



Gene Hackman recreates his role as New York cop Popeye Doyle in FRENCH CONNECTION II.

at the movies

'Connection II' vigorous

Review by Greg Lukow

One of the most pleasing aspects of *French Connection II* is that it seems to have been made in spite of its predecessor. Things we might have expected to see in the film have been reworked and thrown back in the face of *French Connection I*. Similarities stop with the use of only two returning actors (Gene Hackman as "Popeye" Doyle and Fernando Rey as the cool, sophisticated drug dealer, Chainer), and the natural follow-up to the resolved conclusion of the first film.

Director John Frankenheimer has made a startling, mean and effective movie that puts his up and down career at a momentary peak.

Two years ago Frankenheimer directed the memorable adaptation of O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh* for the American Film Theater, but then followed it with a dismal little crime melodrama called *99 and 44/100% Dead*. The title was fudging since the movie was 100% dead and went nowhere.

But the excitement of *French Connection II* is that it's very much alive, a vigorous, bursting motion picture much like the first *Connection* but reaching beneath the surface in ways that the earlier film didn't. William Friedkin's *Connection I* was a slick, run-and-gun mover while *Connection II* is less overwhelming on the surface but weightier and more concentrated on working within the people and confrontations of the story.

Life of its own

Friedkin's howling, noisy New York City had a life of its own and almost seemed to be the force that made the rough, Popeye Doyle kind of cop a necessity. Frankenheimer's *Marseilles*, on the other hand, is

a more subdued, foreign experience that Popeye must learn to reckon with.

Popeye's vulgar, brutal style is even more accentuated here because it's all he has. In New York he was carried along by the inertia of the city but now he is cast adrift and even used as a decoy to help the French police, headed by Barthelemy (Bernard Fresson), in reporting out Chanier's operation.

Movie disturbing

The movie is most disturbing indeed, unsettling, after Chanier has captured Popeye, mainlined him on heroin for three weeks and then dumped him back where he came from. As a result of all this, Popeye becomes even more obsessive—his animalistic crudities come out as an even more natural part of him.

Yet unlike *Connection I*, Popeye now comes to realize what he is. During his addiction and subsequent cold turkey period, he finally finds out what it's like to be a victim. In one of the film's key lines, after he sees the police drag a prisoner past his cell, he yells, "Don't tell em anything until you see your lawyer!" He means it too whereas in *Connection I* a similar utterance would have come only when (and if) he mumbled legal rights to a punk he had just beaten into submission.

Chase was highlight

The highlight of *Connection I* was of course, the reckless, smashing chase scene, between subway and automobile. The climax of *Connection II* is again, a lengthy pursuit by Popeye but here it is he and Chanier on foot; a slow, labored and painful sequence that throws itself up in direct contrast to its famous forerunner and gets away with it.

Gene Hackman gives a gutsy, exhaustive performance as Popeye and he is brilliant. In

his In his third film to be released in a month (along with *Bite the Bullet* and Arthur Penn's *Night Moves*), he endows us with one of his most unforgettable acting moments. It comes mid-way in the movie as he sits in his damp, stone-walled cell while recovering from his drug addiction. In a rambling, one-sided dialogue, he tries desperately to converse with his friend Barthelemy. He is drinking, weeping, screaming and inwardly dying all at the same time. One of the most compelling releases of frustration ever filmed, it may become as famous as Brando's taxicab scene in *On the Waterfront* or James Deans desperate outpouring in the stairway sequence in *Rebel Without a Cause*.

More human

Hackman has made Popeye Doyle one of the most fascinating, and important movie detectives-cops. In *Connection I* he was a character for the audience to root for even though we might not like him. *Connection II* has made him more human, giving him moments where we sympathize with him but in which we find nothing to cheer about. He is Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer revisited—the modern, anti-intellectual vigilante.

French Connection II furthers the rather surprising and satisfying potency of the new Hollywood sequels. Also, aside from Robert Altman's yet unseen *Nashville*, it may be the best American film so far this year. A dynamic, short-fused genre picture, it follows in the tradition of the great American thriller. It has a bleak, inner edge of paranoia and darkness almost reminiscent of the nightmare film noir movies of the 40s and 50s, with Claude Renoir's stark, no-nonsense photography adding to the feeling.

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