

## Document Citation

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# AVENTURE MALGACHE.

## BON VOYAGE

(FRENCH-BRITISH-B&W)

A Milestone Films release of two 1944 dramatic shorts produced by the British Ministry of Information. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. "Bon Voyage" screenplay by J.O.C. Orton, based on an original idea by Arthur Calder-Marshall; "Aventure Malgache" screenplay uncredited. Camera (B&W), Gunther Krampf; art direction, Charles Gilbert. Reviewed March 5, 1993, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. (In Berlin Film Festival.) Running times: "Aventure Malgache" 31 MIN.; "Bon Voyage" 26 MIN.

With: John Blythe ("Bon Voyage") and the Moliere Players.

**"Aventure Malgache" and "Bon Voyage," two French-language shorts directed by Alfred Hitchcock for the British Ministry of Information during World War II, have been unearthed by the British Film Institute. The Hitchcock name and the dramas' legendary status among his devotees may be enough to ensure some theatrical exposure, but pics seem best suited for homevideo.**

Without the Hitchcock imprimatur, it's debatable whether anyone (except, possibly, World War II historians) would think "Bon Voyage" worth all the bother. A briskly paced, heavily ironic drama about a downed RAF pilot smuggled out of Nazi-occupied France, pic resembles nothing so much as an above-par episode of '50s TV anthology series.

English actor John Blythe plays John Dougall, an officer being interrogated by the Free French in England after his escape. In subjective flashbacks, he recalls the heroic efforts of a fellow escapee, a Polish sergeant named Godowski, to guide him to contacts with the underground.

Trouble is, Godowsky was actually a Gestapo agent using Dougall to smoke out Resistance fighters. As soon as Dougall learns this, Hitchcock segues into a rerun of his journey, this time from the viewpoint of the Gestapo agent. Events and dialogue that previously seemed innocuous turn out to have darker alternative meanings.

It's tempting to theorize that Hitchcock's experiments with perspective here were a kind of warm-up exercise for "Vertigo." More likely is that Hitchcock was motivated more by patriotism than by experimentation.

The other short, "Aventure Malgache" was intended to be

French Resistance Hitchcock noticed during research for "Bon Voyage." But the British propagandists, preferring a more upbeat tone, shelved "Malgache" soon after its completion. Even so, pic reportedly received some theatrical exposure in France before all prints were rounded up.

Seen today, "Malgache" seems a minor but entertaining slice of Hitchcockian cheekiness. Again, most of "Malgache" is flashbacks, this time narrated by Clarousse, who recalls his days as a barrister — and his nights as a Resistance agent — in Madagascar.

After Petain's order for capitulation to the Nazi juggernaut, Clarousse helps organize an underground railway to help Resistance fighters escape. Unfortunately, Clarousse is hounded by a corrupt police chief and inadvertently betrayed. The Vichy government-run court condemns him to five years. He serves his time cheerfully, hiding a radio in his alarm clock so he can keep up with Resistance activity.

Eventually, Clarousse is rescued, and Madagascar is liberated by British forces. In the pic's funniest scene, the police chief tries to swim with the shifting political tide by taking down his office portrait of Petain, and replacing it with a portrait of — no kidding — Queen Victoria.

Like "Bon Voyage," "Aventure Malgache" is little more than a footnote to Hitchcock's career. But, then again, even footnotes to careers so remarkable are never without interest.

Blythe is the only member of the two casts identified by name either onscreen or in the production records. Other members of the cast are introduced collectively as members of the Moliere Players, a theatrical troupe formed by French actors resettled in England during the war who, fearing reprisals against friends and relatives still in Occupied France, asked that their identities not be revealed.

Tech credits, especially the first-rate black and white cinematography by former UFA cameraman Gunther Krampf, are above and beyond the call of duty. Film historian Tom Milne's English subtitles are everything they should be. — Joe Leydon