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GODARD
FESTIVAL

SURF THEATRE

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In 1960, while Americans were applauding themselves for their bloated biblicals, Jean-Luc Godard was showing the French how exciting American films once were with a spare replay of a Monogram quickie. The French already knew. *Cahiers du Cinema* had been promoting Hitchcock, Ford and Hawks since 1951, the Cinematheque Francaise was making their films very available, and the *politique des auteurs* was by then the rallying cry of any self-respecting cineaste.

The rest of Europe was still in the grey era of gloomy neo-realism and ponderous symbolism. To the average American foreign film and art film were synonymous. They tantalized him with frankness and tortured him with technique. Joe American was already avoiding his local art house, but when Godard and Belmondo blasted their way into the cinema of the sixties they were playing to his French counterpart. A new cinema language had evolved, and Americans had somehow neglected to learn it.

BREATHLESS was an international success and an instant classic, but it was Godard's last American success. The flood gates were open and the Nouvelle Vague was pouring in, but Godard's films stayed at home, caught in the shallows of critical confusion and audience apathy.

Godard's troubles were not all abroad. His second film, **LE PETIT SOLDAT**, ran aground on the shoals of French censorship for its uncompromising portrait of French police methods in the Algerian war. Governmental sensitivity withheld the film for over two years, and Godard's adulterous **MARRIED WOMAN**, made in 1964, required a title change from **THE** to **A** to rescue it from a similar fate. Despite Godard's penchant for toying with the official image of France, his talent for making films swiftly and cheaply gave intelligent French producers the necessary courage to chance his particular brand of popular art. However, the distributors, the functionaries as Godard calls them, were as usual impassive to everything but the call of immediate profit, and for the next five years American exposure to Godard was absurdly haphazard.

Godard's next film, **A WOMAN IS A WOMAN** (1961) did not appear in the United States until 1964. **MY LIFE TO LIVE** (1962) had arrived in 1963 and was imperiously dismissed by Bosley Crowther of the New York Times. In both of these films Godard broke every known rule of orthodox cinema. His theatrical devices and flagrant borrowing from silent films in **MY LIFE TO LIVE** shocked the purists, and the musical comedy style of **A WOMAN IS A WOMAN** cost him his political fans. While Godard was freeing cinema from the strangle hold of its own conventions, he was alienating American critics who didn't like getting kicked in their preconceptions, but by reversing his methods Godard was showing that self-contradiction is the core of artistic freedom.

For a filmmaker dedicated to dialectic, critical objec-

tivity is the end as well as the means. Godard's film career is an outgrowth of his polemical period with *Cahiers du Cinema*, whose basic position at that time elevated the director above any individual work. While many mediocre films achieved a perhaps exaggerated new significance during the first heady rush of re-appraisal, Godard could not ignore the responsibility such license imposed. Through the unclouded eye of Raoul Coutard's camera his critical ideas became a visual rearrangement of an environment that was vanishing before the overaccustomed eyes of its inhabitants. Since cinema was a part of that environment, everything was permissible, except, of course, the obvious and the trite. The only restriction was internal logic.

