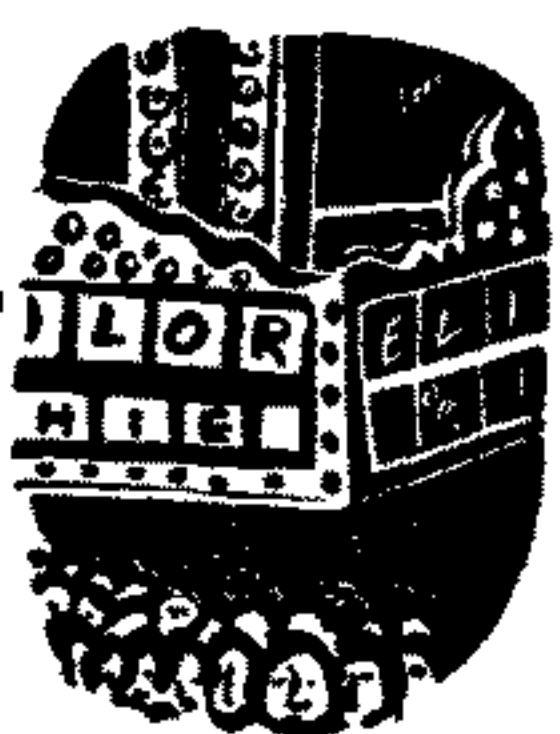


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SR GOES TO THE MOVIES

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Hollis Alpert

The Young Frenchmen

IN FRANCE, SERIOUS young men take movies seriously, and a good many of them aspire to be film directors. Such ambitions in our own country generally lead to frustration or to the making of TV commercials, but in France, where a subsidy program exists for movie production, the youngsters have been getting their chance, and making impressive use of it. The current expression, "the new wave," has been used to describe what is not necessarily a movement, but a group of new and often young filmmakers who, in the past eighteen months, have made several striking films. Their ages range from twenty-three to forty-seven; names with the most lustre are those of Louis Malle, Claude Chabrol, Marcel Camus, François Truffaut, and Edouard Molinaro. Malle's "The Lovers" has already been reported on in this column, and a fall opening is also planned for Claude Chabrol's "The Cousins." Chabrol wrote, directed, and produced the movie. He is twenty-eight, made an earlier do-it-yourself film called "Le Beau Serge," and seems to have learned most of his film technique as a movie critic, of all things!

I'm not sure that "The Cousins" is an unqualified masterpiece, but it is uncommonly interesting, and at times brilliant in its capturing of atmosphere and its fixing of contemporary Parisian types. It tells of two cousins, Charles and Paul, both law students, one earnest, hard-working, sensitive; the other clever, superficial, and more than a little decadent. Charles is from the country, and shares his cousin's city apartment during his last year of law study. What goes on in that apartment, decorated according to the more sophisticated boy's taste with African masks, a collection of old firearms, and a snake in a bottle (among other interesting objects), is what mainly makes up the story. Paul's friends, amoral, happy-go-crazy, stream through the apartment on a round of parties, while Charles, disappointed in his love for a girl his cousin has taken on for a mistress, studies away, a not-so-eager beaver, but a beaver nevertheless, dutifully writing letters to his mother in his spare moments. The irony is sometimes a little heavy, especially when Paul gets through his examinations without studying while Charles fails, but the climax is shocking and sobering.

Among the more fascinating types

in Paul's crowd are Clovis, a marginal, parasitic fellow of thirty who has apparently been unable to forget his university days, and Florence, a sweetly pretty girl of twenty, who has confused sensation with love, and who finds herself responding physically to Paul, but "in love" with Charles. The girls in the crowd tend to gravitate from one young man to another, and the males are equally gravitational, although now and then one of them gets "serious," and embarrasses the others. Whether such atmospheres exist in Paris or anywhere else, and whether it is essentially "beat" is not so much the point as the fact that Chabrol has caught a contemporary mood here and with the good taste not to judge it too moralistically. In other words, his eye and his sense for detail is—and there is no other word for it—extraordinary. The apartment is recognizable whether or not one has ever been in such rooms, the girls are exactly so, the amusements are frenetic and futile, and Chabrol has caught the attitudes of his young people, "fixed" them without being satirical. The subtitles are wanting in capturing all the flavor of the dialogue, but the acting is superb. Jean-Claude Brialy as Paul has the best of the roles and makes a haunting figure out of the decadent young student. Gerard Blain as the country cousin is perfect, and Juliette Mayniel is not only pretty, but looks like a genuine girl, as she attempts to sort out her tangled feelings and slowly lapses into her pattern of promiscuity. Chabrol's cutting seems arbitrary on occasion, and now and then one catches a slight lapse into pretentiousness, but there is not the slightest doubt that he has broken through the film barrier and has come to grips sensitively and evocatively with a mood of our times.

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