



● Breaking new ground with the documentary: Yves Simoneau's *Pourquoi l'étrange*: M. Zolock s'intéressait-il tant à la bande dessinée ?

Banff Television Festival '83

Electronic flyspecks in the divine cathedral

by Gordon Martin

Sitting in the well-upholstered lounge of the Max Bell Building while most Banff Television Festival participants are still struggling to awake, it is easy to play to solitaire version of that timeless parlour game, *reductio ad absurdum*. Yes, the Festival is designed to encourage and recognize excellence in TV programming. Director Carrie Hunter has said it many times, and with dedication sets her course in that direction. At its best, television is a broadening experience, a taste of the world beyond one's horizons; surely sumptuous and satisfying fare.

Yet here in padded comfort the eye is irresistibly drawn through the picture window to a golden sunrise on Cascade Mountain. A slightly fluorescent version of the same scene, taped weeks earlier as a backdrop for program announcements, pleads for attention on the lounge's many and well-placed monitors; electronic fly specks in the divine cathedral.

The Festival thrives on this kind of dichotomy; even strives to make the money changers feel at home in the temple and the art-worshippers at ease among the entrepreneurs. Indeed, after seven days in this sublime natural

Montreal writer/producer Gordon Martin has covered the Banff Television Festival since 1979 for a number of trade publications.

paradox the intricacies of international deal-making and the critical appraisal of an often exploitative medium do become reconciled. For Banff works a kind of magic that breaks down traditional barriers between the sacred and the profane and casts a spell over its increasingly large and loyal following, a spell which warms even the cold stone hearts of reviewers and critics.

There was much to criticize amongst the 221 entries from 19 countries which held official status in the programme, as well as the dozens of other videotapes that made it to the Festival in suitcases and handbags. Yet there was little time left to participants for viewing after the rounds of receptions, seminars, and discussions. The diffuse nature of the television medium which legitimately embraces such a wide range of themes, treatments, and values made it practically impossible to catch "the best" each day. The monitored lounge areas which replicate the way television is watched at home were also conducive to casual viewing. It was easy to stray off in the direction of popping corks! Like the rainbow which arched its way across the Banff '83 poster, the productions formed an infinite spectrum of subject and style. Like the elegant array of dedicacies that graced each reception, it was possible to sample only a few.

Bold, brash and slick was the \$2 million screen version of Alvin Toffler's *The Third Wave*. A superb example of internationalism in financing, content, and production, this 90-minute television special separated the audience, if not

down the middle, at least into two distinct camps. Toffler's evangelical message of salvation through the corporate society was splendidly visualized by TVOntario producer-director Wally Longul, hand-picked by the author to do just that. He had a little help, mind you, from Toronto's Omnibus computer animators whose constant image transformations encouraged the hi-tech "gee-whizzery" which is an essential ingredient of the Toffler package.

The trouble is that the superstar futurist leaves no room for thought, reflection, ambiguity, or exploration. The film is a 90-minute commercial whose unsubstantiated assertions exemplify the old maxim, "If you say it often enough it will be so." We are told in one long seamless breath that "In a mass society the team is more important than the individual," and, "The key to understanding the third wave is diversity." Attention to detail and accuracy are not Toffler's strong points. The packaging itself is all-important. In this respect the filmed version is certainly faithful to the book. It is curious that a respected institution dedicated to the provocation of learning could be a partner in this propaganda piece extolling the virtues of immaculate life in a corporate heaven.

For \$27,000 and a lot of unaccounted craftsmanship Helene White of Calgary created a half-hour labour of love called *Lady in Motion*. The "Lady" in question is Agnes Hammond, Alberta rancher, artist, and dog breeder; a woman whose face bears the lines of character and

humour etched by winds sweeping eastward down the slopes of the Rockies. The film unfolds at a leisurely pace. Director White gives us every opportunity to feel the west wind and to soak up the prairie sunshine as we amble around the homestead with Agnes and an occasionally obtrusive interviewer who seems intimidated by her task.

No matter. Glorious framing and camera work and the subtle use of a small number of archival photographs sketch a satisfying, if not intimate, portrait of a fascinating member of Canada's West.

