

JFK's 'Years of Lightning' Greatest Impact on Young?

It took an Act of Congress to make it possible for the American moviegoer to see "Years of Lightning, Day of Drums," the United States Information Agency propaganda film on the two years and ten months of President Kennedy's administration.

But when it finally opened in New York recently, a strong recommendation from the office of the archdiocesan superintendent of schools indicated that the film is expected to have its greatest impact on young people rather than on votes in Election Year.

"Highly recommended" in the "Bulletin" from the archdiocesan superintendent's office, the film drew additional comment last week from Brother Victor, F.S.C., director of secondary curriculum for the Archdiocese of New York.

"I think it's good for students of ages eleven and twelve and up to get an appreciation of peoples' commitment to each other, mankind to mankind," he said, referring to the film's emphasis on the Peace Corps and Alliance for Progress programs during the Kennedy administration.

USIA-made films are by law kept from distribution in the United States, since it is feared that the political party in power can use the films—designed to show the American way of life to foreign audiences—to political advantage if shown in America. But when "John F. Kennedy: Years of Lightning, Day of Drums" was screened in Washington in November, 1963, for an audience of film critics and dignitaries, a successful campaign was begun to make "Years of Lightning" an exception.

One of the leaders of the campaign, film critic Bosley Crowther of "The New York Times," observed:

"Everything that it shows—the activities of President Kennedy while he was alive and the sadly remembered incidents of his lying-in-state and funeral—has been seen by virtually everybody in the country on their television screens. But here it is assembled and presented so that it has the force of a magnificent epic poem."

Joining in support of the film, the National Catholic Office for Motion Pictures has stressed the picture's portrayal of American ideals for world peace and progress.

"The film justifies all the publicity and praise that it has received," the NCOMP said in its official newsletter. "It avoids using party labels and concentrates instead on the public acts of government. The New Frontier is described in six areas which have international implications: the Peace Corps, the Space Race, the Alliance for Progress, Civil Rights, Freedom and Peace. These are non-partisan matters upon which all men of good will are united. The Kennedy legend, built upon the solid rock of American ideals, is a universal inspiration."

Narrated by Gregory Peck ("John F. Kennedy is now silent and invisible, but so is peace and freedom, and so is love and faith, and so are memories and dreams"), "Years of Lightning" is being distributed without profit by Embassy Pictures, with all proceeds to go to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, which will be the only monument in the nation's capital to the late President.

The film was written, directed and musically scored by a 33-year-old independent filmmaker named Bruce Herschensohn, who had made a number of earlier films for the USIA. One of these was titled "The Five Cities of June," a documentary about five significant events that took place in June, 1963: the election of Pope Paul VI in Rome, the JFK visit to West Berlin ("Freedom has many difficulties and democracy is not perfect—but we have never had to put up a wall to keep our people in"), the integration of the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, the flight of the first woman cosmonaut, from Baikonur, Russia, and turmoil in a Vietnamese village named Bien-tuong.

Not only did the film win an Academy Award nomination, but one morning not long after it was completed, a Presidential assistant was telling USIA film director George Stevens Jr. that President Kennedy considered it "the best documentary film he had seen." It was the morning of November 22, 1963, and hours later Stevens was assigning Herschensohn to write and direct the film that has already been seen in 117 countries, and which has been translated into 49 languages.

The "Years of Lightning" film has also increased U.S. interest in the more than 300 feature films that are made each year by the USIA—films that range in content from explanation of U.S. policy in Vietnam to a display of modern agricultural techniques.

Among the 300 made this past year one titled "The Journey," an account of Pope Paul's trip to New York last October. It was recently reported playing in a theater in the Philippines—on a double-bill with "Thunderball."

(Catholic Press Features)

THEATER NEWS

IVANOV

by EUPHEMIA WYATT

Ivanov — "The good that I would do, I do not but the evil which I would not, that I do." This confession taken from St. Paul's letter to the Romans (VII-19) is the theme of "Ivanov," Chekov's first play.

Played and staged by Sir John Gielgud it won London's enthusiasm. Before he was nineteen, Chekov had begun to write for the comic papers in Moscow; a chore he continued as a medical student. By the time he was twenty-six he had published two collections of comic sketches and stories which proved so popular that he was able to abandon both medicine and comics for literature.

John Stuart Mill in his autobiography describes a four year nervous breakdown in which the most distressing symptom was his complete inability to feel any emotion. This Mill recognized as the spiritual sloth known as accidie in religious communities and he felt reborn when a French author's description of his feelings as an orphan brought a real tear to his eye.

Ivanov was already sunk in apathy or accidie when the play opens and reiterates St. Paul's self accusation. Not only has he wasted his intelligence, mortgaged his property and borrowed too much from his friends but after a passionate romance with the daughter of a Jewish neighbor, Ivanov finds himself bored with his ailing wife and leaves her alone every evening.

