

Graeme Ferguson's Hail Columbia!

In his recent book, *2081*, eminent physicist/thinker Gerard K. O'Neill offers a surprisingly positive view of the future, predicting, for instance, that in 30 years time we'll be shuttling into space with the same frequency we take holiday cruises today. To some, this may sound like sheer science fiction but O'Neill's reasoning is both eloquent and inspiring. It's hard to resist his enthusiasm for super technology, especially the Space Shuttle, which he believes will shape our tomorrows the way the wheel shaped the past. Viewed in this light the world's first spaceship takes on global importance. It represents far more than just another example of Yankee ingenuity.

It is fitting then that there is a film to commemorate the maiden flight of the Columbia. A welcome surprise is that two Canadians, Graeme Ferguson and

HAIL COLUMBIA! d. Graeme Ferguson p. Roman Kroitor, Graeme Ferguson assoc. p. Phyllis Wilson narr. James Whitmore narr. writer Roman Kroitor ed. Toni Trow composers Micky Erbe, Maribeth Solomon music consult. Zalman Yanovsky d.o.p. Graeme Ferguson, David Douglas, Richard Leiterman c.s.c. Haskell Wexler a.s.c. Ronald M. Lautore, Phillip Thomas cam. assist. Martin A. Lautore, Gordon Harris, Lawrence E. Orlick, Douglas C. Hart, Bonnie Bass Parker, Steve Stafford, James Neihouse, Gary Jay, Conrad Hall pilots Ken Baker, Steve Feaster loc. sd. Tom Hilderley, John Megill, Aerlyn Weissman, Lance Hoffman research Stephen Low 2nd unit loc. man. David Keighley prod. assist. Karl Esch tech. support Jim Hooton, Ron Hurst, Colin Gardiner assist. ed. Roberta Kipp sd. ed. David Evans, Wayne Griffin assist. sd. ed. Kelly Hall re-rec. The Film House Group, Paul Coombe, Mike Hoogenboom, Elius Caruso advisors and consultants William C. Shaw, William Breukelman, Robert Kerr, W. Michael Sullivan, Bruce Hoover: Technicolor Graphic Services lab & optical co-ord. Fred Langenbach post prod. consult. David Keighley opticals MGM Optical Effects/Camera-Wm. M. Hughes Jr. titles Burke Mattsson, MGM Titles/Based on original design by Theo Dimson labs Metrocolor, The Film House Group, PSI Film Laboratory Inc. pr. Allan Bowen, Janice Kaye, Joan Rogers, Gayle Bonish p.c. Imax Systems Corp. running time 36 min. colour, 70mm-IMAX dist. Imax Systems Corp.

Roman Kroitor, were given the task, and they wisely chose to take a few quantum leaps beyond the ordinary by shooting their film, *Hail Columbia!* in IMAX. Only IMAX, with dimensions ten times greater than conventional 35mm film, could do justice to the Columbia's awesomeness, and convey in its proper significance this historical event.

Both Ferguson (*North of Superior*) and Kroitor (*Tiger Child*) are veterans of the six-storey screen, which makes it all more disappointing that *Hail Columbia!* – even with its intoxicating visual dimensions – fails on almost every count as a film. Outside of 60 exhilarating seconds of footage showing the Columbia's breathtaking liftoff, the film rarely manages to rise above mediocrity.

For some inexplicable reason Ferguson and Kroitor are infatuated with split-screen techniques, which only serves to muddle the effect of IMAX, and give the entire film an out-dated, Expo '67 feel. Even more disturbing is the way the two chose to ignore the grandness of the event, instead concentrating on a comparatively irrelevant sideshow: will Columbia's tiles fall off during takeoff or re-entry? Yes, this was a consideration during the mission but the whole business has a somewhat trumped-up, boring ring to it.

Ferguson and Kroitor also miss the target when it comes to showing the activities surrounding launch. Instead of an international celebration we get something that resembles a Texas backyard barbecue, with endless shots of wide-eyed Americans parading near the launch site, waving the stars and stripes, gulping their Budweiser beer.

Why two Canadians gave *Hail Columbia!* an entirely American slant probably has a lot to do with who financed the film. Nevertheless, it is inexcusable because Ferguson and Kroitor not only have made a poor film, but have missed a glorious opportunity to create a lasting celluloid document of a truly important event for future generations. Instead they've made a Yankee Doodle promo, the likes of which we've seen far too many.

S. Paul Zola ●



● Jimmy clutches his make-believe guitar as Luke works the street

Larry Moore's Jimmy and Luke

Jimmy and Luke opens with a long, tight pan across the huge mural painted by the kids of Bain Ave. Public School. Imaginative, expansive and colourful; that's half the quiet but powerful 27 minute drama directed by Larry Moore and produced by Film Arts in Toronto.

The other half of the theme is friendship and communication. The story is a triangle, not of lovers, but of three awkward strangers. It centres around Jimmy, a boy of about nine or ten, who is presented as totally isolated in his own fantasy world. He has an invisible friend named "Johnny," with whom he talks and plays, but the real people in his life are blocked out. The kids his own age tease and harass him because he's so strange, and Aunt Agnes, his guardian, tries, but just can't make contact.

The one person who seems to be able to spark Jimmy is a street-singer named Luke. Jimmy is drawn to his music; he imitates Luke, first with a broken tennis racket, and follows him around. Luke's a sad loner. He's perplexed by Jimmy's attention, but he allows the kid to tag along and eventually they become partners... (Jimmy's cute presence with his pretend guitar is good for business)... and almost friends.

