

## New Directors/ New Films

# 'Improper Conduct,' Exiles Indict Castro Regime

By VINCENT CANBY

**I**MPROPER CONDUCT ("Mauvaise Conduite") is something very rare in films — an intelligent attack on Fidel Castro's Cuban revolution, mostly as recorded in interviews with 28 Cuban exiles, including former members and supporters of the Castro regime.

The movie's tone is civilized, but the testimony is as savage as it's convincing. There's no possibility for the tempered, long view of events that makes such films as "Seeing Red" and "The Good Fight" so moving. In those two films, survivors of the wars fought by the old American Left look back with pride, humor and sometimes regret. The wounds remembered in "Improper Conduct" are still raw. There is less disillusion here than continuing rage.

The film, one of the best in this

year's New Directors/New Films festival, has been jointly directed by two prominent Cuban exiles, Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez-Leal. Mr. Almendros is the Academy Award-winning cameraman ("Days of Heaven") who has worked most memorably with Eric Rohmer and François Truffaut, and Mr. Jiménez-Leal is the co-director of "El Super" (1979), a very funny if sad comedy about Cuban exiles adjusting to life in Manhattan.

"Improper Conduct" will be shown at the 57th Street Playhouse today at 8:30 P.M. and tomorrow at 6 P.M.

The film opens with newsreel footage covering the defection in Paris in 1966 of 10 members of the Cuban National Ballet Company, an event that surprised many Castro supporters in this country, where the revolution was — and still is — a popular cause among liberal members of the intelligentsia. At the time, the defections seemed to be an isolated event. How-

ever, as recalled by the witnesses in "Improper Conduct," they were simply the first public evidence of the disenchantment that had begun several years earlier as the Castro Government took an increasingly hard line against so-called "antisocial" elements.

These included political and artistic dissidents and homosexuals, particularly male homosexuals, whose presence embarrassed the Latin macho image that the Castro Government sought for itself. As one witness testifies, homosexuals could be tolerated within the Government, as well as within the police, as long as they were "manly" homosexuals. Any suggestion of effeminacy could be interpreted as counter-revolutionary.

The witnesses in "Improper Conduct" include distinguished writers, journalists, playwrights, doctors, poets and painters, as well as more ordinary folk such as tour guides and

hairdressers, a number of whom spent time in one or more of the country's forced-labor camps. It's to the film's credit that it also includes the testimony of Caracol, a transvestite nightclub performer, whose story is as relevant to the film as that of anyone else.

One of the most eloquent witnesses is Armando Valladares, the poet who had spent 22 years in prison before being released, largely at the urging of President François Mitterrand of France. Mr. Valladares, interviewed in Madrid, tells one especially harrowing story of a 12-year-old boy, imprisoned for a minor offense, who was tortured by guards and raped by other inmates.

Intercut with these interviews, filmed in Paris, New York, Miami, London, Rome and Madrid, are excerpts from a 1979 television interview in which the Cuban Premier asserts that his revolution cannot be accused of having killed one citizen or of

## They Remember

**IMPROPER CONDUCT**, directed by Nestor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez-Leal; written (French and Spanish with English subtitles) by Mr. Almendros and Mr. Jiménez-Leal; cinematography by Dominique Marlin; edited by Michel Pilon; produced by Margaret Menegoz, Barbel Schroeder and Michel Thoulouze; a coproduction of Les Films du Losange and Antenne 2; presented by the Film Society of Lincoln Center and the department of film of the Museum of Modern Art. At the 57th Street Playhouse, between the Avenue of the Americas and Seventh Avenue. Running time: 110 minutes. This film has no rating.

Commentary by Michel Dumoulin

WITH: Reinaldo Arenas, Susan Sontag, Heberto Padilla, Caracol, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Armando Valladares, Fidel Castro, Ana María Simo, Juan Goytisolo, Carlos Franqui, Martha Frayde, Renée Ariza

having tortured one prisoner.

"Tell me," he says, "any other examples of this in history."

Susan Sontag, the American critic and a former supporter of the Castro regime, describes the Castro campaign against homosexuals as "a heritage, in a way a 'Puritan' one, that is deeply embedded in the morals of the Left." She continues: "The discovery that homosexuals were being persecuted in Cuba shows, I think, how much the Left needs to evolve."

"Improper Conduct" is the first legitimately provocative anti-Castro film I've seen.