Even after the doctor has told him that Anna will die unless he sends her to the Crimea for some warmth and sunlight, Ivanov is callous enough to tell her that he no longer loves her. Then he brands himself as a brute but goes off to a party at the Lebedevs whose young daughter, Sasha, is in love with him.

When Anna persuades the doctor to take her also to the Lebedevs, she senses the situation and her heart is broken when Sasha is bold enough to ride over to Anna's house and invade Ivanov's study.

In Act II, Anna has been dead for a year and it is Sasha's wedding day. Even before the young doctor had denounced Ivanov before all the guests, Ivanov has told Sasha that he can't let her marry him. When she refuses to listen to him, he hurries out of the room. A shot is heard. Gielgud has shown good judgment in a quick final curtain.



President Kennedy on a naval inspection tour in "Years of Lightning."

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Portrays 'Moses'

CHARLTON HESTON portrays Moses in Cecil B. DeMille's production, "The Ten Commandments," to open May 27 at Loew's Rochester Theater.

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FILMS ABOUT TOWN

A MENTION OF MOTION PICTURES OF MORE THAN ROUTINE INTEREST

A Patch of Blue—"The basic plot of this picture comes straight out of the radio serials of the past. But the plot is not what makes this a film well worth anyone's time. It has two very authentic characteristics that rise well above the melodramatic contrivances of the story. Elizabeth Hartman does extraordinary things with the role of the blind girl who is victimized by her mother. She is sweetness and pathos and her surprise at anyone being interested in her tugs at the heart. Sidney Poitier is the stranger who befriends her and with whom she inevitably falls in love. It is especially good in this role which must come close to the actual feelings and position of the middle-class Negro in American society today."—Catholic Film Newsletter. (Cinema Theatre—Clinton Ave. S. at Goodman, weekdays 7:20, 9:25, Sat. and Sun. 1:45, 3:40, 5:35, 7:40, 9:50).

A Man Could Get Killed—"A merry, murderous treasure hunt for diamonds by spies and smugglers of a dozen nationalities provides the main driving force in this fast comedy adventure photographed around the Portuguese city of Lisbon. As directed by Ronald Neame and Cliff Owen, 'A Man Could Get Killed' moves at a good pace, with plenty of action and a fair share of humor provided for in the script by Richard L. Breen and T. E. B. Clarke."—Sy Oshinsky (Town Theatre, Jefferson Rd. opp. Southtown Plaza, GR 3-7660).

The Alphabet Murders—"One of Agatha Christie's most successful mysteries has been 'The A. B. C. Murders,' which places master French sleuth Hercule Poirot in London outguessing the best detectives Britain has to offer. And who plays this super-smart baldish Frenchman, who wears a highly cultivated moustache and tailored clothes to match? None other than comedian Tony Randall, cast in a role strikingly different from his past screen endeavors: as the smug, totally confident detective."—Sy Oshinsky. (Paramount Theatre, 38 Clinton Ave. N., 232-9830).

The Gospel According to St. Matthew—"A simple re-telling of the evangelist's account of Christ and his message. The film succeeds magnificently in placing the viewer within the Gospel events which are performed without epic exaggeration. The director, Pier Paolo Pasolini, has been completely faithful to the text while employing the visual imagination necessary for his realistic interpretation. Catholic Film News letter. (Stone-Ridge Theatre, Ridge Rd. W. at Stone Rd. MA 1-1550).

Harper—"As a gun-chewing gumshoe named Harper, Paul Newman is the highlight for Bogart country, that raw, rich 'Big Sleep' milieu; and this Warner Brothers revival of a grand old tradition gets him there in style. Based on Ross McDonald's 'The Moving Target,' and accelerated at a slick '60s' pace by Director Jack Smiley, Harper gives Newman his feistiest role since HUD."—(Lycell Theatre, Lyell Ave. at Mt. Read, GL 8-8523).

Ship of Fools—"Producer-director Stanley Kramer manages to adapt Katherine Ann Porter's mammoth allegorical novel about human weakness with a laudable amount of success. Best of all are the excellent performances by the large cast of stars which include Oscar Werner, Lee Marvin, Vivian Leigh, Heinz Rühmann, Simone Signoret, Jose Ferrer and Michael Dunn."—N. C. O. M. P. (Fine Arts, South Ave. at Gregor, daily 7:10, 9:45 except Sunday, 2, 4:30, 7:10, 9:45).

Sound of Music—"Few stories lend themselves so perfectly to the musical format. Song is essential to the Trepp story and the Rogers and Hammerstein collaboration has produced a first-rate score. Songs made popular by the stage version such as "Do-Re-Mi," "Edelweiss," "My Favorite Things," and "Climb Every Mountain," are given new feeling by their association with the picturesque images of the screen."—N. C. O. M. P. (Monroe Theatre, 583 Monroe Ave., matinee 2 p.m. Wed. and Sat., evenings at 8 p.m.).

IN THE WINGS
Dr. Zhivago (Riviera Theatre)
Stop The World I Want To Get Off (Regent Theatre).
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