Helene White is herself a Westerner born and bred, a rare find in Calgary these days. Coming from a background in theatre, she has embarked on a filmmaking career in collaboration with colleague Gary Toth. *Lady in Motion* was her first solo directorial job and its success has been rewarded at the 1982 International Film and TV Festival, the American Film Festival, and by network screenings on CBC.

Astral Film Productions executive producer Harold Greenberg and First Choice head Don MacPherson prepared Festival-goers for the premiere of their *Pygmalion* by hosting a lavish and attractive dessert and liqueur party. Perhaps it created too great an expectation for the viewing which followed, but disappointment in the program was widespread. A period piece based on Shaw's play, it did depart from the proscenium arch and use the mobility of the lens to advantage in both close-ups and camera movement. And Margot

BANFF TELEVISION FESTIVAL

Kidder's performance as Eliza Doolittle was quite convincing. But Peter O'Toole as Henry Higgins played his series of screaming monologues to the point of overkill. The special effects which opened the film amidst lightning and rain were less than convincing too. Ah, "What is life but a series of inspired follies!"

One of society's most delicate questions, "Who judges the judges?", was raised and answered by filmmaker Axel Engstfeld of Cologne. Combining poetic sensitivity with incisive journalism Engstfeld's hour-long *Von Richtern und anderen Sympathisanten (About Judges and Other Sympathizers)*, was acclaimed for its absorbing treatment of a "heavy" subject.

To understand the title one must realize that "sympathizers" refers to those Germans in recent years who have been condemned for acts of violence or terrorism against the State. Some of these were ultra-leftists, some anarchists, others simply frustrated by the corruption of the status quo. Engstfeld equates these transgressors of the law with the very judiciary which has sentenced them to lengthy prison terms.

For this surprising document reveals that the past and present of the judicial system is closely interwoven. Many of the judges themselves were at very least fellow travellers of the Nazi regime, and through a tightly-controlled system of legal education and induction of younger colleagues to the established principles, the mentality of collaboration lives on.

About Judges and Other Sympathizers is an indictment of apathy, a plea for the separation of justice and politics at all levels, and a personal message about the lust for power and position. As the camera trundles silently through the marble corridors of power, a whisper roars through our sensibilities. The frenetic screams of the dreaded Nazi judge Freisler, "Let them hate us as long as they fear us," echo clearly from the recent past.

Peggy Parnass, a journalist and long-time court reporter, herself a Jew related to victims of Nazi "justice", plays an important role in the film both as a moderator and guide. Her observations about the severe punishment of simple crimes by authorities whose bloodstained Nazi histories go unquestioned in the interests of maintaining a stable system, are both shocking and instructive. As Dr.

Hermann Stolting says to the camera "No, my conscience wasn't burdened when I officiated at executions. I can only say I found it unpleasant. But that was more a question of aesthetics than of law."

Engstfeld combines drama and documentary style with ease, and does not shy away from the fact that the film creates its own reality, - a reality which is every bit as accurate and much more telling than that of the journalist.

Dutch filmmaker George Sluizer used the Festival's superb on-demand screening facilities to screen two of his films. *Adios Beirut* is a chronicle of two Palestinian families and their lives over eight tumultuous years. A 45-minute personal documentary, it speaks of the basic needs of life and asks why anyone who understands the promised land cannot comprehend the longings of the Palestinians. Sluizer is an expert at letting his characters and situations speak for themselves. His skillful cutting of footage taken over an eight-year period creates a drama of human suffering which is gentle and touching, yet free of sentimentality.

In *Sweetwater Junction* Sluizer has made the kind of film which Robert Altman would make if he turned to documentaries. On the surface it appears to be a simple document of the annual Rattlesnake Round-Up in Sweetwater, Texas. But the images are skewed off just a touch, held for a fraction of a second too long to be simple journalism, cut together with apparent ingenuousness which on second thought reveals as sly and subtle hand. Is this *The Meaning of Life*?

From Montreal came an extraordinary 70-minute film, a mixture of mirth and sobriety, which exploded on the screen with all the force of its comic strip subject matter. Yes, why is the strange Mr. Zolock so interested in the comics?

