

Bill Reid's

## Bill Lee: A Profile of a Pitcher

Reporter: What kind of goals do you set for yourself as a pitcher?

Bill Lee: Perfection. Being able to materialize the ball into the catcher's mitt without throwing it.

In Montreal two American national pastimes have become exotic: one is film, the other is baseball. Therefore what could be better than a film about a baseball player?

*Bill Lee: A Profile of a Pitcher* (winningest hurler for the Expos in 1979) is just that film. It was directed by Bill Reid for Double Bill Films and is being distributed by Cinéma Libre. When Reid worked for the National Film Board he made films with a personal style: *Back Alley Blue*, *Occupation*, and *Coming Home* which won a Canadian Film Award. It was like a home-movie. (Reid comes home and talks to his parents, complete with the generation gap.)

The *Bill Lee* film might also be called a home movie in the sense that Reid zeroes in on Bill Lee's life and philosophy, keeping the rough edges in. It's



not a slick, smoothed-out, sterilized narrative. Somehow it fits in with Lee's way of doing things and therefore leaves the audience room to breathe. Lee is an effervescent wit - a man easy with words which just keep coming.

The filming style is disjointed, but this adds to the 'feel' of the picture. Lee's life, we learn, is usually in turmoil. His wife wants to divorce him, but Lee doesn't believe in divorce: "Love is temporary insanity," he quips. "No one gets out of here alive."

Lee's wife (who we never see) has hired a lawyer. She has joined the 20th century ranks of manipulation. Lee doesn't believe in lawyers, so she wins. Lee says she can keep the material possessions. All he wants is his shotgun and a football.

"We're not always in sync." (pause) "We're always a little out of sync," Lee states.

Other turmoils are caused by his being a public figure in a world where the media and the masses eat stars alive - and in the film we see the consequences.

A journalist from *The Village Voice* comes to Montreal to 'get a story' on Bill Lee. She's the type of journalist who makes other journalists feel embarrassed. She constantly throws Lee curve-ball questions, which are expressed with mechanical assertiveness. But Lee hangs in there and doesn't let her get to him.

Journalist: You're not going to save the world.

Lee: But I'm not going to cop out either.

One isn't sure why Reid chose to leave

so much footage of this irritating 'bad guy' journalist in the film, but the result is that the viewer senses Lee's vulnerability in a world which is very screwed up.

One suspects that what makes Lee a credit to society is also what makes him a good pitcher - but his life is full of incongruities, and it's sometimes hard to put his philosophy and his baseball-playing together.

This 'Space Man,' as he is called, seems to be something new to baseball. He's not a 'dumb' ballplayer - as intellectuals habitually label athletes. He's smart, and he's sensitive.

Reporters love to quote him and joke about him - he's food for thought. In the film, one TV newscaster announces: "Bill Lee just flew to Florida for spring training - probably without a plane."

Lee wears the same number '37' as the famous temperamental Cleveland Indian Jimmy Piersall did - but Lee doesn't need to throw bats out of the dugout to get attention. He uses his arm and his head.

A baseball fan's strongest desire is to get as close to the game and the players as possible. The film shows this - Montreal spectators appear with intent faces, donning blankets over their shoulders to keep out the rain and the cold. Another fan cuddles a transistor radio to his ear. The camera, controlled by Martin Duckworth and Serge Giguere, with additional shots by Guy Borremans, looms in almost uncomfortably close. We see everything in extreme close-up - which often cuts off our vision and forces us to lose a sense of the play-by-play action, but somehow that doesn't matter. This is a film about a man and just peripherally about the game of baseball.

Baseball fans in the theatre audience feast on glimpses of the 'behind the scenes' images. As a game opens, the umpires, with their backs towards us, quip about there being two National Anthems in Montreal.

We constantly get that 'down home' feeling from the film: we see Lee driving his van to the ball park, getting caught in traffic with the rest of the fans.

"Why don't you take the subway to the game!" Lee yells out his window. "I work here," he smiles.

The film makes you want to get to know Bill Lee better. You like him, and his humor and openness makes you feel how vulnerable any intelligent individual is.

A baseball film involves baseball fans, and at the Cinema Five premiere the movie-baseball fans cheered when they saw their favorite players on the screen - and they cheered for Bill Lee.

One goes away from *Bill Lee: A Profile of a Pitcher* thinking about things other than baseball. One goes away thinking about the world and how someone like Bill Lee can force us to look at what's around us in a new perspective.

In a world of media-controlled thinking that seems pretty important. Baseball fans or not - one shouldn't miss this film.

Lois Siegel ●

## BILL LEE: A PROFILE OF A PITCHER

d. Bill Reid p. Bill Brownstein sc. Bill Brownstein, Bill Reid ed. Steven Kellar cine-matog. Martin Duckworth, Serge Giguere loc. Glenn Hodgins, Marcel Fraser sd. ed. Abby Neidick additional cam. Guy Borremans asst. cam. Claude de Maisonneuve, Jean-Roch Marcotte asst. ed. Yibeké Sol, David Sherman asst. sd. ed. Glenn Hodgins p. asst. Norma Shadley, David Sherman, Helene Pilote gaffer Jacques Girard mix. Michel Descombes, Sonolab mus. consult. Corky Laing p.c. Double Bill Films Inc., 1981 running time 77 min. col. dist. Cinéma Libre Inc.