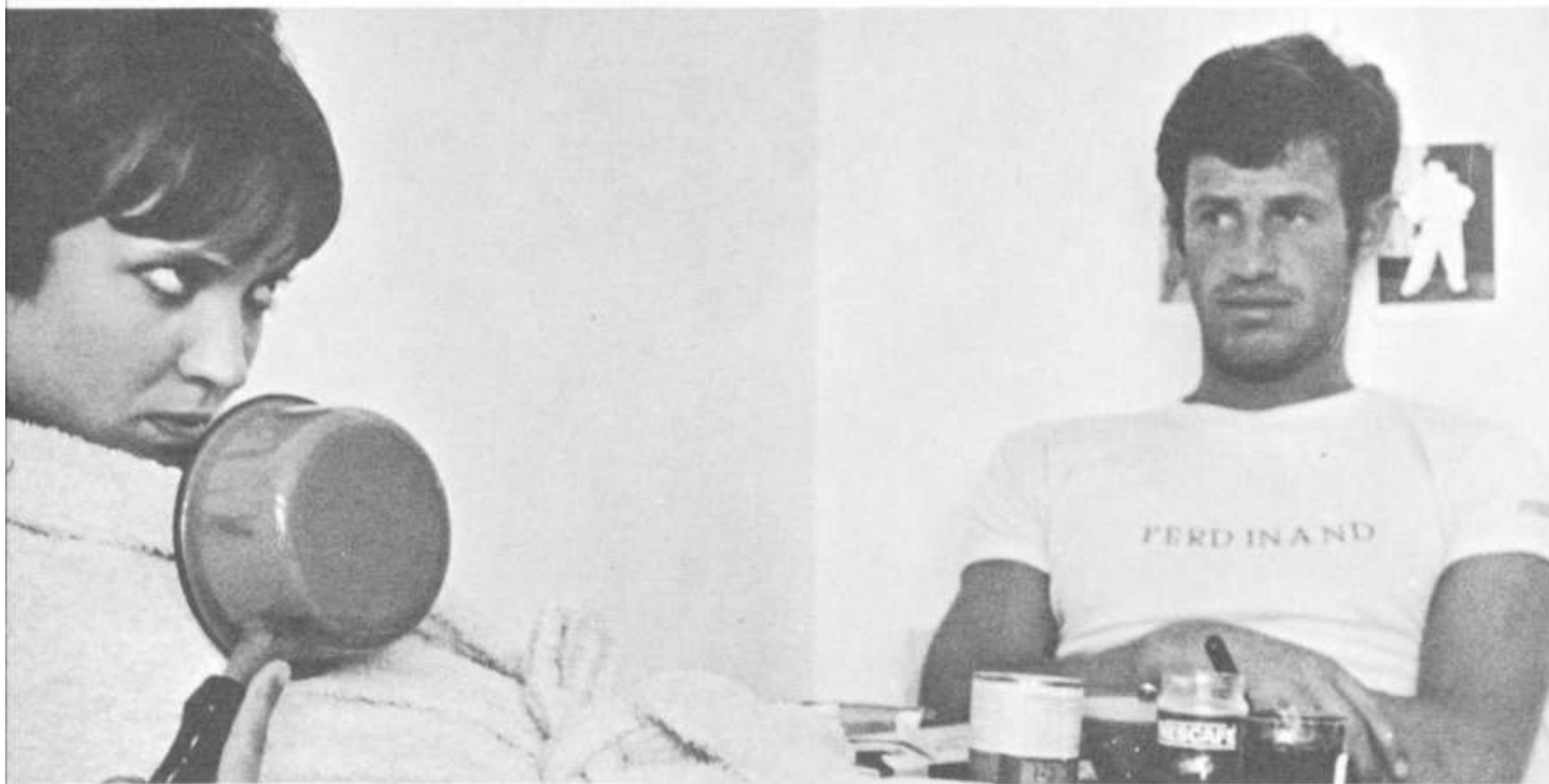
Godard's 1963 film **LES CARABINIERS** did not get a theatrical showing in this country until 1968. **PIERROT LE FOU**, made in 1965, has only recently been freed from the litigations of competing companies, a senseless tangle that has permanently choked off many foreign films.

Although the five films made after 1965, including his most recent—**WEEKEND**—are being dispatched more swiftly, invariably they fail to land with the tide of events upon which they comment. History is partly to blame, creating itself faster than it can be recorded or understood, and Godard's earlier work, the epitome of its period, is now effaced by his latest. Not all of Godard is lost in the rapid shuffle of ideas. The tenderness of his sensibility is always present, a transparent screen between the deadpan heroics and the unsentimentality of his *mise en scene*. The play of his mind is still seductive, but much of his wit is lost on the uninitiated, along with the electric shock of a new idea.

Until 1968 Godard remained a cult figure in this country, but his political activism, his spring tour of American colleges, and the timely release of **LA CHINOISE** has ironically promoted him to hero among large numbers of leftwing students, who have seen only a few of his films. Americans have been forced to catch up with Godard the hard way, in retrospective lumps, but even the challenge of a retrospective cannot replace the excitements of immediacy. The retrospective does, however, offer a more complete look at the work of an artist who views his own films as mere fragments.

Since Godard requires people to think, his appeal here might have been limited in any case to the few Americans who do not exhibit hostility toward ideas. America may not like Godard but it needs him. His impending Paris of **ALPHAVILLE** may be our Chicago of now, where pointless ritual, performed by mindless robots, is the excuse for unrestrained brutality. Godard is wide awake in a society that has slept too long. With his revolutionary cinema he offers to the growing community of American outsiders a viable alternative to the stupefaction of bourgeois banality. — MILTON MIRON.





LES CARABINIERS

Stupidity not war is the theme of **LES CARABINIERS**. The mercenaries Ulysses and Michelangelo are bought for a few counterfeit promises by their king and rewarded for their savage loyalty with betrayal and death. They are no less innocent than their king, only less clever. Godard, like Bertolt Brecht in *Mother Courage*, uses war as a backdrop against which the masque of greed is grimly danced. Violence is disconnected from the drama, becoming meaningless, non-casual. For the soldiers it is only an inconvenient interruption in their dogged quest for spoils. Ultimately war is boring, and brutality becomes its own excuse. For Godard the horror is not the destruction but the repetition which can rob any act of its power to affront. (1963)

"*Les Carabiniers* is probably the simplest study of war in the history of narrative cinema. But it is also for me the most potent of war films: a challenge to patriots and non-patriots alike, and missable by neither. It eats into the mind like acid. If this is not a masterpiece, it will do until one comes along." —

KENNETH TYNAN

COMPANION FEATURES:

MY LIFE TO LIVE
MASCULINE - FEMININE
CONTEMPT
A MARRIED WOMAN
A WOMAN IS A WOMAN

LE PETIT SOLDAT

Godard made **LE PETIT SOLDAT** in 1960 when violence was still shocking. It records the torturing of Bruno, a French counter-terrorist, by Algerian agents in Geneva from a documentary distance. It was this graphic, unemotional approach that earned him the label of callous, but Godard was not so much interested in the act of torture as the indifference with which it was performed. When violence becomes routine, tenderness cannot exist, and for Godard life without tenderness is unbearable. In **ALPHAVILLE** habitual violence is ritualized to the point of invisibility. Violence as a concept along with love ceased to exist.

