

St. Louis conductor plans 'podium retirement'

Although Walter Susskind is leaving the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra this summer, the 69-year-old conductor said he is not retiring.

"Conductors never retire," he said, "They die on the podium."

The trim, tan, impeccably-dressed musician spoke about his plans after a speech he gave Friday in Westbrook Hall entitled "What you've always wanted to know about conducting but were afraid to ask."

Susskind said he will travel to five continents before the end of 1976 as a guest conductor with orchestras such as the London Symphony and the Royal Philharmonic.

British orchestras

A great deal of his work, he said, will be with the five British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) orchestras in England.

"It will be marvelous," he said, "to not have to bother with the administrative duties of an orchestra."

In his talk on conducting, Susskind said the conductor develops a "sensitive back." He knows

how the audience is responding.

And his back feels good in Lincoln. Of all the smaller cities he has toured, Susskind said, Lincoln is the symphony's favorite.

"This is an ideal place," he said. "There is a special affinity with the people here—warm audiences and rapt attention."

Pianist at 17

The Prague-born conductor began his career as a concert pianist at age 17. His mother was a piano teacher; his father a music critic.

Susskind, who has conducted orchestras in England, Scotland, Canada and Australia, said there are more similarities than differences between American and foreign orchestras.

Although art councils in other countries seem more supportive of orchestras, Susskind said art councils here have made a good beginning.

"State support is the only salvation of orchestras," Susskind said.

In Susskind's "thumbnail history" of conducting he said it is not known how poor orchestras sounded

50 to 60 years ago.

"String players had good instruments and couldn't play them," Susskind said, "while wind instrumentalists had bad instruments and couldn't play them."

Carnegie Hall

The first musician was engaged as a conductor: 80 years ago when, as a guest conductor, Tchaikovsky opened Carnegie Hall, he said.

"The conductor has been confused with a bar beater," Susskind said. More essential than beating time is an interpretation of the score and rapport with the orchestra, he said.

"He or she is a maestro or master only with what the eyes do—the feeling which emanates mystically," Susskind said.

Since World War I, the prima donna conductor has evolved with conductors such as Bruno Walter, he said.

"Although there is no such thing as a conductor with a humility complex," Susskind said, "we are actually only servants of the music."

'Woman under Influence' — messy piece of art

A few alternative thoughts on John Cassavetes' *A Woman Under the Influence*. The movie turned out to be an overnight event, and admittedly a very important film, largely because of Cassavetes' style (one must resolve any preconceptions about what is directorial personality in a Cassavetes film and bad movie making in another film) and also because *A Woman* has broken the spell hanging over the role of women in the movies.

No messiah

But I don't think we should offer up Cassavetes as an uncompromising, anti-studio-system messiah. Accounts of Cassavetes mortgaging his house to finance the film and using family and friends in keeping his artistic control close at hand all make for good stories but they don't necessarily mean good moviemaking.

A second viewing gives one a more dispassionate look at *A Woman Under the Influence*. Once removed from the hypnotism of Gena Rowlands' brilliant job of hamming, it is easier to see just how much slop Cassavetes has poured into this film.

In addition to the obvious technical screwups such as the visible hanging microphones and the cameraman's constant inability to rack focus, there are a host of other unsolved dead ends in the film.

Scenes left out

I must have seen the trailer for this film more than a dozen times and it was a shock when the movie itself had ended and I realized that many of the scenes I saw in the trailer aren't in the movie. It's easy to spot where the missing scenes would have been and what purpose they might have served in clearing up a host of undeveloped loose ends. Despite all the talk

of Cassavetes not shortening the film, it has obviously already been trimmed and appears to suffer from it. At two and one-half hours it's an uneasy trip. But the movie is not too long—it's too short.

We can't validly criticize Cassavetes for being long-winded. He has admitted that he has no idea what happens to the Nick and Mables of the world, and *A*

you-were-all-like-me-the-world-would-be-a-better-place. Nick rattles off loaded lines such as "Mabel's not crazy. She cooks and sews and washes the dishes; what the hell's crazy about that?" Mabel counters with a childlike innocence when she tells her kids, "I never did anything in my life except I made you guys."

And those kids are walking, talking teddy bears who protect crazy mommy from angry daddy and contribute to grotesquely sentimental scenes. In one, each of them says goodnight to a newly returned Mabel by crawling in bed with her and kissing her time and time again on the nose. Talk about pulling emotional heart strings.

Beautiful Falk role

Peter Falk as Nick has a subtler, more difficult role than does Rowlands as Mabel and as far as the movie will let him take it, he pulls it off beautifully. Rowlands naturally sticks in one's mind but a lot of actors have breezed through parts like this before (remember Cliff Robertson in the now forgotten *Charly*). Falk, on the other hand, gives us the moving reactions and emotional wrangling of a man who realizes the person he loves most in this world is going insane. Sure he's an SOB but he's a sympathetic SOB and he wants to understand.

Cassavetes is entirely capable of coming to terms with his material, as he did in his last film, the slight but well made *Minnie and Moskowitz* (also starring his wife, Gena Rowlands), *A Woman Under the Influence* is memorable, honest, and moving film that is, nevertheless ponderous, flawed and quite primitive. It may be the messiest work of movie art ever made.

greg lukow key grip

Woman doesn't really have a satisfying ending. A three-hour film that knows where it's going is better than a two and one-half hour film that doesn't.

Stacked deck

As *A Woman* is now, Cassavetes has done one of the all-time jobs of stacking the deck. Gena Rowland's family is made up of short, black-haired Italians with names like Nick, Angelo and Maria and she sticks out by being a tall, blonde Mabel. She wears ridiculous short, little dresses and pink socks and Cassavetes photographs her face with wide angle close-up shots (could this distortion possibly symbolize her insanity? [sic]).

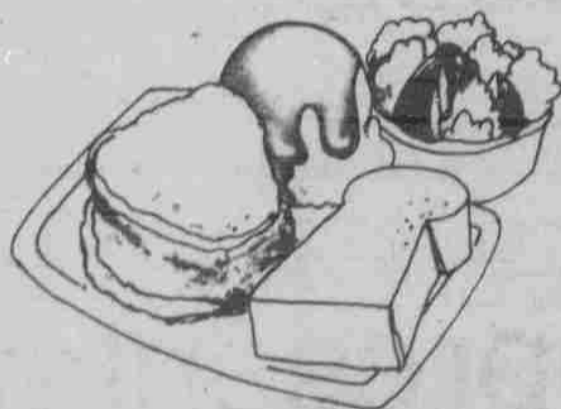
Before her husband confronts her with her behavior, everything Mabel does reeks of I'm-harmless-and-I-love-everybody-and-if-

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