

# REVIEWS

One would like to see many more Canadian films in this vein; not necessarily autobiographical films using non-professional actors – there are many fine actors still working in Canada – but ones which would, above all, show the variety of Canadian life and reflect the personality of the filmmaker. During the seventies a whole school of filmmakers showed this kind of promise. But so far, they have no chance to go beyond a few tentative television productions, such as Bruce Pitman's *Hailey's Gift*, Martin Lavut's *War Brides*, Peter Rowe's *Horse Latitudes* and Rex Bromfield's *Love at First Sight*. These are the kind of 'personal' filmmakers the CFDC should be encouraging – instead of forcing them to starve, or work on schlock, look-alike, American films.

Alan Collins ●

## ALLIGATOR SHOES

d./sc. Clay Borris p. Clay Borris, John F. Phillips exec. p. Don Haig, Barry Shapiro assoc. p. Paul Caulfield d.o.p. John F. Phillips ed. Gordon McLellan sd. Brian Richmond mus. Murray McLaughlan electronic score Eugene Martynec lighting Robert Holmes p. man. Nick J. Gray a.d. Dennis Chapman asst. cam. John Gundy 3rd a.d. Colin Brunton best boy Dave Roberts boom Carol McBride cont. Barbara Ratz stills Anita Olanick key grip Mike Ray pub. Jack Cunningham l.p. Garry Borris, Ronald Jones, Clay Borris, Rose Mallis-Borris, Len Perry, Simone Champagne, Gary Furlong, Guy Lefebvre, Rick Pappa, Rene Pappa, Philip Williams, Dave Roberts, Tony Hill, Gerry Whitmore, Doris Chiasson, Karen Williams, Sheila Morgan Wood, Gary Boisvert, Ginny Borris and P.J. Aziz as the Stunt Driver p.c. Alligator Shoes 460231 Ontario Ltd. (1980) col. 16mm/35mm (English with French subtitles) running time 98 min. dist. New Cinema

## William Fruet's *Cries in the Night*

*Cries in the Night* is your basic horror-house thriller. A young city girl (promising 15-year-old Lesleh Donaldson) spends a summer holiday in the country with her granny (Kay Hawtrey). Grandpa mysteriously skipped out many years ago. But lo, there are mysterious voices arguing in the basement... Not to mention a retarded handyman, the obligatory black cat aspy and ascreech, a ghoulish setting, and a plot climax that rises like the mythical phoenix from the ashes of Norman Bates.

But a tasteful pallor hangs over the proceedings. The film does not deliver the extremity or the volume of fright that the C-movie ads promise. Did director William Fruet rein up on the gore in deference to the CFDC funding? Or might it be that Fruet does not really wear his heart in the lowlands where his recent art has been slumming?

At first sight the career of William Fruet seems to have plunged from his award-winning *Wedding in White* (1972) to the box-office lurids of bile in black. But in most of his commercial films, there is a hint of sensitivity and intelligence all but buried in his brutishness. In his most scandalous commercial work, *Death Weekend*, one sensed that the violation of the vacuous Brenda Vaccaro was not meant to be as upsetting as the jobs' violence upon dentist (oops, Oral Surgeon) Chuck Shamata's material goods. But box office being what it is, the threat of rape eventually took over the film.

In his fine 1978 thriller, *Search and Destroy*, Fruet produced a kind of low-budget and straight version of 1941. He

brought the Vietnam war to the complacent American homeland. In addition, there was real wit in transplanting the Viet Cong lines to the plastic romance and glitz of Niagara Falls, das honeymoon kapital of the whirled. Indeed, apart from her glamorous make-up, Tisa Farrow's quivering simp recalled Carol Kane's pathetic wimp from *Wedding in White*.

And so to *Cries in the Night*, a \$1,400,000 romp filmed in 1979 but withheld pending arrangements for U.S. distribution. Amid its grisly flab there is a quiet, sensitive film crying to get out.

