



Craig Clekner and Eleanor Lindo.

michael asti-rose

MIRROR

MIRROR MIRROR — 16mm, colour, 11 minutes, screenplay and direction by Michael Asti-Rose, with Craig Clekner and Eleanor Lindo; camera: Lela Asti-Rose, lighting: Peter Jarrett, assistant: Howie Kirsch; original music composed and created by Allan Rae (the score of the film is being adapted for a dance piece by the National Ballet of Canada); an Asterovum Canada Production; with special thanks to The Paraklete, and Jesus Christ.

The film begins with a long shot of a dark and mysterious staircase. A boy appears, dragging a dressmaker's dummy down to the basement.

The camera keeps circling the boy in one long, continuous dolly shot as he rummages through mementoes from the past down in the basement. There's everything to capture a child's imagination: old trunks, boxes, trinkets, a desk with secret hiding places, nooks and crannies, an old brass bed post, a foot-pedal powered sewing machine, jewelry, crystal, old slides and photographs.

As the blond boy explores the 'buried treasure' in the cellar, the camera keeps making circles around him and the pile of stylistically arranged old objects. As he lazily browses through the stuff we get closer and closer and the soundtrack hits a few eerie notes: hints of things to come.

He finds slides of reclining women, the 'dirty' pictures of the turn-of-the-century era. He finds an old camera and makes believe he's snapping shots of the female torso-dummy. He opens a woman's fan, and for a moment his young face becomes very feminine. Very obvious sexual overtones.

What happens next is a trip back in time, a strange evoking of the spirits inhabiting the place, a journey through the Jungian subconscious with strong currents of Christian mysticism seen through the vehicle of a child's vivid imagination. We hear what sounds like electric sitar mixed with Gregorian chant, and we see ritualistic blood-letting, in

which pagan and Judeo-Christian elements combine to create a powerful ending to the film.

The climactic scene is reminiscent of *Performance*, where Mick Jagger's male/female character literally gets his mind blown in a sequence strongly akin to ritualistic sacrifice. The boy in *MIRROR MIRROR* is the not-so-innocent lamb/Christ figure, who even receives the mystical wounds of the stigmata only to return to the womb of an old trunk with his female/mother alter ego.

MIRROR MIRROR combines the pagan occult with Christian superstition, and is the only film I know of that gives end-credits to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is unorthodox enough to have gotten the Anglican Dean of Toronto a bit upset, even though his name appears as well, in an advisory position.

The CBC declines to show the film, in spite of the very favourable opinions voiced by many Corporation executives. Lister Sinclair liked it, for instance, but the official position is that the CBC doesn't have the odd ten/eleven minute slot needed to air the film. The CFDC awarded a thousand dollars to its young director, Michael Asti-Rose, but that amount was hardly one-sixth the total budget of the film, and was immediately used to pay overdue lab bills.

Asti-Rose was especially outspoken in his criticism of the CFDC. He was one of the applicants for the \$50,000 grant competition, of which amount only ten thousand was given out.

"When I heard the news that I got the grant, I went out and bought a new suit to celebrate, thinking that I would get a just share of the fifty thousand. And when the cheque came through and it was only a thousand, I flipped."

At one point he was talking to his lawyer. He claims that the CFDC never explained why it only gave out one-fifth of the announced grant money.

"Chalmers Adams was implying that the submitted films weren't good enough to justify more substantial grants. But he tried to make me feel better, by saying that mine was an exception."

MIRROR MIRROR cost Asti-Rose six thousand dollars to produce. How does a twenty-three year old gentle-mannered young man get into the position where he is able to produce even such a comparatively modest-budget film himself?

"I got interested in film when I went to the New York World's Fair in 1964 and saw the new things being done in multi-screen films and slides. I went to Waterloo Lutheran College, then enrolled at the London Film School in '67.

I must have worked on at least forty films in one capacity or another while there, and I directed six of them."

Michael Asti-Rose went to San Francisco where he worked as a film editor, then up to Vancouver where he directed a half-hour color documentary *LONGEST CHILDHOOD*, dealing with retarded children. He was then assistant director on an ecology-film *RIVERS OF BABYLON*, produced from Chicago, but shot in British Columbia.

