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Next issue: Saturday 25th January
Deadline: 10am, Friday 24th January

Friday 24th JANUARY 2003 (1st Week)

COMING

SATURDAY 25 JANUARY 8.00pm, Sheldonian Theatre. Oxford Philomusica Orchestra: Bruch Violin concerto no. 1, Dvorak Symphony no. 8. Chloe Hanslip violin, Marios Papadopoulos conductor. Box Office 01865 305305

THE OXFORD SINFONIA. Saturday 25th January 8pm. Mendelssohn 'Italian' Symphony, Berlioz Nuits d'Été, Strauss Duet Concertino, Schoenberg Chamber Symphony. University Church. Tickets: £8(£5), 07775 904626 / on door

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CINEMA REVIEW

IRREVERSIBLE **SIBL** **COMING SOON to the Phoenix Picture House**

The first film of Gaspar Noe to screen in Britain was 'Seul Contre Tous' ('1 Stand Alone'), starring Philippe Nahon as 'the butcher', an angry, alienated man, whose acts of brutal transgression during the course of events included repeatedly kicking his heavily pregnant wife in the stomach, and having sex with his own retarded daughter. Nahon appears briefly again near the beginning of Noe's latest film, 'Irreversible', this time playing 'Philippe' (Nahon's own forename), a character whose story seems strangely similar to the butcher's. Lying stark naked on a bed, he confesses that he has slept with his daughter ('She was all I had, nothing left...'), only to be presented by his (fully clothed) companion with the consoling words 'There are no bad deeds, just deeds.'

Which is to say that there is a certain continuity in Noe's works, and although 'Irreversible' does not tell more of the butcher's tale - Nahon disappears entirely from the film after its first five minutes - it is still full of the shock tactics and visceral provocation for which Noe has become notorious. Mark my words: if you have a weak constitution, or a low tolerance for extremes of bludgeoning violence and savagery, then this film is definitely not for you. Or, as one character puts it in the heavily gendered language of the film: 'This is a man's business. No pussies allowed.' Which turns out to be true in more ways than one.

It would be malicious to summarise the plot in anything but the most general terms, as part of the film's entertainment is the interpretative puzzles which Noe poses for his viewers, but suffice to say that it is a 'fucking revenge B-movie' turned on its head, with a highly individual artistic vision. Each of its nine episodes (and a coda) is filmed in one long, queasily handheld take - even a punishing twelve-minute anal rape scene whose unflinching length will leave viewers feeling suitably violated.

These long shots, and the crude, colloquial dialogue (also by Noe), give the film a life-like, documentary feel, but in fact it is highly contrived, with even the most casual-sounding lines contributing to a tapestry of thematic threads running from one episode to the next. Noe is unquestionably very talented, but subtlety is not one of his strong points. By the time the film is over, you may well feel that you've had his ideas repeatedly rammed down your throat - or indeed up your arse.

The first few episodes of 'Irreversible' feature strictly men only (chiefly Vincent Cassel, Albert Dupontel and Jo Prestia), and its thematic concerns are male sexuality, male anger, and the terrible, destructive atrocities which men can commit when they follow their bestial instincts. Yet it ends not with men, but with a woman (Monica Bellucci), and a wistfully impossible glimpse into what the world might have been like if it had conformed instead to the fantasies of women.

Disturbing, challenging, and better than you might think.

Anton Bitel, 22.01.03



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'HUNGARIAN MUSIC: EUROPEAN OR NATIONAL?' / Oxford Hungarian Society / With Prof. László Dobossy, doyen of Hungarian Musicologists / 8pm / McGregor Room, Oriel College, Oriel Square, off High St.

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OXFORD HISTORY

Oxford in the War Years
Taken from The Oxford Calendar, 1986

1. Before World War 1, most North Oxford houses had iron railings set into their low walls, but these were removed to be melted down and recast as ships or guns.

2. In May 1940 men between 17 and 65 were asked to offer their services for the "Local Defence Volunteers". Uniforms and equipment were less forthcoming than volunteers and it may have been the ramshackle nature of their weaponry which earned the Barton Contingent the nickname "Look, Duck and Vanish Brigade". Barton was an enthusiastic group, which "stood down" in 1944 with some reluctance. The name "L.D.V." was later changed to the less bureaucratic "Home Guard".

3. By early 1939 the Government had decided that war was inevitable, and called up 18 year olds that spring, ostensibly for 6 months training. They didn't get out again until 1947, since those who joined up later were released earlier on grounds of greater age and therefore less employability - so some spent 8 years in the army.

4. Our ubiquitous Proprietor spent part of his war in Oxford, and gives his reminiscences: "At St Edwards' school the most obvious impact on school life, when rations were reduced to 1/4 of an ounce of butter and one egg per week, was a vast improvement in the food compared with peacetime. We had minced meat and sausages, which, while largely made with bread, you could actually cut with a sharp knife, whereas our sliced mutton before the war was as resistant as the plate itself.

"Military parades took place 2 half-days a week, and we were sometimes called upon in uniform to defend Oxford against practice incursions by Canadians pretending to be Germans. It was my mission on one occasion to defend the Woodstock Rd against the threat from the north, for which I was provided with one thunderflash. I spent the entire day standing in the doorway of a house on the corner of Osberton Rd, awaiting the tanks. I clutched my thunderflash tightly, and the sweat gradually dissolved it until by 4pm, when I was relieved (because the Canadians had gone down the Banbury Rd instead) there was nothing left to throw. Great equalisers, the Canadians. There was a wall off the Banbury Rd, dividing a private estate from a council estate. They went through it and it has never been rebuilt."

5. Your calendar artist, Mary Potter, spent her war years drawing maps for the Admiralty, who were camping out in the School of Geography. Mary was head of a cartography section in New College.

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OXFORD HISTORY

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