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photo from Canadian Pacific Archives



High hopes in *Our Cultural Fabric*

ed when so attired in Canada, while the filmmakers reveal through the juxtaposition of magazine stills and live models the way in which high-fashion has co-opted “peasant” styles of dress. As well, the filmmakers interviewed a professor of anthropology who is able to explain the symbolic and practical rationales behind a wide variety of dresscodes. There are moments of subtle humour, irony and even bitterness which emerge throughout *Our Cultural Fabric*, as well as the few fascinating explanations of cultural customs like those mentioned earlier. But such moments are kept short, oddly enough. Instead, the filmmakers have structured their film around a bizarre intrusion which, for me, reveals their own unacknowledged perceptual bias.

Intending *Our Cultural Fabric* for the youth market, to be used in high schools and other educational settings such as churches, libraries and synagogues, the filmmakers shaped their material around the device of an intentionally obnoxious game-show panel which indulges in snide cultural slurs, inane babble and aimless energy. Evidently, the filmmakers felt that only by alluding to the glittering schlock of most television culture could their film appeal to this particular age group — an assumption which itself is simply another form of stereotyping. Even

more problematic, the inter-cutting of this panel with the other material creates, at times, the obviously unintended effect of crudely “commenting” on a previous interviewee. For instance, an immigrant discussing his native attire is punctuated, through editing, by the shriek of the game-show whistle, which serves to unintentionally send-up his remarks.

It seems to me that the filmmakers may have been confronted by the prevalent fear of boring a teenage audience. Not trusting the strength of their original subject to fascinate any age group, they undercut it through using a device — the game-show panel — which actually comes to occupy the privileged place in the film in terms of screen time allotted, verbal dominance, visual energy, and in being the editing “peg.” The resulting emphasis in the film is given over to scenes and remarks which are prejudicial in nature.

*Our Cultural Fabric* is only the first in a series of films exploring cultural differences and intended for a youthful audience. If the filmmakers trust in the strength of their original idea, as well as in their audience’s sincere interest in learning about cultural differences, they will no doubt turn this into a fascinating series.

Joyce Nelson

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