

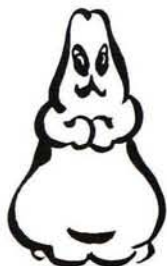
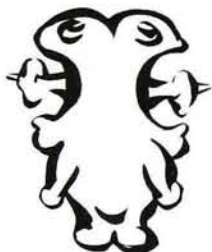
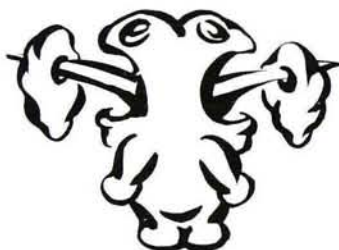
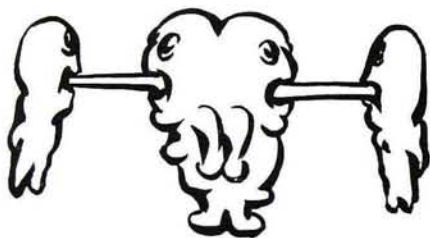
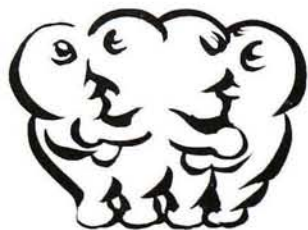
# FILM REVIEWS

## Rien Qu'un Petit Chanson D'Amour

The National Film Board, a microcosm of the country it represents, is split down the belly button between French and English. Even in the cafeteria at noon, tables are divided into the red and the blue and perhaps the only contact between the two cultures occurs in the washrooms waiting for a free towel dispenser.

One of the more amusing manifestations of this xenophobia is in the fact that there are two animation departments at the Film Board; each with separate autonomy and distinctive styles; located at opposite ends of the huge building and light years apart in sensibility. A sad consequence of this split is that while the McLarens and Ryan Larkins and Don Ariolis get widespread and well deserved publicity, not much is known about their franco-phone counterparts. A case in point is the work of Vivienne Elnécavé and her recently completed film *Rien Qu'un Petit Chanson D'Amour*, (Just a Little Love Song). This particular love song is drawn in a black and white style reminiscent of the Krazy Kat cartoons of the thirties but it is not a cute or pretty or colourful animated film. Using what must be an animated equivalent of psychoanalytical free association, the film takes us on a ten minute odyssey through the terror and pain of love; from an infant's desperate attempts at closeness with its parents to an adult's relationship with a cruel and isolating world.

The film begins innocuously enough with a rocking chair oscillating to the country sound of a five-string banjo. When the rocking chair metamorphoses into a man, we are not surprised. So far it just looks like good animation. But then this first level of reality is shattered as the arms of the rocking-chair-man smash through a wall and pull out a struggling bird. It is like some form of raw energy has been pulled up from the unconscious. Later in the film, the bird becomes a child, a child who is killed by its parents, its chest split open by a dagger, as we go deeper into the chest and are plunged into a deeper level of the unconscious. The pulsating heart metamorphoses into a man crucified by a nail to the relentless rhythm of a flamenco. The film now becomes a dance, perhaps one of the most painful dances ever choreographed on film. The man becomes two and then four. The



dancers swallow each other, regurgitate the meal, come together and then split into four. The splitting and fusion continue. A dancer removes the heart of his partner through the mouth and the heart splits and reveals two more dancers. The action becomes faster and faster and the process continues into a blinding infinite regress of broken hearts.

Searching for Vivienne Elnécavé's predecessors, one does not think of Disney or McLaren. The names which come to mind are Dali, Buñuel and Edgar Allan Poe. She uses the medium not just on the level of cartoon or moving abstraction but, through the metamorphosing of shapes and personae, as a reflection of what is going on deep in the subconscious. It is a personal statement and yet universal enough to trigger powerful emotional reaction, sometimes attraction, sometimes revulsion but with the universality of one's own dreams.

*Ronald H. Blumer*

## Coming Home

The concept of applying use of media to an intense, personal situation is not brand new, just new enough to make further attempts in the area interesting to the viewer. Allan King's *A Married Couple*, and the PBS Series *An American Family*, each demonstrated the technique and its possibilities. *Coming Home* works on many levels as a tool for improving the difficult relationships inside this particular film, and the film itself is helping others to gain insight and understanding in their own family relationships.

Bill Reid left a Ph.D. programme when he realized that academia would teach him no more about what he felt were the important aspects of life. He started off as a production assistant at the NFB and while there, had access to a Portapak video tape outfit. That outfit accompanied him on a trip home to Sarnia where he again found himself caught up in his unpleasant relationship with his family, specifically his father.

The Portapak recorded a family argument of some 20 minutes duration, and that tape sparked the idea for a more detailed film project that would capture the family in its natural state, and work as a tool to assist in settling its long-established differences.

# Blumer, Kirshenbaum, Edwards, Fothergill, Hartt

Photo: Baltazar



Bill Reid

Bill's father is the Chrysler dealer in Sarnia. He built his business from the ground up and has obviously had hopes that one of his sons would carry it on for him. Neither Bill nor his younger brother is inclined in that direction. The father is also upset with the fact that Bill wears his hair long, and dresses in blue jeans. This problem of Bill's appearance is the major stumbling block, it seems, to any kind of communication between Father and Son. Bill asks why his father cannot talk to him as an equal; in fact, can not talk to him as a human being, and rather than discuss the point, a monologue begins on how Bill's looks make his father ashamed (or words to that effect).

