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Notti Bianche

(White Nights)

(ITALIAN)

Venice, Sept. 17.

Rank release of a Vides (Franco Grimaldi) production. Stars Maria Schell, Marcello Mastroianni, Jean Marais; features Clara Calamai. Directed by Luchino Visconti. Screenplay, Visconti, Suso Cecchi D'Amico from story by Dostolewski; camera, Giuseppe Rotunno; music, Nino Rota; editor, Mario Searndrel. At Venice Film Festival. Running time, 105 MINS.
Nafalla Maria Schell
Mario Marcello Mastroianni
Tenant Jean Marais
Prostitute Clara Calamai

Split reactions noted here at the Venice Fest will probably characterize this film's career abroad although some markets promise well. Others must be sold via the Marla Schell name for marquee bait as well as a prestige pitch. General U. S. chances appear mild. It won second prize at this festival.

Ambitious attempt to update a Dostolewski tale by the same name doesn't quite come off, never quite reaching necessary credibility. It remains a remarkable intellectual exercise while never really moving the spectator as it should. At times using an interesting flashback technique, this tells the tale of a woman who befriends the upstairs boarder, eventually falling in love with him. He has to leave, but promises to return in exactly a year, setting a meeting place. Meanwhile, girl is approached by another man, who likewise falls for her, offering her the advantage of presence, though she still believes and waits for her promised man. Just as she is about to give up and accept, her old flame turns up once more, and she runs off with him.

Crucial flaw in this film is the portrayal of the boarder by Jean Marais in a stiff, unappealing manner which belies her great love for him. Opposite, Marcello Mastroianni makes her occasional love into a very sympathetic, appealing role, playing it to the hilt in a fine performance. Maria Schell in the key role is very mannered, but manages her usual audience-winning moments.

Others in cast, especially an uncredited old lady playing Maria Schell's grandma, back the key trio ably. Luchino Visconti's direction wavers somewhat at the halfway mark, slowing down the action, though otherwise doing a creditable job with a near-impossible subject. There is no half-way acceptance of his picture: either one believes it, and thinks it's great, or one does not, and the whole pic suffers from it.

A special nod must go to Mario Chiari's giant stage reproduction of a town quarter, an elaborate and functional production effort which deliberately gives the pic its semi-theatrical backdrop and flavor. Giuseppe Rotunno's lensing is also extremely effective in capturing the Nordic, fogbound quality of the story. Other production credits are excellent.

Hawk.