Pourquoi l'étrange M. Zolock s'intéressait-il tant à la bande dessinée? is a caricature of caricatures, a film about the *bande dessinée*, that special kind of comic book peculiar to Europe and practically unknown in North America outside of Quebec, except for translations of Tintin and Asterix.

Yves Simoneau has used all the visual and aural tricks of the cartoon trade to fashion a unique and entertaining documentary. Like the comic strip it is a mosaic of discrete moments in time. ♦



♦ Understanding Palestinian longings: George Sluizer's *Adios Beirut*

Banff '83 briefly

by Linda Kupecek

The Fourth Annual International Banff Television Festival (Aug. 14-20) attracted over 300 international delegates to an action-packed week of seminars, screenings and receptions.

The Banff Festival, despite growing pains, appears to be moving towards the status of a world-class event. And, according to many delegates, what sets the Banff Festival apart from its competitors is its informal setting and comparative intimacy. Add to that the backdrop of the Rockies, and its appeal is clear.

The "Rockies", the awards ceremony held at the Banff Springs Hotel, might dispel any charges of provincialism and nationalism, for the Best of the Festival Award was beamed out to *Women of the Sun*, an Australian entry, while other award winners were of diverse origin: the U.K., the U.S., Sweden... and Canada.

Producer Maryke McEwen of *For the Record* raked in the Best Drama Special Award for *Ready For Slaughter*, which she produced for the CBC. "I think that *For the Record* is the most important series in North America", she says. "In the States they aren't allowed to attack issues. With us, if you take a subject, you can approach it any way you want."

The traditional Canadian content debate raged throughout the week, with Dr. John Meisel of the CRTC enduring with grace the harangues of frustrated producers. Harold Greenberg dominated a panel on international co-production

with his own fiery comments on Canadian production, while Australian and British delegates offered their own points of view... and the Americans were politely blank.

In reaction to the never-ending debates on the dilemma of the independent producer, a free-thinking group headed by Dusty Cohl and Ed Cowan, organized the Dependent Producers Party, a howling success complete with hilarious manifesto.

Meanwhile, back at the seminars, Ed Cowan delivered a post-mortem on C-Channel, offering a number of reasons for its premature demise: undercapitalization; internal battles; not going 24 hours-a-day; overspending early in the game; simultaneous start-up and national launch; regulation problems and government problems; and lack of previews.

While debates on regulation, deregulation, Canadian content and pay-television steamed ahead, On Aug. 15, Harold Greenberg announced the start of *Draw*, a comedy western adventure starring Kirk Douglas and James Coburn, and shooting in Fort Edmonton and Drumheller. And Maxine Samuels announced two projects for Alberta: a two-hour made-for-pay-TV movie on the life of black cowboy John Ware (for spring) and a feature based on Maria Campbell's compelling autobiography *Halfbreed*.

Finally, despite the pace and hectic schedule, a good time appeared to be had by almost all - especially American actor Gregory Peck, who received a special award honouring his transition into television.

Plans for next year's Festival include two positive changes: new dates of May 20 - 26, and a new locale - the Banff Springs Hotel.



♦ *Lady In Motion's* Agnes Hammond, fascinating member of Canada's West

Actress Linda Kupecek's most recent role was playing the young Doris McCarthy in *Richard Leiterman's* and *Peter Shatalow's* *Doris McCarthy: Heart of a Painter*.

Festival quotes

Dave Greber, writer :

"Canadian content is what we - the regional writers - are asked to discard from our material - because the mandarins in Toronto won't understand it - and - further - what we discard from our material for the international market because the mandarins in New York won't understand."

Harold Greenberg :

"It is time that people realized that it is easier to get access to world markets than our own system."

Jacques Dercourt, Parafrance :

"If you are thinking only in terms of making a deal, you are lost. And if you are thinking only in terms of making a film, you are lost. You have to integrate."

Harold Greenberg :

"We could fill your creative needs just by bringing back the people who had to leave this country to work."

Max Engel :

"Being an independent producer means you have the independence to fail on your own. If you succeed, you suddenly have a partner."

Marc Gervais, CRTC :

"I haven't been to a Festival that is more a Festival. This is an amazingly successful mix... Cannes used to have the Mediterranean. Banff has the mountains. Here, a small group of people get to know each other."

