Al Neil: A Portrait

There will always be people who want a present their own vision, their uniquely personal vision of things. Whether it's on film or canvas or as sculpture, whether it will be absorbed by my industry. - David Rimmer, 1978.

In certain ways, Al Neil: A Portrait seems to summarize all of David Rimmer's previous work. At the same time, it is quite strikingly different from my film that, to my knowledge, has not been in the past. This possible paradox was brought about by the presence of the subject himself, the extensible subject of this film, jazz musician Al Neil is the living embodiment of Rimmer's own work. At the same time, it seems like a document on the central mystery of death which Al Neil plays seems harshly displacing our own core feelings, our own inner being. For those who are open, the film's center of pain and illumination is simultaneously a personal, inner journey for the viewer. There, for a few extraordinary moments of the film, we are in almost total, harmonious empathy with the subject, on the edge of time, space, dimensions, individual differences momentarily fall away. We are privileged to see, through the eyes of the film, the central mystery of death which is the root of human life. Once we have shared in the depths of this film, the film releases us into its far reaches. The lighting is transformed. Al Neil, surrounded by an audience, plays his incomparable music - which we now hear as through the first time, with transformed senses: music which releases us into extra-dimensional heights of joy and a celebration of life. Al Neil: A Portrait is the most intricate, powerful and personally rewarding film I have seen in years. Unfortunately, this is only a review. A beautifully complete work like this film deserves a full critical response as impassioned and intelligent as the work itself.

Joyce Nelson

Granville: A Portrait

I'm your boogie man, boogie man... uh... turn me on..." Granville Johnson's black muscular hips roll and grind to the disco beat as he slowly peels down the top of his pants. He partakes his full lips provocatively with his tongue, as he tugs at his pants and goes out at half-bared, half-dressed, bare parsons, half-watching his performance.

That's Granville's business - to turn you on, in the cheap strip joints and massage parlors that line Vancouver's downtown Granville Street.

Director Tony Westman has nicely played the Granville/Gravelle/St. parallel into a compact, powerful, 15-minute film that is as impressionistic as it is documentary. "Granville: A Portrait" depicts not so much the life of a man as it does the sex-for-sale lifestyle. Westman has taken actual incidents from Granville's experience as a stripper and masseuse and presented them both allegorically and realistically.

Order, Gary Fogrow etc. Beluga Productions (1980). 16mm running time 14 min. dist. Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre.

Flowers in the Sand

For those who deplore the violence and the grimmness that overwhelms both large and small screens today, this is the other, warm, human side that is seldom seen. Daniel is in his twenties, mentally retarded, and living on an island with his caring mother. He yearns to attend training school on the mainland but it means travelling on the ferry by himself. He wishes for courage to go on the 'big boat', but it is his new summer friend, 12-year-old Grace, who shows him how to make his dreams come true.

A tight, sparse script with every word counting, and first-rate acting performances from David Eisner as Daniel and Cree Summer Franckes as Grace make an infinitely affecting film which deserves a wide audience.

The production values are all there. The island - across from Toronto, as those who live in the city will easily identify - is pictorially beautiful and people who seem to belong in this green and rural retreat so near to a large metropolis. Little telling things remain in the mind's eye - David's pleasure at finding a friend; the exploration of the old lighthouse and the ritual of wishing; a busy body neatly etched in two knowing looks and a few words of dialogue. Dan Hill composed the music score and sings out over the closing credits.

Now, where can one see a 27 1/2 minute film made without violence or gratuitous sex? Order your copy of "Flowers in the Sand" at your local film society. The screening attended by a disparate group of people, many eyes being wiped up. It may be corny - but once in a while, a nice film comes along.

Pat Thompson