Aunt Agnes leads a drab life, struggling to support her dead sister's son, and love him too. She tries to be patient with Jimmy's invisible friends (as far as Aunt Agnes knows, Luke is just as imaginary as "Johnny") and she even helps Jimmy construct a guitar out of cardboard and string. But Jimmy's silences leave her feeling hopeless most of the time.

Watching Luke trying to cope with the responsibility of a friendship he doesn't really want, and Aunt Agnes clumsily trying to build a relationship with her nephew creates reverberations that last long after the film is over. Luke is given a low-keyed gruff dignity by Toronto musician Luke Gibson. For the adults who see the film, the isolation of the character is scary. And there is nothing romantic or wistful about Ann Anglin's Agnes: she's terribly single, doesn't seem to understand the world at all, and yet she knows that somehow she has to help this lonely kid participate in it.

Paul Braunstein's sad face is the perfect reflection for the characters of these two isolated grown-ups.

(Don't worry, the story has an ending that is balanced in favour of the happy.)

The script is very sparse, but it feels to be just right: lonely people don't talk

that much. It was written by Amy Jo Cooper who has worked with *Playing With Time* on its *Kids of DeGrass St.* series. It colours the melancholy feeling of the film, and provides basic information. But the plot and real emotional dynamics of the film are built mainly through the editing of Stephan Fanfara, who co-produced with director Moore. He puts Jimmy in motion, and keeps him bouncing between Luke, Aunt Agnes, and his own fantasy world. The result is a portrait of a child who, you can feel, senses he doesn't really belong anywhere.

Luke Gibson's music fills in the background, so that the story is strong and complete, yet simply stated and accessible to viewers of all ages. *Jimmy and Luke* has a lot in it.

John Brooke ●

JIMMY AND LUKE d. Larry Moore ed. Stephan Fanfara d.o.p. Fred Gathe ex. p. Don Haig assoc. p. Paul Caulfield p. Stephan Fanfara, Larry Moore sc. Amy Jo Cooper l.p. Luke Gibson, Anne Anglin, Paul Braunstein p.c. Film Arts/Mekanique Prod. running time 28 min., 16mm, colour dist. Canadian Filmmakers Dist. Centre.

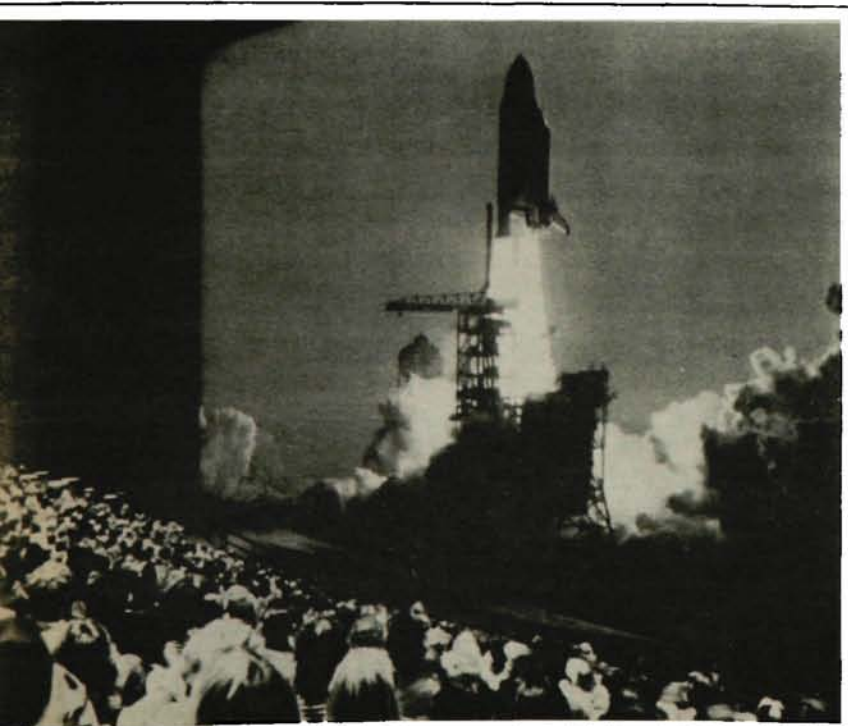
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or departments of government? If so, this may be because the Festival board think it is not as easy to obtain showings for such films as for films funded by a corporation. This is patently not the case for *The Breakthrough*. A comparable film – also a powerful documentary dealing with social issues – is *Prison For Women*. This film's source of funding has clearly not hampered its distribution and *The Breakthrough's* source of funding has clearly not helped it. The vagaries of distributing and funding independent films are far more complicated than the Festival of Festival's qualifying rules.

Where one might reasonably hope that the board of the Festival of Festivals would support independent Canadian filmmakers they are making life even more difficult.

The producers of *The Breakthrough* do not regard filmmaking as a private art. It is important to them that their films are seen. They do not want to miss the opportunity the Festival of Festivals can provide for Canadian filmmakers so they have decided to obtain and publicize a showing of *The Breakthrough* to coincide with the Festival. After all, *The Breakthrough* is still a prime example of independent Canadian filmmaking, despite the Festival of Festival's neglect.

Siobhan Flanagan
Script Consultant
on behalf of Peter Williamson
and Ira Levy



● Columbia takes off on Imax screen