The smothered story shows a young girl awakening into the promise of womanhood, but overwhelmed by a horrifying parade of dead love. The supporting cast of grotesques dispels her romantic expectations of maturity. Harvey Atkin plays a repulsive traveling salesman secreted away with an equally obnoxious sweet patootie. Then there's Barry Morse, still chasing a fugitive after all these years. This time he's tracking down his wife, who ran off with the heroine's grandpa.

Most importantly, there's Granny Chalmers herself. Her attempt to convert the family funeral home into a cozy tourist inn is as romantic and futile a gesture as her attempt to keep alive her departed hubby's romantic character. Inevitably, the funeral aspect rises out of the cellar to overwhelm the romantic notions of the tourist home. Another nightmare sweeps through the Niagara Falls of the mind.

But for all the potential of wife Ida Nelson's screenplay, Fruet's film does not free that aspect. The psychological center is abandoned in favor of the horror-house hoaries.

Too bad. Through all these films Fruet shows a sensitivity towards the collision between innocence – whether delicate or deluded – and the harshness of the social reality. But for the master's voice

to be heard, it will have to shake free from the formulae and rhetoric of American gothic.

But then, *Cries in the Night* went to Cannes in 1980 and was sold to Norway, Spain, Argentina, the West Indies, etc. Maybe Fruet doesn't want to quarrel with such success.

Maurice Yacowar ●

**CRIES IN THE NIGHT** p. William Fruet exec. p. Barry Allen assoc. p. Patrick Doyle d. Director: William Fruet a.d. Roy Sager sc. Ida Nelson cont. Marie Therese Boily d.o.p. Mark Irwin, CSC cam. op. Robin Miller stills Rick Porter grip Maris Janson gaf. Jock Brandis ed. Ralph Brunjes, CFE sd. ed. Wayne Griffin sd. op. Ian Hendry sd. mix Joseph Grimaldi art d. Roy Forge Smith, Susan Longmire ward. Mary Jane McCarty make-up Shonagh Jabour sp. efx. Dennis Pike props Michael Fruet animal handler Karl Mitchell mus. Jerry Fielding p.a. Geoff Martin p. man. Patrick Doyle l.p. Lesleh Ann Donaldson, Kay Hawtrey, Barry Morse, Stephen Miller, Dean Garbett, Alfred Humphreys, Harvey Atkin, Peggy Mahon, Jack Van Evera, Les Rubie, Bob Warner, Linda Dalby. p.c. Production Co.: Northampton Productions Ltd. (1980) col. 35 mm running time 103 min. dist. Frontier Amusements.

## Alfred Sole's *Tanya's Island*

A natural suspicion is aroused – things being what they are in our film industry – when a co-production company has a name like Rainier Energy Resources Inc. That suspicion deepens when the film in question has sat around for over a year, in spite of the ballyhoo and cheesecake that attended its creation. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that the brief appearance of *Tanya's Island* on Toronto's screens elicited hoots and catcalls from the critical fraternity.