Gilles Blais'

## Les adeptes (The Followers)

Since the germination of Eastern religions in the West during the latter years of the '60s, investigations of such sects as the Hare Krishna have become increasingly of public interest. Horror stories of religious brainwashing and de-programming therapy often associated with this community (among others), coupled with the exotic appearance of its members, have caused outside reactions ranging from curiosity and perplexity to fear.

Founded in New York in 1965, the western sect of the Hare Krishna flourished in California. Today, followers of Krishna (the supreme Hindu deity) are recruited throughout the world.

In an effort to understand the force behind this movement, Gilles Blais of the National Film Board followed the Krishna community of Montreal for a period of six months. Out of 15 hours of film, he has made an 80-minute documentary centered on three young disciples of Krishna (Michel, Robert and Johanne), covering their conversion and



eventually their formal initiation into the Conscience of Krishna.

Throughout, the camera alternates between a public and a more private view of the Hare Krishna. Shots taken on the streets of Montreal of the Krishna devotees (as they are formally called in their religion), are juxtaposed and contrasted with more intimate sequences inside the Krishna temple. Blais follows their daily practises which include 3 a.m. reunions in the temple and the recitation of their mantra. (They are required to repeat the various names of Krishna 1,728 times a day. Their shaven heads (their hair offered as sacrifice to Krishna), and Eastern attire (a uniform meant to inspire thoughts of God), make them painfully conspicuous within the context of Montreal. In the temple, the camera swings from shots of zombie-like dancing before garish, almost ghoulish sculptures at the altar, to yawning children and babies asleep or crying on the floor, insidiously implying a total lack of responsibility and awareness on the part of the followers.

At first, one is inclined to feel a sense of pity towards the three novices. Their naivety seems appallingly obvious, their vague responses to key questions about their religion, almost a betrayal to their newly adopted faith. Before even reaching the sublime, the ridiculous becomes all too obvious as young advocates of Krishna are seen putting on clumsy wigs and street clothes with the intent of "gently" introducing outsiders to their rigorous spiritualism.

As Michel, under this guise, approaches a reluctant passer-by, the man exclaims, "At least you weren't stupid

enough to shave your head." The irony is damagingly evident.

In the light of feminism the role of women in the sect is preposterous. Women are considered to be nine to 10 times more concupiscent than men and, therefore, are in desperate need of their guidance. The men are their masters. But in having a master, states one of the more fervent female members, one is free. In a following scene a married couple within the Krishna community is interviewed. Both husband and wife elaborate on the subordinate role of women and yet, while the husband deliberates, the camera zooms in on the wife's face, catching expressions of both bewilderment and regret.

However, despite the merciless eye of the camera, apparently bent on exposing the contradictory nature of the movement, the filmmaker's stand becomes less clear as awkward statements made by the devotees are counter-balanced by the perplexity of disciples' parents and the irrational reactions of passers-by.

A scene, in which Michel's confusion about the religion is underlined, immediately precedes an interview with his father, whose "we-gave-him-all-that-we-had" speech instantly transforms him into a cliché caricature. The fervour of the Hare Krishna in the streets of Quebec City is correlated with the fervour of a member of the Bible Society who refutes their claim that Krishna will return to earth, by referring them to a passage in Exodus: 20. Blais presents a battle of religions in which a knowledge of dialectics is lacking on both sides.

Near the end of the film a group of the Hare Krishna, while awaiting the arrival of a spiritual master at Dorval International Airport, confront and are confronted by an irate couple who claim that their son was abducted by the Moonies in California. The couple's violently reactionary stand is evidently understandable, yet is hardly presented as attractive. Shortly thereafter the spiritual master arrives laden with flowers and is ushered out of the airport. And as the car pulls away, the camera zooms in on its Mercedes logogram.

In the final scene, that of the very elaborate initiation of the three novices, the camera alternates between the religiously enthusiastic faces of the newly initiated and the scowling expressions of the outside visitors.

Perhaps not a documentary in the strict sense of the word, *Les adeptes* presents an intimate view in which semblances of religious tolerance and objectivity emerge. Through his constant use of cinematographical contrapositions, Blais expresses his final ambivalence towards the Hare Krishna. And it is this ambivalence, which becomes increasingly apparent, that prevents what so often verges on satire from becoming a total mockery.

Lois Pope ●

## LES ADEPTES (THE FOLLOWERS)

d. Gilles Blais research Rachelle Lussier consult. Mike Kropveld cam. Andre-Luc Dupont, Roger Rochat, Michel Thomas D'Hoste, Seraphin Bouchard, Jean Lepine, Serge Lafortune sd. Jean-Guy Normandin, Hugues Mignault, Jacques Drouin, Raymond Marcoux, Michel Charron elec. Walter Klymkiv, Maurice DeErnsted, Gerald Proulx ed. Yves Leduc, Nicole Chicoine re-rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel admin. Monique Letourneau p. (assoc.) Georges Dufaux exec. p. Jacques Bobet p.c. A French production by The National Film Board of Canada (1981) running time 80 min.