

ENTERTAINMENT

Sugar Cane Alley: Fantastic!

by Anne Burke

Sugar Cane Alley is a story about life. It is the story of a young black boy in Martinique in the 1930's, but it is also the story of a people struggling to find justice and freedom at the hands of their bosses, who were once their masters, in the cane fields of Martinique. It is, as well, a story about values and heritage, about relationships and love, about dreams and reality.

This marvelous film opened last week at the Carolina Theater in Durham. Directed by a young (28-year-old) woman with the unusual name of Euzhan Palcy, it combines skill, talent, and good taste to present a moving, unified story of life on the sugar cane plantations of this French-owned island. This is Ms. Palcy's first American showing, although she has directed one or two earlier films. Her talent in this field is evident throughout the film. Although the story is based on fiction, Palcy creates an aura of reality and authenticity centering on the life of young Jose Hassan, his grandmother, Ma Tine, and a small village of cane pickers. Filmed in French, with subtitles, the movie moves quickly and smoothly through nearly two hours of human drama.

Life in the village is seen through the eyes of young Jose as he narrates the opening scene with a glimpse of village life from a child's perspective. He is being raised by his grandmother, Ma Tine, who wants for her grandson what she and the others of the village will never have—a good education. She sees this as the one escape from the harsh, oppressive life of the cane fields.

A telling example of the extent of their poverty and her determination to have him rise above it is a rather humorous scene in which Ma Tine has brought home, at the end of a long day in the field, a scrap of newspaper for Jose to practice his reading. He pastes this sheet alongside

others that cover the walls of their crate-like hut while reading to her from the paper about the sizes and shapes of women's bosoms and how to develop them. As he drones on through the article, Ma Tine's expression indicates more pleasure at his reading ability than criticism of the content matter. It becomes clear from the beginning of the film that their's is a special and loving relationship.

Relationships are the heart of this movie, and Palcy manages to make each of them seem loving and strong without sliding into the sentimental. The characters are clearly defined, both in their roles and in their personalities, and how they relate to each other seems real and most convincing.

Palcy traces young Jose's friendship with the village elder, Medouze, through a heartwarming series of incidents in which Medouze passes on to the boy the history and heritage of their people. Their mutual affection and respect are obvious throughout. Jose is a blend of the old and new. He learns his people's story of bondage in Africa and their eventual freedom in Martinique through the old man's ritualistic sign-song chant. He also learns the traditions of herbal medicine and the respect for the cycles of life—birth and death—in his role of apprentice to his mentor, Medouze. Palcy portrays the intimacy of their relationship with many camera close-ups and through the use of natural lighting—soft fire glow, warm sunshine, and, at Medouze's death, mournful torchlight.

Jose is also obedient to the wishes of his grandmother and becomes an eager student in the local school, thereby earning the opportunity for higher education in the city of Fort-de-France. The ironic injustice of this opportunity is that the

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Sugar Cane Alley:

A true disappointment

By Stephanie L. Bush

Sugar Cane Alley tells the story of a young boy's efforts to escape the sugar cane fields of Martinique in order to receive an education. He is aided by his aging grandmother, whose tireless efforts to provide financial support add much to the content of the film.

So far, so good, at least the story "sounds" promising. I have to admit that I enjoyed the scenes that revealed the cultural characteristics of Martinique. It's just a shame that the rest of the film doesn't capture a viewer's attention. Of course that may be due to the subtitles that one has to read in order to understand the dialogue between the characters. I guess I've just never enjoyed viewing a film that makes me work to catch every word. Not only did it irritate me, but I found myself missing key objects in scenes, while I struggled to, literally, read the script as it flashed before me.

The director makes a feeble attempt to draw the audience into the action of the film by scenes of the field workers living in their dilapidated shacks and surrounded by filth. Here, Jose and his grandmother are introduced. We learn a little about Jose, but more about his grandmother's disposition. It is during the first few scenes that we learn of her determination to help Jose better himself by achieving an education.

The next phase of *Sugar Cane Alley* is centered on the pair's move to the city. There, Jose must pass several grueling exams in order to continue his education. Of course, he comes through with flying colors, and the film continues. (Much to my distress. By this time I had a headache

from reading subtitles).

The city is bustling with progress, which both excites and dismays Jose and his grandmother. On the heavy side, we are exposed to the problems the two face in adjusting to a modernized society. The director obviously doesn't want us to miss this, so we view the name "Albatross" on the boat that carries Jose and his grandmother to the city. Naturally, this name is symbolic of the struggles the two are about to face. I was insulted by having something so obvious literally spelled out for me. On the lighter side, the scenes of Jose and his grandmother in the city present the ageless problem of the older generation versus the younger. The grandmother finds the city a haven for moral decadence and remains loyal to her cultural heritage. Jose, at the other end of the scope, is filled with a desire to experience the new and exciting. Their views concerning education are just as diverse. The grandmother sees education as a means of escaping the sugar cane fields. Jose recognizes education as a chance to become part of the modern world.

Also centered on the struggles of the pair trying to make it in the city are two new themes: the first being personal sacrifices, and the second being the dominant white culture. The grandmother is able to capture the hearts of everyone through her tireless efforts to support herself and Jose. She becomes ill twice during the film, the second illness causing her death. The scenes of her death, contrary to the rest of the film, are quite moving. If a viewer is able to last until this

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Don Angle: A new angle harpsichord

by Susan Adkins

Don Angle, a renowned harpsichordist, provided an entertaining performance for the Meredith students, Monday, Oct. 1 at convocation.

Angle, originally from Pennsylvania attended the Berkley School of Music to study piano and was introduced to the harpsichord one summer. While studying the harpsichord he built a repertoire ranging from Classical to Jazz to Bluegrass.

The program for convocation was enhanced by Angle's warm and jovial personality. The music he played followed in line with his personality including such well-known songs as "Rockytop," "Foggy Mountain Breakdown" "The Entertainer" and "Stars and Stripes." Angle impressed the students with his unique rendition of "Old MacDonald's Farm" which was imaginative and entertaining.

Angle's performance was most enjoyable and we eagerly look forward to future visits from this warm and entertaining man.



DON ANGLE

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