Still, those who have called this pic-

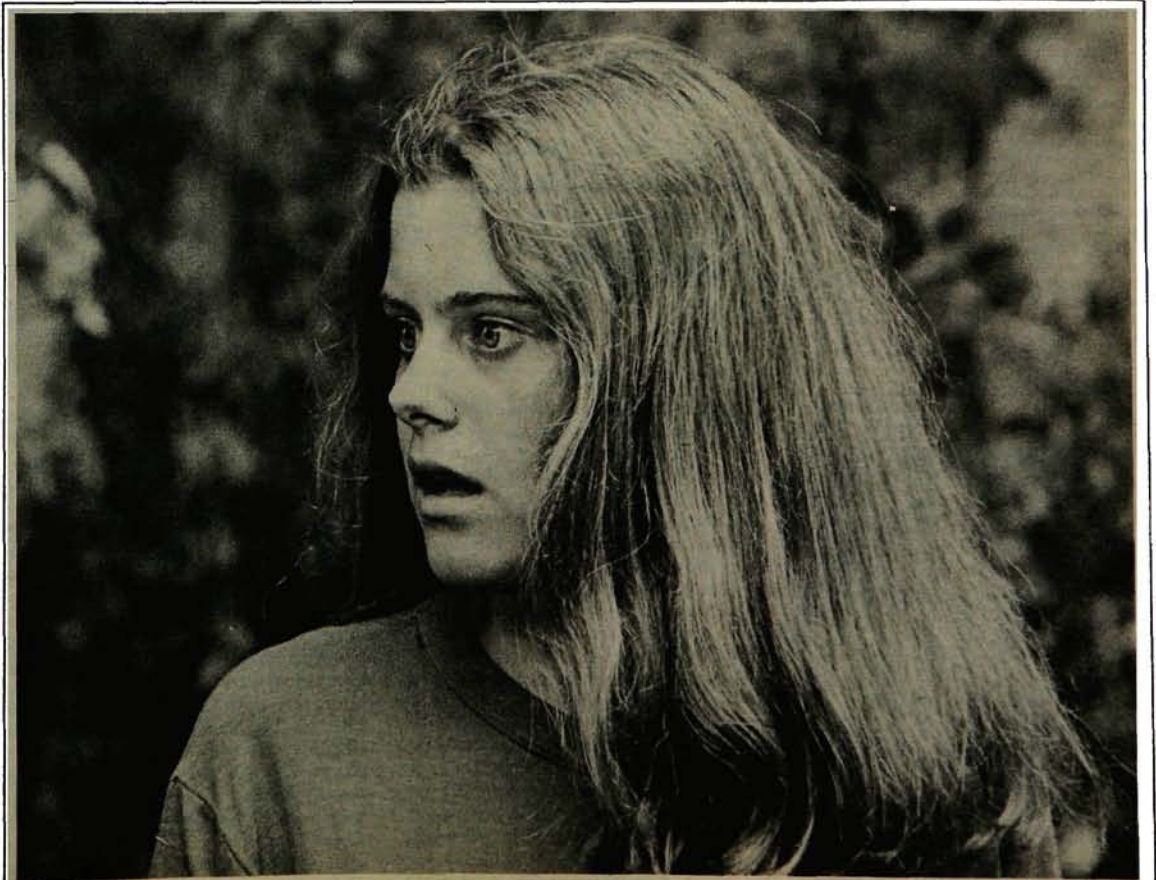
ture the year's worst are perhaps overreacting. After all, 1981 has already seen the likes of *My Bloody Valentine*, *Kelly*, *Dirty Tricks* and *Happy Birthday to Me*. Pierre Brousseau's production has a lot of competition in the turkey sweepstakes.

Such as it is, the plot involves the erotic fantasy of a Toronto model (D.D. Winters) who imagines herself and her boyfriend – a surly artist appropriately named Lobo (Richard Sargent) – on an island. But they are not, as they believe, alone. The other occupant is an ape-like creature whom Tanya suddenly discovers. After an initial shock, she befriends him and names him Blue. The essential conflict is thus set, as the two males battle each other for the female's body.

Pierre Brousseau's idea is just bizarre enough to sustain a passing interest, but the screenplay is totally lacking in anything approaching craft. Clearly, he has seen his fair share of Roger Vadim, and has absorbed from him a view of women of which could only be called retrograde. If the theme is, ostensibly, that all men are essentially beasts in sexual matters, he also maintains that all women are passive and willing to be bound, for Tanya offers only perfunctory resistance.

As Lobo, in his contest for physical mastery with Blue, degenerates intellectually (if such is possible), he blackens his face 'guerilla'-style (feeble pun obviously intended) in a racist slur that becomes all the more objectionable as it progresses. Director Alfred Sole may have an ambition to make a witty remark with an allusion to *Apocalypse Now*, as he does with an earlier reference to *Mighty Joe Young*, but heavy-handed, utterly unbelievable dialogue ruins whatever effect he has in mind.

With respect to D.D. Winters, no useful comment on her acting can be made, since she is given the vocabulary of a



Never a dull moment for *Cries*' Lesleh Donaldson.