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Why-Tanner's not Piccoli?

MARBLE REVIEW

(Middle Of The World) Touch And Go

by Linda Coleman

Alain Tanner's latest offering, *THE MIDDLE OF THE WORLD*, for all its pretensions to seriousness, is rendered frivolous by Tanner's heavy hand. In delightful contrast, Philippe de Broca's as yet unreleased (in the States) *TOUCH AND GO* (*LA POUDRE D'ESCAM-PETTE*), doesn't pretend to be more than just for fun and succeeds on that basis. De Broca gives us a lot of laugh-provoking incongruities, a little satire, a little romance, and even a bit of blood, all with exquisite engineering. Tanner mistakes manipulation for artistic control. He frames a love affair amidst bourgeois politicking and frames these against occasional car-radio news blurbs on the international political scene and flashes of tranquil countryside. The landscapes and backdrop politics are busy-ness. Tanner encumbers his basic love story with dreadful, dogmatic, irrelevant commentary.

The Tanner film, romance with an unusually engaging beginning, is, thanks to our pedantic narrator, set up as an illustration of the tenor of the time. The world has reached a watershed period with respect to politics, a time of "normalization," during which governments conduct their interactions smoothly so long as they are not called upon to make concessions to one another. Coincidentally, the physical setting is the supposed geographical center of the world, and a watershed. Moreover, we are



Michel Piccoli and Michael York share a bath in *TOUCH AND GO*.

instructed by our narrator that each person is a center unto himself. Having had the scene set as precisely as possible in time and place, we proceed to view the short-lived (we're forewarned) affair of Paul (Philippe Leotard) and Adriana (Olimpia Carlisi).

Paul wants Adriana to quit her job and travel with him on his business trips and Adriana wants Paul to acknowledge and explore dimensions of her personality. Since neither will concede to the other's wish/need, are we to assume that their relationship literally mirrors the relationships among nations? If it does, the point is trite. If not, why not scrap the heavy political pseudo-insights and develop the characters?

Neither Tanner nor De Broca has developed a particularly remarkable film. De Broca is playful; Tanner is ponderous. De Broca's action is carefully clipped, as his English officer (Michael York), along with the wife of the Swiss Consul in Tunisia, Marlene Jobert, and a local crooked-looking gentleman of leisure, Michel Piccoli escape across the Sahara. His timing is right, his actors suited to their parts. This improbable odyssey is the focus of the film and all else supports it. Tanner's action is convoluted, his intent confusing. If you enjoyed *KING OF HEARTS*, you'll enjoy *TOUCH AND GO*. Hopefully, it will be seen soon on a general release. If you enjoyed *LE SALAMANDRE*, you won't necessarily enjoy *MIDDLE OF THE WORLD*.