

January 21, 1957

Screen: Genuinely Reverent Report; 'Albert Schweitzer' Shown at Guild Documentary Reveals Extraordinary Life Evolution of a Saint

By **BOSLEY CROWTHER**

THE life of Dr. Albert Schweitzer has been such an extraordinary one that we could hardly expect all facets of it to be revealed in an eighty-minute documentary film. But certainly the over-all pattern of human service and Christian example in the career of this great scholar, musician and physician is warmly illuminated in the color film, "Albert Schweitzer," which opened last night at the Guild.

Proceeds from the première and all profits from the film's exhibition will be for the benefit of the famous hospital that Dr. Schweitzer operates in French Equatorial Africa.

The venerable doctor himself is a participant in much of the film, which was photographed by Erica Anderson under the direction of Jerome Hill. Particularly is he in evidence in the latter half, given over to a fine account of a day at the Schweitzer hospital in the jungle village of Lambaréné.

A touching pictorial report is given of a visit by the aging doctor to the Alsatian village of Gunsbach, where he was reared as a boy, and a subsequent documentary flashback on the formative influences on the growth of the youth and the man. The film then takes up a detailed description of the jungle hospital, its physical layout and its African patients. This is the heart of it.

For it is in the candid views of Dr. Schweitzer and his small staff of dedicated Europeans working patiently with ailing natives—the piteous lepers, the aged and infirm—that the magnitude of his simple motto, "reverence for life," is most movingly conveyed.

Contrary to the general impression, Dr. Schweitzer's hospital is not a handsome, modern institution but a cluster of small buildings and primitive huts, crowded with nondescript patients in a fashion that appears indifferent to hygiene. This state is explained as consistent with the necessity of maintaining routines as near to the normal ways of life to the natives as is medically feasible. But vividly manifest is "the brotherhood of those who bear the mark of Cain." The gentle presence of the quiet old doctor among these people bespeaks his belief: "There are claims on his heart."

In the earlier phases of the picture, Mr. Hill and Miss Anderson, who made an excellent short about Grandma Moses a couple of years ago, reconstruct the early life of Dr. Schweitzer in the familiar documentary way of showing the buildings and places that were significant, while narration conveys the line of thought.

They have also used Dr. Schweitzer's grandson and his sister to re-enact little episodes of particular importance in which Dr. Schweitzer, as a boy, and his mother were involved. And in the opening sequences of Dr. Schweitzer's return to his old home, they have him playing Bach's Prelude in D major on the organ of the village church.

There is in these phases of the picture a reflective, poetic quality that prepares the viewer to appreciate the contrast that occurred in Dr. Schweitzer's career when he forsook the atmosphere of the study for the hard realities of his jungle hospital. The deeper psychological motivation of the humanitarian may not be clear, but the force of his philosophical convictions is potently put across in this film.

The personal narrative, written by Dr. Schweitzer himself, is spoken earnestly and beautifully by Fredric March. The commentary, written by Thomas Bruce Morgan, is spoken by Burgess Meredith. The musical score by Alec Wilder is tasteful and eloquent.

While the color tends to be uneven—a peril in filming a picture such as this—it betokens the spontaneity, simplicity and sincerity of a genuinely reverent report.

ALBERT SCHWEITZER, a biographical documentary feature produced and directed by Jerome Hill and filmed by Erica Anderson at Gunsbach, France, and Lambarene. French Equatorial Africa; narration written by Dr. Schweitzer and spoken by Fredric March; commentary written by Thomas Bruce Morgan and spoken by Burgess Meredith; presented by Mr. Hill and Miss Anderson. At the Guild Theatre.

Albert Schweitzer as a boy Phillip Eckart

Albert Schweitzer's mother Mrs. Adele Woytt

"MARGARET OF CORTONA" traces the evolution of a saint, a young thirteenth-century commoner whose virtue overcame fiendish human opposition. Produced by Scalera-Secolo Films in Italy, with a large cast and a lavish array of costumes and sets, this Crown Pictures release arrived Saturday at the Cameo.

It is a plodding, old-fashioned movie pageant, crammed with enough cloak-and-dagger intrigue and mayhem to fill out four such projects. The colorful, spacious period riggings are perfectly complemented by the florid conventionality of the music. Directed by Mario Bonnard and generally acted in like fashion, the picture gallops ponderously to a lofty conclusion as the heroine enters a nunnery.

What sticks in the viewer's mind, and sustains the film's spiritual sincerity, is the exquisite, haunting face of Maria Frau in the title role. Small wonder that her dignified goodness in a mare's nest of villainy and persecution later drew a canonization.

Beginning with her stepmother, her father and his cuckold, Signorina Frau, as a household slavey, is shamelessly abused. Soon a small army of persecutors, royal and peasant, hounds her across Italy, until her healing powers still a plague-ridden lynch mob. And the mounting crescendo of the shrill, fantastic charges against her—greed, adultery, murder and witchcraft—is enough to make anyone's blood run cold.

