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VARIETY

Shadows

Powerful, provocative improvised drama imaginatively reined by John Cassavetes. Brings fresh, raw, naturalistic approach to U.S. filmdom. Might kick off cycle of similar homemade efforts.

Lion International release of Maurice McEndree-Seymour Cassel production. With Ben Carruthers, Lella Goldoni, Hugh Herd, Rupert Crosse, Tony Ray, Tom Allen, Dennis Sallas, Davey Jones, David Pokitillow. Directed by John Cassavetes. Camera, Erich Kollmar; editor, McEndree; sets, Randy Liles, Bob Reeh; music, Charlie Mingus, Shifi Hadi; sound, Jay Crecco; asst. director, Al Giglio. Reviewed at Paramount Studio Theatre, Feb. 6, '61. Running time, 81 MINS.

Benny Ben Carruthers
Lella Lella Goldoni
Hugh Hugh Herd
Rupert Rupert Crosse
Tony Tony Ray
Tom Tom Allen
Dennis Dennis Sallas
Davey Davey Jones
David David Pokitillow

"Shadows" is a "significant" motion picture. If it creates the stir domestically that it did overseas, where it walked off with awards and critical superlatives, it may well be the standard bearer for a radical swerve in U.S.-manufactured screen entertainment. And there is every reason to believe it will be a smash success in this country's art theatres, for this is a film that tangles and tingles with life.

Produced by Maurice McEndree and Seymour Cassel via the most modest of cinema expenditures (reportedly \$40,000), released by Lion International and ticketed for domestic bow March 21 at New York's Embassy Theatre, the release establishes John Cassavetes, already well-known as actor and occasional television director ("Johnny Staccato"), as a gifted, inventive, perceptive director.

In "Shadows," Cassavetes has accomplished something all too often forgotten, disregarded or unattained by many of his veteran colleagues. He has succeeded in utilizing the motion picture as it rarely has been utilized since the era of the silent screen putting drama in visual terms, telling the story in pictures, thus reducing the improvised dialog of his actors to secondary status. There are moments, in fact the film's most vital and arresting passages, when the actors do not say a word, yet all that has to be said is said through the expressions in their eyes, producing the enchanting effect of a montage of unforgettable snapshots.

The technical quality of "Shadows" is crude. At times the audience can barely hear or even see what is going on, but one can always feel the impulse of excitement generated by the picture. Its very crudeness captures the spontaneity, the unpredictability, the raw, unruly pattern of human behavior.

But what separates, what ultimately distinguishes "Shadows" from several other recent, abortive screen attempts at dramatic improvisation is the substance of its characters. The underlying drama is pegged on the tragedy of a pair of fair-skinned Negroes, free souls adrift in the never-never no-man's land between the overlapping white and colored social jungles of New York. One, the girl, has an ill-fated love affair with an un-

aware white boy, abruptly terminated when he is confronted by her dark-skinned brother in her apartment, the film's most remarkable, and unforgettable, scene. His sincere, but clumsy attempts at apology for dashing off in shocked confusion produce another noteworthy passage.

Other story, the boy's, is told in a somewhat lighter vein as he romps about with his white buddies in search of stimulation, only to emerge physically beaten (in a very natural fistfight sequence) but spiritually unbowed in spite of the social chaos and confusion that is to be his lot.

There are a number of sharp, vivid performances in spite of the acute uncertainty engendered by improvisation. The actors all have their momentary lapses, but they have done an exceptional job and, in concert, the effect is quite overpowering.

Among those who excite special attention are Ben Carruthers (the boy), Lella Goldoni (the girl), Tony Ray (her white lover), Hugh Herd (their brother), Rupert Crosse (his manager), Tom Allen and Dennis Sallas (Ben's buddies). An important factor in the exciting chemistry of this film is the improvised music by Charlie Mingus and Shifi Hadi, effectively split among a moody sax and a driving string and tympany. Tube.