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Le Dernier Metro

(The Last Subway) *Metro*

Variety (FRENCH-COLOR)

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Paris, Sept. 5.

Gaumont release of Films du Carrosse/SEDIF/TF1/SFP co-production. Stars Catherine Deneuve, Gerard Depardieu, Jean Poiret. Directed by Francois Truffaut. Screenplay, Truffaut, Suzanne Schiffman, Jean-Claude Grumberg; camera (Fujicolor), Nestor Almendros; art director, Jean-Pierre Kohut-Svelko; sound, Michel Laurent; music, Georges Delerue; costumes, Lisele Roos; editors, Martine Barraque, Marie-Aimee Debril, Jean-Francois Gire. Reviewed at the Ponthieu screening room, Paris, Sept. 3, 1980. Running time: 130 MINS.

Marion Steiner Catherine Deneuve
Bernard Granger Gerard Depardieu
Jean-Loup Cottins Jean Poiret
Lucas Steiner Heinz Bennent
Arlette Guillaume Andrea Ferreol
Germaine Fabre Paulette Dubost
Nadine Marsac Sabine Haudepin
Daxiat Jean-Louis Richard
Raymond Maurice Risch

Francois Truffaut's 19th feature is his richest, most satisfying film in years and could earn him the joint critical-commercial success that has been eluding him of late. On its most undemanding level it is adroit dramatic entertainment, gracefully romantic and uplifting. But it is also a fascinating chronicle of Paris life under the German Occupation — its daily terror, material deprivation, opportunism, cowardice, denunciation, as well as its quiet heroism and unexpected moments of laughter — as such will be one of the most-discussed films of the year.

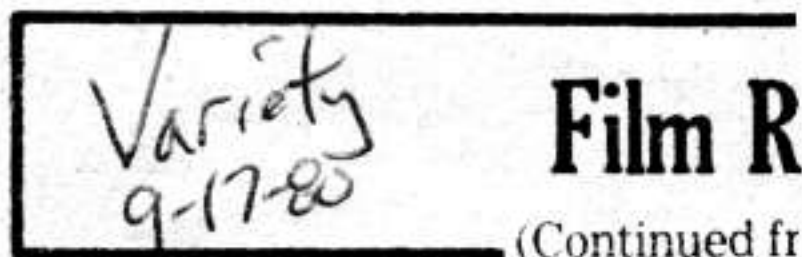
"Le Denier Metro" follows the difficulties of a small Paris theatre struggling to stay open under the constraints of the Nazi occupants. In a way, it's "Day for Night" recast for the theatre, once again examining the sycophantic interplay of art and reality, this time in a specific historical context. And it's no less a subtle valentine to Truffaut's mentor, Jean Renoir, who celebrated the theatre in all its literal and metaphoric expression throughout his work.

Truffaut has been inspired foremost by the autobiography of Jean Marais, which provides an import-

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Le Dernier Metro

ant compendium of theatrical life in Paris during the War. Many of Marais' recollections are deftly woven into the script.

Cinematically, Truffaut's model is not Renoir, but Lubitsch. The latter's "To Be Or Not To Be" (1942) is a film that Truffaut adores, and the core of his script, a romantic triangle, reflects the mainspring of Lubitsch's classic.

An exiled German Jewish director (Heinz Bennent) has gone into hiding in the cellar of the Paris theatre he had been running prior to the Nazi invasion. His non-Jewish wife (Catherine Deneuve) has taken over management of the troupe, which is rehearsing a Norwegian play, the reception of which will decide the company's future.

Deneuve must maneuver among the internal problems of the company, the emotional difficulties with her husband, whom she visits secretly every evening, and the impending menace in form of a virulently anti-semitic drama critic who prowls around the theatre when he is not busy spewing hate in his column or on the radio. Further emotional complications arise with the arrival of a new actor (Gerard Depardieu), a compulsive womanizer who moonlights as a Resistance fighter.

Truffaut, aided by his usual collaborator Suzanne Schiffman, and dramatist Jean-Claude Grumberg, have successfully wrestled with a mountain of factual material and compressed it into a memorable gallery of composite personages and incidents. The first part of the film threatens to sacrifice character to anecdote, but once it finds its equilibrium, the narrative flows smoothly, with its full weight of emotion.

Truffaut's direction is uncharacteristically restrained, his mise-en-scene almost classical in its invisible camerawork and sober editing. Inevitably, he indulges his penchant for filmic references (which include an opening scene paraphrasing, aptly enough, the first scene in "Children of Paradise," and a silhouette lifted right out of "Rules of the Game"), but rarely have they seemed more appropriate.

The acting is fine down the line, with Deneuve giving one of her most accomplished performances, particularly in her scenes with Bennent, forlorn and appealing, and Depardieu, who displays vigorous range. Jean Poiret (author of "La Cage Aux Folles"), Andrea Ferreol, Sabine Haudepin, Paulette Dubost and Maurice Risch, as the other members of the theatre, all register strongly.

But film's top performance comes from a new face: Jean-Louis Richard, whose portrayal of the fascist critic is so finely drawn and nuanced that one is almost moved by this essentially odious personality.

Nestor Almendros is behind the camera, so it seems superfluous to add that the film looks lovely. The other technical credits are excellent. —Len.