The next project he made was *Before the Wind*, a story film about adolescents on a sailing voyage.

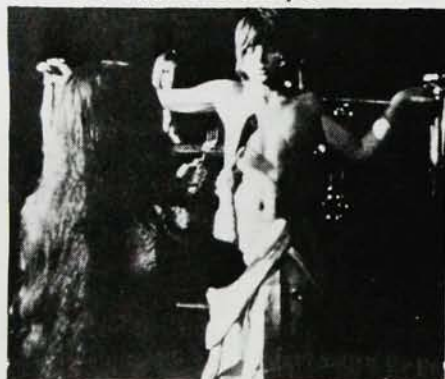
"*BEFORE THE WIND* is kind of a metaphysical film. The kids are in a sense looking for Atlantis. There is a phantasy sequence in which Vancouver was filmed to look like a magical city from the water."

Asti-Rose came to Toronto two years ago and got a job at CBC as production assistant, then assistant editor, and now he is a full editor there. In fact he was laying tracks on *Jalna*, while he was finishing *MIRROR MIRROR*.

"We shot the film in a couple of days, using the Factory Theatre Lab garage and working into the wee hours of the morning. The circular dolly shots were made in several continuous takes, using ten-minute lengths of film each time.

There were advantages to working at three o'clock in the morning. When the boy looks tired and groggy in the bed sequence, he was actually sleepy and tired."

The ritualistic sacrifice scene.



MIRROR

by Attila Magor

His wife Lela Asti-Rose did the camera-work on the film, which is flowing and visually excellent throughout. She had no formal training as a cinematographer, but danced with the Toronto Dance Theatre before giving birth to Chloë Asti-Rose earlier this year, so she has a good sense of movement and drama.

Lela and Michael met in Pakistan, where Michael was born, son of a British publisher, in 1949. He also went back to finish high school there, after becoming a Canadian citizen in 1960.

He is very sensitive about not being Canadian-born, and claims that he has felt slightly put-off by Canadians on account of it.

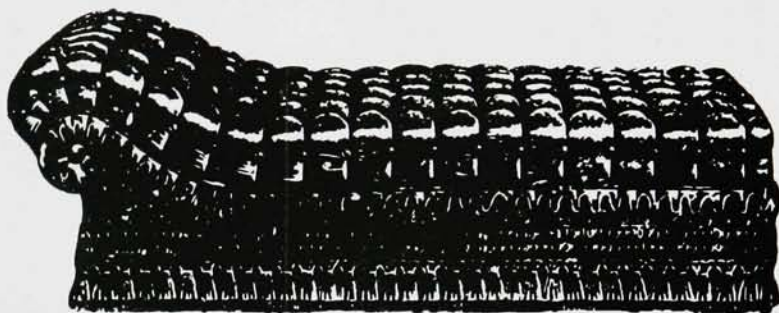
"In 1969 my brother and I built a log cabin on the shores of the Pacific in B.C., so I feel that I'm truly settled here. I went down to the Atlanta Film Festival, where **MIRROR MIRROR** won a major prize. And the feeling among the young American filmmakers there, was that Canada is just *heaven* for people into films, because of the NFB and now the CFDC, and all the government money available up here. I feel the same way, I think it's great to be in film and working in Canada."

Now he's doing a fantastic amount of writing. He sold a script to the CBC for a women's series and has submitted a feature script to the CFDC, on which he is awaiting a firm decision. He is entering **MIRROR MIRROR** in the Canadian Film Awards competition, and he is even thinking of sending a print of it to the Academy Awards.

The Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Co-op is handling the film and might enter it into other festivals around the world. It will be shown at the Poor Alex Theatre in Toronto as the short with Peter Rowe's *Neon Palace*, starting October 3rd.

Michael Asti-Rose reads a great deal of psychology, and is intrigued by the whole child psyche thing haunting a person even in adulthood. He is fascinated by Christianity's basic tenet of becoming like a child, and has worked with children and adolescents in most of his films.

Go see **MIRROR MIRROR** at the Poor Alex, and then write a letter to the CBC asking them why they would deprive you of seeing this and so many other excellent Canadian films.



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