephews, so attuned are their responses)—huddle together on deck, their red jackets glowing against an unnaturally blue crepuscular sky, singing the "Marseillaise." Alienated as Mastroianni is (upon regaining consciousness, he imagines himself en route to America), the old radical can be seen shedding tears. It's a superb moment, even if cut-aways to Mastroianni's abandoned son and Farmer suggest that the revolution isn't the only thing on his mind.

Although Mastroianni betrays the Brotherhood at least three times, he still winds up being shot as a revolutionary in one more exercise in futility. Misleadingly informed that the local peasants have joined forces with the Brotherhood, Mastroianni has a vision of Jacobins and farmers dancing a spastic *saltarello*. The image is grotesque, majestic, and poignant—just like the film.

—J. Hoberman, Village Voice