In **LE PETIT SOLDAT** a human being can still measure the consequences of his action, and Bruno, although he does not believe in his cause, cannot betray it. He is still master of himself, and even torture cannot force him to be what he is not. The casual courage with which he flings himself through a chance window reduces death to the incidental. Like Laszlo in **BREATHLESS** Bruno can gamble his life on the flip of a coin, but he cannot be compelled to fear. To the outsider life and danger are the same thing, and the absence of choice is intolerable.

COMPANION FEATURES:

ALPHAVILLE and
BAND OF OUTSIDERS

LA CHINOISE

LA CHINOISE is perhaps Godard's most perfect film. It is certainly his most important. Not only does it exemplify his commitment to revolutionary art, it is his treatise on the art of revolution, and, indeed, the film anticipated the spring uprisings in Paris. With delicate candor Godard probes the interrelationships of five French students banded together for one summer to practice the teachings of *Mao*. Their world is a charming game, but the stakes are high. By the end of the summer one comrade has been expelled for revisionism, and another has taken his own life. Guillaume (Jean-Pierre Leaud), the actor of the group, is caught up in the futile madness of door-to-door guerilla theater, and their leader, Veronique (Anne Wiazemsky), while carrying out her first act of terror, kills the wrong man. The atom of their revolution had split without shattering the world.

Despite Godard's stylistic detachment the film is almost a totem of the student left. Jean-Pierre Leaud's progression from student in *Masculine/Feminine* to Maoist in *La Chinoise* provides a powerful parallel of identity for politically militant youth, which even the strictest theoretical discipline cannot eliminate. If *Masculine/Feminine* was the outcry of an alienated generation, then *La Chinoise* has become the anthem of their activism. With **LA CHINOISE** the program will include an exclusive showing of films of the French student uprisings, obtained from private sources and banned from showing in France. In addition to scenes of the demonstrations, the films contain an interview with Daniel Cohn-Bendit.

WEEKEND

Fresh from the recent Berlin and New York Film Festivals (it is also scheduled for the San Francisco Festival as we go to press), **WEEK-END** is Godard's most recent film and his most savage denunciation of contemporary bourgeois society. In its violent depiction of a weekend traffic jam the film starts on a witty and comic tone that turns lethal as the visual metaphor becomes a devastating comment on civilization's decadence and decline. Among other things, Godard is saying that we are killing each other with our possessions. Combining documentary, fantasy and fiction, **WEEK-END** poses an apocalyptic and terrifying vision of the near-future, if not the present, following a depraved bourgeois couple through a nightmare odyssey that includes capture by a primitive tribe of hippy revolutionaries who—literally—feed off their class enemies. There are extremes of violence and gore, but there is also humor, all of which may destine **WEEK-END** to be Godard's biggest commercial success. With Mireille Darc, Jean Yanne, Jean-Pierre Leaud. Color.

ACCOMPANYING GODARD FEATURETTE TO BE ANNOUNCED.

PIERROT LE FOU

The romantic elan of **PIERROT LE FOU**, Godard's love song to the politics of madness and the poetry of despair, is the heartbreaking counterpoint to the vast emptiness, the glacial silences, that surround its people. Driven by love and clowning at death, Jean-Paul Belmondo's Ferdinand/Pierrot is the apotheosis of Godard's outsiders. With the irresistible Marianna (Anna Karina) he escapes the slow death of the noxious middle-class existence only to become enmeshed in a hazardous world of smuggling and gangsters, a world of betrayal, treachery and murder. Using the joyful colors of Coutard's magnificent seascapes, Godard creates a world too beautiful not to love and too cruel to endure, a paradox embodied by Karina's consummate beauty. In many ways Godard's freest film, **PIERROT LE FOU** has generally been acclaimed his most moving. Nominated for an Academy Award and recipient of the Young Critics Prize, Venice. (1965)

COMPANION FEATURES:

BREATHLESS
AND POSSIBLE REPEATS OF
OTHER GODARD FEATURES
FROM THE RETROSPECTIVE

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Oct. 14 - 15: Les Carabiniers and A Woman Is a Woman
Oct. 16 - 19: Le Petit Soldat and Alphaville
Oct. 20 - 24: Le Petit Soldat and Band of Outsiders
Oct. 25 - Nov. 5: La Chinoise and Films of French Student Revolution
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