

Kalli Paakspuu's Maypole Carving

During baseball season in the summer of 1980, down in the Harbourfront park at the foot of Bathurst St., a strange obstruction appeared in right-field sometime during the month of June. It was the huge trunk of a 700-year-old cedar tree. It had been felled in the forest near Squamish, B.C., stripped and transported by truck to Toronto. With it came a small mobile office, and a group of people with a purpose as grand, it turned out, as the piece of wood itself.

They were going to carve something: a Cosmic Maypole. Great! We re-aligned our baseball diamond and continued on with our season.

Two years later, one Kalli Paakspuu, filmmaker, arrives at the Canadian Film Makers Distribution Centre with a 23-minute documentary describing the evolution of this Cosmic Maypole, from the felling of the chosen tree in the lush B.C. forest to the raising of the finished icon, oiled and swirling with carved images, on a chilly October morning in an empty park in Toronto.

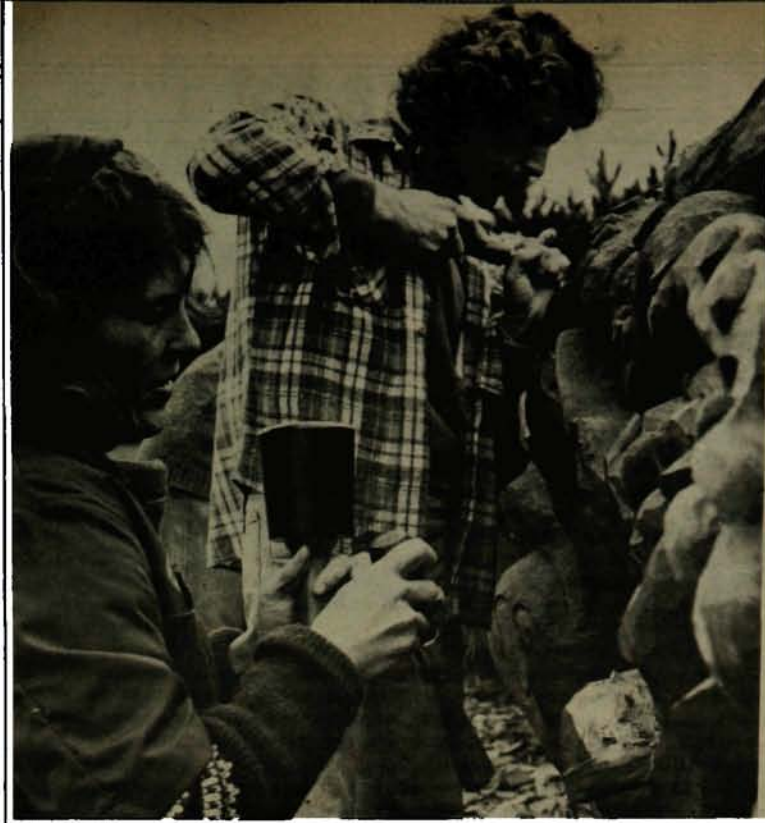
The film begins with a series of long-held close-ups showing a carver's hands, wielding mallet and chisel, slowly fashioning the details of a face in the wood. Timothy Sullivan's music compliments perfectly to immerse the viewer in what is to be the essential idea of the film: slow, patient, painstaking work, performed not as drudgery, but as a way of contemplation and learning - and therefore, creating.

During the establishing sequences, as we see the felling of the tree and its eventual placement at Toronto's Harbourfront, there is a voice-over in which designer Georganna Malloff explains the motifs and the story which the carving will depict. She has mapped the whole thing out for the carvers in red and black paint: it is to be a creation myth entitled "The Dreamwork of the Whales." The maypole's various sections will provide a telling of creation's beginnings... through to a vision of a higher consciousness which man will eventually attain.

Scoring (continued)

big screen. The odiously miscast Jack Weatherall looks as if he had more fun doing *The Elephant Man*. That leaves us with those cinematic luminaries Cloris Leachman and Eddie Albert who are, supposedly, our bargain-basement rite of passage to the American distribution deal. Appearing quietly in a thankless supporting role is the one actor in this film who's got the face, talent and brains to be a great actor, Nicholas Campbell. When he looks at the camera you know what he's thinking and when the words don't suffice his body takes over. He's such a good actor that he can even make a lousy part look interesting. The producers of *Scoring* obviously never thought of Campbell for the leading role. Apparently, going for a second rate T.V. star/tennis player like Van Patten was their idea of inspired casting.

Taken all in all, *Scoring* isn't really much better or worse than any number of Canadian films we have seen recently. Its budget, \$1.5 million, is a fair price for any film these days if it is to recoup its



● The maypole slowly takes form

All the scenes and elements are autonomous, yet, by design, they overlap and connect with each other: a Cosmic Maypole.

