

Document Citation

Title	A Parisian streetcar of desire
Author(s)	Stephen Fried
Source	<i>Good Times</i>
Date	1980 Nov 4
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Le dernier métro (The last metro), Truffaut, François, 1980

Truffaut's 'Metro'

A Parisian Streetcar of Desire

The Last Metro

Drama. Directed by Francois Truffaut. Written by Francois Truffaut, Suzanne Schiffman and Jean-Claude Grumberg. Director of Photography, Nestor Almendros. Starring Catherine Deneuve, Gerard Depardieu and Jean Polret. Not released in U.S. Not rated.

By STEPHEN FRIED

It is surprising that Francois Truffaut, whose style is considered so unique by Americans, is considered "conventional" by his compatriots in France. Witness the already widely-noted comments that Godard made at the NY Film Festival, practically calling Truffaut's films "junk."

In *The Last Metro*, Truffaut has once again chosen the path least taken. This stunning and engaging film of a theater struggling to make it in France during the height of the German occupation takes probably the most human view of the tyranny of that war yet, and in so doing give us a perspective that is thoroughly new—a believable group of people fighting hard times while not being used metaphorically. The film is not heavy, as many films about WWII are, but in its own way it makes a more powerful statement. The net effect is somewhere between Lubitsch's hilarious *To Be or Not to Be* (the Jack Benny classis that spawned TV's *Hogan's Heroes*) and *Casablanca*.

The Last Metro is the story of Marion Steiner (Catherine Deneuve), who has taken over her husband's theater since he fled the country, saving himself from the Germans' grasp. She hires Bernard Granger (Gerard Depardieu), inept womanizer extraordinaire and brilliant stage presence to star in her new show, which is being directed by Jean-Loup (Jean Polret) since Lucas Steiner's (Heinz Bennet) departure has also left a space in the director's chair. In reality, however, Lucas is hiding in the bowels of the theater, sending up direction changes with his wife at night after listening to the day's rehearsals through a hole in the boiler.

Although there obviously is already much adversity in the conditions in France, the group must also contend with Daxiat (Jean-Louis Richard) the critic turned Nazi sympathizer who gives the group lots of grief while for some reason continuing to say that Lucas Steiner was the only Jew who should have been allowed to remain in the theater business.

But there is much more to *Last Metro* than a *Those Lips, Those Eyes Goes to Occupied France*. Intertwined in this plot of a struggling theater group are love triangles upon love triangles. Granger starts out making the moves on Arlette (Andrea Ferreol) and cannot understand why she spurns him. In fact, he makes advances to every woman in the production save one—Marion Steiner. Arlette, however, is really a lesbian, preferring another of the show's female stars while waiting for Marion to succumb to her woos. Eventually Marion, Granger and Lucas become a little work-ethic love triangle, with the business of acting and directing keeping their situation alive.

Truffaut has taken this story, based on many true events of the times, and woven it into something quite different—a WWII love and adventure tale that is simultaneously light and heavy. He has given us a fresh perspective on this time, while at the same time reinforcing our feelings about Nazism.

Even the look of the film is different from other color films about the war. Truffaut and brilliant cinematographer Nestor Almendros decided to try a little-used film to get a "period" feel from the colors. It succeeds beautifully.

Although the style of *Last Metro* represents a departure from other films about this period, it should certainly not surprise fans of Truffaut. As he usually does, the French director has managed to cull the most charming, believable, human characters and emotions out of even one of the most insufferable times in modern history. And by combining that talent with a firm yet subtle conviction about the period, Truffaut has made a strong nationalistic stand and a solid political statement, without running us over all the familiar material again.



tracking shots

Star Drought?

By STEPHEN FRIED

Everyone who likes foreign films has their own explanation for why they haven't caught on big in this country. There are hundreds of reasons, ranging from our inherent distaste for subtitles to all the elitist aspects of "art" theaters and their patrons.

I have long believed that one major reason for America's lack of support for all but a handful of foreign-language pictures is the lack of recognizable stars who can consistently draw audiences.

Not that European and Third World films haven't had their stars (although certainly the directors have always been more important than the players). Unquestionably, Marcello Mastroianni, Giancarlo Giannini, Dominique Sanda, Klaas Kinski and Jean-Paul Belmondo are giants in foreign-language film, but not one of these, or scores of other biggies, has been able to draw crowds in American theaters simply with his or her presence in a film, like so many American stars can.

Although this trend was altered somewhat by "the great Laura Antonelli scare of 1979," it could not be sustained. Antonelli was unable to reverse the trend simply because most of her older films (the ones that came over by the boatloads after *The Innocent* and others took off) aren't very good, bordering on soft-core pornography. Not only that, but they threatened the very nature of the foreign film market by leading Americans to believe that all foreign films were sex farces.

Part of this star problem is the method of foreign film distribution. The masses (us) don't decide which films will come into this country. Nor do we decide when they will come—Pasolini's "new" film *Arabian Nights* is dated 1973. We don't consistently see the work of the actors and actresses growing—we're lucky if we see the films of one director in any order.

If the New York Film Festival did anything—and it must have done something—it signalled that the star problem may have been resolved, at least for the time being. For it seems that France, whose cinema has captured America's fascination since their New Wave began at the end of the fifties, may have produced some bankable stars, some recognizable faces.

The two dominant faces are Gerard Depardieu and Isabelle Huppert, who appeared in two films each at the festival. (Huppert's first American film, Michael Cimino's *Heaven's Gate*, is