

State on the Aisle

'Synanon' Asks for Faith

By Richard L. Coe

"SYNANON" is the unusual sort of film which must be taken on faith. One can either disbelieve this Metropolitan arrival or accept it. Argument over it belongs to the experts. Ultimately, I accepted it.

Synanon House at Santa Monica, Calif., run through private donations, is a refuge for dope addicts who wish to recover. Such treatment can last for years and those who enter (all voluntarily) slowly rise in community status from KP and latrine duty to positions and prerogatives of leadership.

Thus, there is about this worn beach house the atmosphere of a strangely related community. Men and women, young and old, poor or rich, educated or ignorant from all strata of society, the residents are pledged to mutual self-help and the need to grasp a new code for living. It is rather like a purposeful, grubby school, its staff and students bickering but closely knit.

Group therapy could be described as the closest previous approach to "a synanon," which a newly arrived addict in the home's early days coined from a faltering attempt to say "symposium" and "seminar." Because all the participants have worked their way up from the dope habit and for other reasons, the treatment differs from group therapy. From these bull sessions seems to come the interaction of understanding peers.

An experienced film-maker, Richard Quine has been a close observer of Synanon House (where all sorts of visitors are welcome). In a story which concerns several types of addicts, he has attempted to pinpoint the movement's values.

Using the house (and some of its guests), Quine's film has a neo-documentary tone, pointedly real in setting if fictional in dramatics. Thus, the outsider must accept the facts.

A young man submits himself for treatment, meets a girl who, in time, points out that they are using physical love to replace their dope. His conflicts further include a fellow he had once been in jail with and a resident who is cheating on the house rules. Weakness leads to death, faithfulness to hope.

Quine has kept his performances exactly keyed to the mood of neo-realism. Far less intensely shattering than previous such scenes, the thawing-out period is more credible. Alex Cord, Stella Stevens and Chuck Connors are never

"SYNANON." Columbia Pictures release produced and directed by Richard Quine. Screenplay by Ian Bernard and S. Lee Pogostin from a story by Pogostin and Barry Orlinger. Photographed in black and white by Harry Stradling. Music by Neal Hoffl. At the Metropolitan and Ambassador.

THE CAST

Ben	.....	Chuck Connors
Joaney	.....	Stella Stevens
Zankie Albo	.....	Alex Cord
Reld	.....	Richard Conte
Betty Coleman	.....	Eartha Kitt
Chuck Dederich	.....	Edmond O'Brien
Mary	.....	Barbara Luna
Chris	.....	Alejandro Roy
Hopper	.....	Richard Evans
Vince	.....	Gregory Morton
Arline	.....	Charin Hale
Friday	.....	Casey Townsend
Bob Adamic	.....	Larry Kent
Pete	.....	Ernie Hamilton
Joe Mann	.....	Mark Sturges
The Greek	.....	Lawrence Montaigne
Carla	.....	Patricia Huston

out of character for the drama's chief trio and to the character of Chuck Dederich, who began Synanon House, Edmond O'Brien brings impressive conviction.

Quine has balanced his film entirely on his acceptance of the Synanon philosophy. If at first you do not accept the details, Quine's unwavering approach may convince you. It did me.

(There is, by the way, an informative book on the subject, "The Tunnel Back: Synanon," by Lewis Yablonsky, MacMillan, \$6.95).

THE SHADOWS has a perky new revue from Britain, via New York and Chicago, "THE Oxford-Cambridge Revue."

Pointedly avoiding the topical, this free-wheeling, informal entertainment for the small Georgetown stage tacitly suggests it doesn't want to be thought of as the tag end of the style "Beyond the Fringe" introduced here three years back.

A gal named Gaye Brown, who can do just about anything, is the particular bright member of this fivesome, the rest of it male: Bill Wallis, who is chubby; David Walsh, who is skinny; Kent Baker, who is toothy and Nigel Pegram, who is wistful.

The second act is far the better in this parade of quick blackouts. The material is re-

freshingly almost all unfamiliar and several are highly original, a pedantic lecture on humor by Walsh, a spoof of the music halls and a rocky "Hallelujah" chorus by all. I also liked Wallis' RAF "Briefing," some remarks on "heavily petting" by Miss Brown and Walsh and a wild do with custard pies (from Mennen's).

More wry in tone than "The Establishment," this should please those who couldn't crack The Shadows when that group held its stage.

Cliff Robertson is today's Hilton visitor, with a starry invited night audience to his cock-eyed adventure in "The Masquerade." . . . William Major, who acts that awful nephew of "How to Succeed" so zestfully, helps keep his associates in the musical busy. He teaches them acting twice weekly . . . "King Arthur's Sword" will be presented by GWU's Children's Theater Guild Saturday morning at 10:30 in Lisner auditorium . . . Tom Bosley, still starring in Broadway's "Catch Me If You Can," will have the Eli Wallach role in the touring company of "Luv," which will play here next season after starting a trek Aug. 30 in Wilmington . . . Seats for "Oliver!" which opens June 7, will go on sale Monday at the National . . .