Signorina Frau is entirely innocent, and one look at her should have been sufficient evidence. Indirectly, the picture is a chilling treatise on human self-deception and an awful reminder that man belongs to the animal kingdom.

As her protective (and murdered) fiancé, and someone who does take a good look, Aldo Nicodemi is a relief from the rest of the tormenting pursuers. But the best and most fluent performance comes from Isa Pola, as, oddly enough, her stepmother, the chief intigator of Signorina Frau's misery. Now here is a real artist.

This old-fashioned, cumbersome and erratic tribute to saintly innocence can't hold a candle to the professionalism of Hollywood's "The Song of Bernadette." But Signorina Frau's countenance, with its aura of purity, is certainly one to remember.

Evolution of a Saint

MARGARET OF CORTONA, scenario by Cesare Vico Ludovici, Mario Bonnard, Edoardo Nulli and Nino Sclaro; directed by Signor Bonnard; produced by Scalera-Secolo Films and released by Crown Pictures.

Margaret Maria Frau

Lucia Isa Pola

Marco Mario Pisu

Arsenio Aldo Nicodemi

Tancredi Giovanni Grasso

Rinaldo Tino Buazzelli

Lapo Galeazzo Benti

December 31, 1973

Screen: Hill's 'Portrait':Charming Swan Song of Experimentalist

By HOWARD THOMPSON

Jerome Hill's "Film Portrait," a 90-minute recapitulation of his early years and subsequent career as a movie maker, is an utterly charming swan song by the screen experimentalist who died in 1972 at the age of 67. The film, using old home movie footage, covers his childhood in a happy, wealthy Minnesota home and then shifts to his later avant-garde filming.

There is an endearing freshness to all this. A director, composer and painter, Mr. Hill outlines the course of his career in a simple, crystal-clear narrative. He loved the camera, we sense, as a wonderful toy of unlimited possibilities.

In spite of the acclaim his more conventional documentaries on Albert Schweitzer and Grandma Moses have received, this last work of his may turn out to be the most impressive of his efforts. Everything here flows steadily, skillfully and pointedly, starting with his evocative chapter on his early life in St. Paul, which imaginatively blends photographs, animated stills and color that has the quality of Tiffany glass.

Then as a wealthy young American roaming Europe in the nineteen-twenties, Mr. Hill slips behind the camera and remains there—a determined independent movie-maker, influenced by Dreyer, Melies and other pioneers. The Cocteau influence is obvious as we see in a runoff of his 1930 short, "Fortune Teller," in a flickering print.

Toward the end, the film dissolves kaleidoscopically within the image of a movie-ola as the spry, aging Mr. Hill demonstrates the vital role of editing ("alchemy") in his laboratory. These scenes were made shortly before his death.

"Every artist lends his own eyes to the audience," he muses, splicing a strip of negative. As an art form taking advantage of the machine, Mr. Hill tells us, "cinema was born just in time." He adds his credo: "A miracle is around every corner." Released by Anthology Film Archive, it was shown yesterday at the First Avenue Screening Room and will be repeated on Friday and Saturday.

The Program

FILM PORTRAIT, a film by Jerome Hill, presented by Anthology Film Archive. Running time: 90 minutes. At the First Avenue Screening Room, at 61st Street. (Not submitted for rating.)

October 24, 1950

THE SCREEN IN REVIEW; 'Paris 1900' and 'Grandma Moses' Constitute Paris Theatre's Bill--'Pancho Villa Returns' at Rialto

By **BOSLEY CROWTHER**

A mood of mellow nostalgia descended upon the Paris Theatre last night with the opening there of a program of two wistfully reflective factual films.

The first, "Paris 1900," is a seventy-six minute review of the general tone of Parisian society, culture and, vaguely, politics in the years between 1900 and the outbreak of the first World War, as captured in old newsreels and French films and sifted through contemporary minds.

The second is "Grandma Moses," a twenty-three-minute color film which shows that gentle old lady and some of her paintings in her home at Eagle Bridge, N. Y.

Of the two, "Paris 1900" is much the more ambitious job, covering an area and an era that embrace vast historical detail and challenge the studious observer who would comprehend them in one quick look. This is the drawback to the picture—this and the simple fact that the graphic material available for purposes of demonstration is not profound.

To be sure there are plenty of old pictures of the Paris Exposition, la Tour Eiffel, Montmartre and President Fallieres beaming behind his great white beard. There are glimpses of dozens of famous artists, writers and actors of the day, most of them conscious of the camera as they dutifully pass in review, and there are reels and reels of faded footage of the fashions and fads of "le bon temps." There are quaint shots of ancient autos, horse cabs, airplanes and bathers at "la plage." And there are, here and there, skimpy sequences showing minor dramatic episodes.