Ed Cowan, C-Channel :

"It's my second year here. The Festival has taken a gigantic leap forward in terms of the questions. The independent producers were in a cooperative mode, more understanding and less antagonistic... a very good sign for the future. The Festival needs more international participation in terms of entries. Not only that... but I've had a very good time."

Paul Barron, Barron Films Ltd., Australia :

"A quality experience as opposed to a quantity experience. You get to spend an hour or two with fifteen or twenty key people as opposed to a rushed cup of coffee with a hundred."

Maxine Samuels (at a press conference on John Ware) :

"There probably isn't a black actor who wouldn't accept this role. But what we won't accept is an ex-athlete who can ride a horse."

Les Brown (on switching channels with a converter) :

"I don't watch anything. I watch everything."



● Calgarian Helene White's first directorial solo *Lady In Motion* has achieved widespread international acclaim

the brief interviews with artists (or are they illustrators?), the linking fantasy drama which brings the innocent Dieudonné together with the villain Zolock, and the sequences of camera movement across the printed page achieve remarkable unity.

The *bande dessinée* is almost always irreverent, sometimes cruel, and often offensive to Puritan sensibilities. Simoneau's camera roams the streets of Paris collecting insights from the minds of its creators, explores their studios to discover technique, and lingers too briefly on the social context of this pop medium. His use of sound, layers of effects, sparse use of a few musical notes, varied voices, and bridges between scenes, is as brilliant as his camera work. Because he is not inhibited by a traditional narrative approach, Simoneau captures the audience's mind by appealing to the eye and ear in comic strip fashion. Oh yes, beginning, middle, and end are all there, but not necessarily in that order.

Banff is a competitive festival as well as a showplace, business forum, and educational experience. So it was that an international jury headed by Claude Fournier survived their assignment to screen 80 hours of competing programs and even asked for more. They looked at an extra 20 hours of productions which had been set aside by the pre-selection committee.

Above all the jury was looking for "exceptional, bold, new ideas and approaches." With one exception their search was fulfilled. No award was made in the Light Entertainment category simply because these standards were not met.

The Case of the Middle-Aged Wife (The Agatha Christie Hour) was awarded a Rockie for Television Comedy, a heading which the jury relabelled as Comedy Drama. *Middle-Age Wife* from Thames Television is indeed a witty, well-acted, finely-directed example of the genre.

Juror Les Brown, editor of *Channels of Communication*, explained the pro-

blems he and his colleagues shared in naming *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* as tops in Fine Arts Programs. "Many entries were performance programs, others were documentaries about the arts." He went on to commend *Nickleby* for its unusual adaptation to the television medium. "Training a camera on a world-class stage performance is not necessarily good television," he remarked.

Jacques Dercourt, jurist and director of *Télécip*, noted the irony of a worldwide trend to reduce the number of documentaries on networks just as the form is reaching new standards of excellence. *A Season in the Sun* from U.K.'s *Survival Anglia* received a Rockie in the Outdoors and Wildlife Documentary class. Dercourt praised the film-

makers for their careful preparation of the story, and their avoidance of anthropomorphism.

An ABC News *Closeup* entry, *Vietnam Requiem*, garnered top honours among Social and Political Documentaries for its simple, direct, and compelling approach to the ongoing Vietnam tragedy.

One of the two Canadian awards winners was *Ready for Slaughter*, a CBC drama which jurist Patrick Chalmers, head of BBC-Scotland, commended for its appeal as a contemporary subject rather than a period piece. Directed by Allan King, it stars Gordon Pinsent as a beef farmer struggling to keep his farm in the midst of the present economic crisis.

Winning the Rockie for the best Continuing Series for the second consecutive



● Just desserts: John Standing, Margot Kidder and Peter O'Toole in *Pygmalion*



● Members of the Nazi magistrature vow to uphold the law in Axel Engfeld's *About Judges And Other Sympathizers*

year was an episode of *Hill Street Blues*, *Trial by Fury*.

Little Gloria... Happy at Last was chosen as the outstanding entry in the Limited Series category and was cited for its authenticity, careful attention to detail, and a memorable performance by Bette Davis.