Then comes the main body of the film which concentrates on the carvers. Chainsaws and axes are used to make the initial cuts. Then, as the maypole takes on a form, the tools become smaller and the work more delicate. But is difficult for the carvers, as they work at close-range on details of the still horizontal slab, to visualize the completed work. So designer Malloff is brought back during several scenes to make sure the rhythms and textures fit with the overall plan. It's interesting to see a "director" at work, striving to make the concept and the physical materials merge. The film could use much more of the presence of Georganna Malloff.

Chip by chip, the Cosmic Maypole nears completion. Two other sequences are inter-cut with the actual work on the wood. One hints at the engineering dynamics involved in raising the mammoth pole; and the other shows one of the members of the maypole group

appearing before Toronto city council, giving a progress report and appealing for aid in the matter of paying for the pole to be raised. As with the scenes involving Georganna Malloff more development of these elements of the project would have given the film a greater breadth. (It's always fun to see such worldly people as city politicians arguing and expressing themselves on the topic of such things as Cosmic Maypoles.)

The film ends with the raising of the maypole on an autumn morning in the nearly deserted park. Those involved dance with pride and joy at their accomplishment, but one is left with the feeling that the whole project was carried out in near anonymity.

Technically, the film's strongest point is the music track. This element is the strongest in helping to establish the feeling which must have surrounded the small group as they worked through the summer and fall. Paakspuu, who appears to have done her own editing, chops a few scenes off with a haste that is noticeable. Why didn't she linger more, as she did with those beautiful opening close-ups? Rolf Cutt's camera has provided the basic materials, but, (and I suppose this falls back into director/editor Paakspuu's lap), a little more thought beforehand to the *rhythm* of a story about such a huge sedentary object as a maypole could, perhaps, have illicit a little more in the way of variety in the cinematography. I don't know what her budget was, but, as stated, the thing was lying there from June right through to the World Series; plenty of time to study and story-board.

But the film is enjoyable and valuable. It explains the maypole, and, partially, the perspective of those who caused it to happen. It's good that we have filmmakers such as Kalli Paakspuu whose curiosity and dedication would attract her to produce and complete a project such as *Maypole Carving*.

John Brooke ●

MAYPOLE CARVING p.c. Kalli Paakspuu
Films p./d. Kalli Paakspuu d.o.p. Rolf Cutt's ed.
Kalli Paakspuu ed. Kalli Paakspuu. Scott Prebby
music Timothy Sullivan dist. International Tele-
Film Ent. running time 28 min. 16mm colour

Peter Raymont's Magic in the Sky

Harvey J. Crossland's Somewhere Between

Anne Cubitt's Treaty 8 Country

Canadian cinema has presented us with two images of native peoples. The first was of smiling and silent performers of exotic crafts and practices. Whether we were asked to despise or romanticize this anthropological subject, the implication of these films was that the native person was essentially alien to our European culture, a sideshow to our daily lives.

The second image of the native person has been that of the political activist, the hero of films like *You Are on Indian Land*. Admirable as these films were in bringing native problems into public view, they carried within them a rather demeaning assumption. The first was that their native protagonists had gotten smart; they would succeed because they could be taught the mechanics of Western style radical struggle. No longer would the native person be essentially alien to the film audience. Instead, he fit quite well into the rhetoric of those productions that brought us Oppressed Minority, Type A.

Three recent films concerning native problems have come up against these fundamentally divergent views of native peoples in contemporary Canada. Most successful is *Treaty 8 Country*, a film by Vancouver documentarians Anne Cubitt and Hugh Brody. The first half of the film is a synch sound sequence of a caribou hunt on a western reserve. As the hunt slowly unfolds, the temptation is to see the film as yet another "Indians trap and skin something" ethnographic epic. Yet we are soon made aware of breaks with the anthropological approach. The silence and distance of the hunt is frequently punctured by the hunters' discussion of their actions and of the nature of the process.

While skinning and gutting their prey, the hunters project a social awareness that goes beyond the traditional practices of the hunt. This awareness is made more tangible with a radio announcement of a meeting to discuss infringements of the hunting rights guaranteed under Treaty 8. Almost imperceptibly, we move from the hunt to a meeting on the reserve. The legal issues surrounding the hunt are explained by a native lawyer to the band council and the hunters. And, as these issues are unfolded in a lengthy anecdotal fashion, the camera pans away from the speaker to the continued, now seemingly endless, process of preparing skins and meat.

The genius of *Treaty 8 Country* is the genius of any great documentary: the ability to tell a story on its own terms. The hunt, in its own good time, becomes a political rally. But it is a political rally

David Eames ●