But, except for a couple of the latter, which only fleetingly suggest the social and political tensions that formed in France before the first World War, there is little in "Paris 1900" beyond an arbitrary mood. And that is mainly accomplished through wistful music by Guy Bernard and a line of occasionally witty and persistently nostalgic gab.

Monty Woolley speaks this narration, which John Mason Brown has prepared from the original French commentary of the film's creator, Nicole Vedrees. And it must be said for Mr. Woolley that he makes it all sound "toujours gai," with his voice calling up a mental image of a left-over boulevardier.

The total impression, after all is said and done, is of a mass of old footage strung together in a slightly

grotesque melange—of endless pictures of ladies in big hats and hobble-skirts and gentlemen with lots of whiskers and the manner of William Howard Taft.

Now "Grandma Moses" is different. That is a simple and compact little film which discovers in the life of this old lady the image of the basic American stock. By picturing the venerable artist against the landscapes of her lovely countryside and working on the colorful "primitives" that have brought her fame, the film illustrates a lush narration, written and spoken by Archibald MacLeish, which glows with the homey sentiment of the poetic concept of rural life.

The narrative probably suits the subject. Anyhow it combines happily with the pictures and the music of Hugh Martin to convey a genuine sense of the courage of an indomitable lady and the charm of escape into the past.

PARIS 1900, a documentary recreating the Parisian era from 1900 to 1914; original scenario and preparation by Nicole Vedres; conceived by Pierre Braunberger; English adaptation by John Mason Brown; narrated by Monty Woolley; music by Guy Bernard; presented by Arthur Mayer and Edward Kingsley. At the Paris.

and

GRANDMA MOSES, narrated and written by Archibald MacLeish; directed by Jerome Hill; photography by Erica Anderson; music by Hugh Martin; produced by Falcon Films, Inc.

August 16, 1961

'Sand Castle' Opens at the Guild Theatre

By **BOSLEY CROWTHER**

FOLKS who can't get to the seashore on these tempting summer days may have the agreeable experience of an illusory outing, at least, by going to see "The Sand Castle," which arrived at the Guild yesterday.

For here in this modest little picture that was shot on a lovely stretch of beach at Laguna, Calif., its producer-director, Jerome Hill, has captured a lot of the amusement of a visit to the beach.

He spies on the comical behavior of a plump old woman who arrives with folding chair, beach tent, assorted sun protection and a canary bird in a cage to watch the characters through field glasses and sneak occasional glimpses at a Racing Form. He watches a girl in a bikini, a fat man with a bottle of gin and a baby in a go-cart he is presumably supposed to tend, a slightly eccentric painter, a cantankerous surf fisherman, an apparently nutty skin diver and a flock of chirping nuns who emerge from a flashy station wagon and have a fast game of softball on the beach.

Most persistently, he gives his attention to a dreamy youngster who patiently makes a lovely castle of sand at the tide's edge, quietly and deftly building it up while the various beach denizens pause to watch him, until they are all diverted by the ball game of the nuns. And then, when a sudden storm develops and the characters have all scuttled from the beach, he slips in a color-film conception of the napping boy's closely correlated dreams.

The latter is done with cardboard cut-outs animated within painted paper sets to represent an approximation of the youngster's fantasies. It lacks the vitality and humor of the black-and-white actuality scenes.

That's all there is to this essentially candid-camera-tricky seventy-minute film that does no more than could be done quite as fully and more acutely in a two-reel short. Indeed, much the same kind of peeping was done, without the extraneous fantasy, in the short, "Muscle Beach," and the delightful British two-reeler, "Sunday By the Sea."

Mr. Hill, who has captured Grandma Moses and Albert Schweitzer very nicely on film, has the documentarian's disposition and he does not disguise it here. His characters, all amateur actors, perform with the swash of amateurs—or like normal, unselfconscious people acting as they would act on a beach. Except for a faint and wistful whisper that summer pleasures are as transitory as dreams,

he tells us nothing more in this picture than the fact that there is fun in the passing scene.

Alec Wilder has contributed a lively and precociously colorful musical score that is often a little too insistent and intrusive—in short, overdone.

Also on the bill with "The Sand Castle" is a handsome thirty-minute color film, about the present-day Blood Indians of western Canada, their traditional annual gathering to do their historic sundance and the encroachment of modern civilization in their tribe. "Circle of the Sun" is its title, and it is a small work of art in its genre, which is the genre of the documentary picture and the searching cinematic photograph.

The Cast

THE SAND CASTLE, written, directed and produced by Jerome Hill; released by Louis de Rochemont Associates. At the Guild Theatre, 33 West Fiftieth Street. Running time: seventy minutes.

Boy Barry Cardwell
Little Girl Laurie Cardwell
Artist George Dunham
Fisherman Alec Wilder
Plump Lady Maybelle Nash
Girl in bikini Erica Speyer
Fat Man Lester Judson
Skin Diver Martin Russ