If there had been a popular vote, *Harry's Game*, a superbly written and acted full-length drama about the strife in Northern Ireland would have carried the day for top honours. The jury, however, recognized it as best Television Feature, noting that its impartiality and illumination of a complex situation harmonize perfectly with a powerful dramatic handling.

Two prizes were given for originality of concept, the one to *Special Bulletin*, a

private U.S. production, and the other to *Patricia Highsmith: A Gift for Murder*, from London Weekend Television.

Special Jury Awards with accompanying \$2,500 cash prizes went to Sweden's *The Miracle of Life*, a didactic film which transcends the limitations of its form to reveal with raw drama a mystery whose plot is so familiar to us all, and to *Pourquoi l'étrange M. Zolock s'intéressait-il à la bande dessinée?* an S.D.A. Productions entry. Jury chairman Fournier was delighted to find a struggling independent company breaking new ground with the documentary. Noting the woeful showing of the National Film Board, he commented that "Canada had a world reputation for documentaries but we are now out of touch. It's about time that we make up. We have not

varied the genre. Only the filmmakers have changed."

Best of the Festival, which included a cheque for \$5,000 along with a Rockie, was awarded to Australia's *Women of the Sun*, episode one. It is an extraordinary production because of the acting of the main characters, a group of aborigines who are non-professionals. Courageous too, in its use of the original voices with sub-titles. Inspired perhaps by *Walkabout* and influenced by *Quest for Fire*, it exemplifies the potential popular appeal of programming which is not carefully designed for the mythical American mass audience.

Throughout the Festival seminars, this real or imaginary audience was invoked with constant regularity as the great guiding spirit which must inform all producers and directors. Although its parameters are vague, it is defined by ratings, the use of known stars and easy stories, by advertiser acceptance, and by those most conservative of gatekeepers, the program purchasers.

Participants were told that "Buyers err on the side of caution. They won't try anything extraordinarily different. They look for similarity to existing successes." Another panelist told listeners about her hope for a not-too-distant future when it would be impossible to distinguish the country of origin of any program.

But here in Banff, home of cheerfully co-existing dichotomies, the jury proved it wasn't so. Most of the honoured films will probably never find their way to American small screens. Yet they were made and paid for by someone, and will continue to be made. Excellence will out, with a little help from its friends!

If you want to share in this feast of culture and commerce, this meeting-place of the ephemeral and the durable, this interface of the corporate and the individual, mark down these dates on your agenda under Banff's sunny rainbow: Banff Television Festival, May 20-26, 1984.

Festival quotes

Neil Hickey:

"They always say there was a golden age of the documentary in American television. Well I don't remember it."

Peter Pearson (on the CFDC Broadcast Fund):

"We are building a rather primitive baseball field in the back forty in the hope that someone will come."

Pat Ferns (on the need for a producers' lobby group):

"One spends 50% of one's time lobbying to create an industry rather than working in the industry."

Paul Barron (evoking applause):

"A lot of producers wouldn't know a good script if it hit them in the face."

Dr. John Meisel, CRTC

(on regulation):

"We must identify the problems and act on them. Failure to do this would spell disaster for those in Canada who believe that national obliteration would be a disaster."

Helene White, HBW Film Productions, Calgary:

"The sacred cow of Canadian content sure got a workout."

Lori Harris, security guard, Banff:

"A friendly, cordial group of people having a good time and getting a lot of business done at the same time."

Gene Lawrence, TV Ontario:

"One of the problems the Banff Festival has is deciding just what it is. It is very close to becoming an important Festival - a world-class festival. One of the problems has been in trying to please too wide a clientele, so that the seminars were of less interest to active professionals. Next year, there will be a more focused Canadian element, hopefully in a bilingual setting."

Ed Cowan (after an impromptu survey of the crowd):

"If you want an industry, then you have to buy pay television!"

Claude Fournier

(at the Rockies):

"I believe that the situation comedy between Quebec and Canada should be taken off the air. The ratings are down, and we are all losing money on the show."

Dr. John Meisel (on the prevailing attitude toward regulation):

"One's own area is sacrosanct. Everybody else's should be regulated."

Harold Greenberg:

"You have a better chance of Canadian content with a co-production."

Linda Kupecek ●



● Maryke McEwen, Gordon Pinsent, and director Allan King get *Ready For Slaughter*