Ron Mann's
Poetry in Motion

Ron Mann's first feature documentary, *Poetry in Motion*, is a compelling look into the worlds and works of Cecil Taylor, Archie Shepp, Bill Dixon and Taylor, four highly respected yet little-documented figures in jazz music. Mann's second feature documentary, *Poetry in Motion*, is a spellbinding film of poets and poetry.

Individually and together, these two films reveal a filmmaker capable of making the seemingly inaccessible eminently accessible; a filmmaker capable of opening our eyes, ears and minds to worlds not universally known or appreciated. More important, Mann and his associates in both films, the artists in front of the camera and the craftsmen behind, achieve this with startling simplicity: they allow the considerable pleasures, power and resonance of the spoken word to speak directly from artist to audience with a minimum of interference or "translation" for general public consumption.

Thus Mann reveals a refreshing respect for the art, the artist, and the audience.

Cleaver, Taylor, Shepp and Dixon, on the verge of being cast aside as relics of a bygone era, are resurrected through the spoken word. Here, as they were in the spoken word, they share a common human base and are, at their best, living expressions, inherently accessible and intelligible to all, natural extensions of human existence and of each other. Poetry in Motion is Ron Mann's attempt to capture and express no less than this.

The performances unfold in rapid succession with a different meaning to each of the speakers, some words repeated as many as five times in quick succession with a different meaning to each of the speakers, some words repeated as many as five times in quick succession.

Like a sober warning from an overly critical professor, Bukowski's sombre and querulous monologue -- as much a performance as any of the actual "readings" -- periodically intrudes upon the flood of presentations, underlying their vibrancy with fearlessly lamenting its general non-existence.

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One of the neglected poets, Allen Ginsberg, becomes the most often and best remembered poet of the 60s. Ginsberg is the great energy of the film's soundtrack is compromised, but it is still a remarkable achievement.

The potency of the performances is so great that even when the crystal clarity of the spoken word is compromised, the poets remain in performance, will prove its own best testimony, and will leave us with this: that the art is not separate from life; that all art forms share a common human base and are, at their best, living expressions, inherently accessible and intelligible to all, natural extensions of human existence and of each other. Poetry in Motion is Ron Mann's attempt to capture and express no less than this.

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As a film of electric energy -- the art and artists pulse with a vitality so galvanizing that audiences viewing the film applaud and cheer spontaneously after almost every one of the "readings." The poets are working the film audience, and that audience, in turn, is working the poets, as if the kinetic barrier-window of celluloid simply does not exist.

For these Canadian and American poets, a "reading" is a performance, a vital interaction between poet and audience, a life-giving act as important as the words it brings to life. And by performance I mean not just that not the lifeless, toneless, laboured readings of poets thrust into an unwanted spotlight, vocally transcribing their printed words, but that performance has evolved into the extraordinary diversity of expression of the passion, the creativity, the essential humanity possible in an art form that embraces principles of music and dance, as well as vocal interpretation.

As Poetry in Motion begins, the forty-fourth poet, Charles Bukowski (whose books include "Burning in

in colour and texture, within an environment shared in succession by each of the artists. The result: a subtle yet eloquent visual statement of the diversity of expression offered within a shared context -- the art of the poet.

Poetry in Motion is a remarkable achievement. While striving to eliminate barriers, Mann erects a few of his own, particularly in his frequent use of voice-over introductions. This attempt at informativeness and fluidity causes confusion when applause drown out some of the poets' names. And without the visual reinforcement of on-screen titles, it is very difficult for those of us not acquainted with many of the poets to remember a name called out in the darkness.

Nevertheless, *Poetry in Motion* fills an enormous void. "You're a poet," says John Giorno, "and there's an audience, and whatever happens in between, the poem. It takes place in performance, on the page, and in any other fashion that connects with an audience." And now, it takes place on film.

Laurinda Hart