The mother is caught in the middle of the situation, and can be understanding of both viewpoints. Above all, she is mediator of the dispute and the force moving to keep both men from shutting off the whole process of communication.

The younger brother at 21 is just coming into the problem of feeling that he cannot relate to his parents. He expresses the thought that he feels a conflict in not being able to carry on the same behaviour in the company of his friends as in the company of his parents. This duality is forming into his own identity crisis.

As an 84 minute documentary, the film does not attempt to solve the problems of the Reid Family. Rather it documents the group in discussion and attempts to be as unobtrusive as possible. The only way that Mr. Reid would consent to the experiment was for Bill to promise to get a haircut, and since that seemed to be the central pivot of

the argument, Bill felt the concession to be part of the process. It was, of course, not the magic key, and the father's reaction was even less than it might have been. But the film covers some ten days of personal interaction, and when it's over, there is very little improvement in the family's situation.

The film stands as a statement of the situation as it began, and the various attempts to break down barriers to communication at conversations over meals and at less formal times as well. It has been working very well as a conversation generator at meetings of family counselling groups and the like. This seems to be its function to others, in letting them see how their own problems look as they happen in other families. For the Reid family there were positive results to the project, but these did not come about until after they saw the film. The first screening brought no reaction from them. No comments, and no attempts at reconciliation. Months later, at a second screening, things did begin to happen, and the overview which the film gives, on an intense personal level, did allow a base for discussion. Apparently, with the passage of time and considerable discussion of the events in the film, many of the Reids' family problems have been successfully worked out.

Reid sees film as a tool which, applied to sociological reality, can work to help give a view of the situation that will help both those directly involved and others who watch the study. It has worked in this situation and there is no reason why it shouldn't work in others. As the kind of tool that is useful in therapeutic counselling, it is an indis-

putable success.

There are elements in each character of the drama that allows some form of identification for each member of the audience. The sad realities of the film blended with the lighter moments involving small-scale successes in the ongoing battle make the film an enjoyable experience, especially for a larger audience that usually sees such material on TV, in smaller groups.

Harris Kirshenbaum

## Diary of a Sinner

Comment from Iain Ewing, 29 year old producer of successful skinflick *Diary of a Sinner*:

**"If I ever go to Hell what the Devil's going to make me do is look at that film for one thousand years."**

... Ewing.

Iain Ewing is absolutely determined to make movies. And in fact he has been making them, learning the craft, the art, and even the businesslike aspects of the trade, ever since he made his first film, *Picaro*, an attractive 27 minute short in 1966 while at McMaster.

But *Picaro*, though a pleasing little film, never got any distribution and neither did his next film, *Kill*, a conversational off-beat work involving a disgruntled young man who'd like to kill his father. Despite some grotesque and bizarre suggestions which Ewing says a college audience really digs, the film is basically philosophical and totally non-commercial.

One of the major accomplishments of this film was simply the process of getting it made. With a borrowed \$500 and several thousand feet of professionally unusable film stock that had spent five years in the Arctic, and with bargain rentals from Janet Good of the Canadian Motion Picture Equipment Rentals on Granby, and owing money everywhere, getting everything done on credit, and editing the film while at UCLA, he finally got it made. It represented some \$1500 in hard cash and a lot of hard work.

Ewing's next film was somewhat shorter and more successful. Called *A Short Film* it was a three minute student exercise at UCLA which his professor termed "perfect." Twenty-three at the time, Ewing decided after two semesters at the famous University of

California at Los Angeles film school (where Don Shebib also studied) that he had no need for a degree and it was time to get to work.

Back in Canada he made *Eat Anything*, a film he loved making but found the reception to be "a real disappointment." "It's a good film," he says, "a really beautiful honest film about human beings." Made in 1970 it presents about 25 people he really liked, doing natural things like playing the guitar or talking about their marriage, interspersed with Toronto shots and concluded with comments they make about their feelings about God. The CBC turned the film down.

This film is with his others at the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre waiting for viewers. Ewing couldn't care less about how much money he makes on it, but he would like people to see it.

Ewing continued to accumulate experience. He worked on David Sector's *The Offering*, Don Shebib's *Goin' Down the Road*, starred in David Cronenberg's *Stereo* and *Crimes of the Future*, acted and sang his own music in Clarke Mackey's *The Only Thing You Know*, worked on a film in India as a soundman, and returned to photograph his sister, Judy Steed's, film *It's Going to Be All Right*, and make a 20 minute short for the CBC *Bo Diddley's Back in Town*, (of which they ran seven minutes one Weekday).

And still he couldn't get a feature film underway or convince the CFDC to part with some of the \$120,000 he needed to produce his love-story script.

So he decided to make a skinflick.

He found a friend who agreed to foot \$4000 for film stock, and a real estate entrepreneur who finally invested some \$20,000. And with director Ed Hunt, another filmmaker whose heart wasn't really in the filmflesh business, *Diary of a Sinner* was shot right on schedule in 13 days last summer at Kew Beach and a rented Toronto house with a total budget of \$65,000 of which only \$23,000 cash was actually spent.

The deferrals and debts will be cleaned up if the film makes money. Danton distributor's Dan Weinzweig thinks they may make enough right in Canada to break even, and has already confirmed bookings for Hamilton, Oshawa, London, Winnipeg, a drive-in chain and Montreal in the fall.

So now that producer Iain Ewing and director Ed Hunt have a success with *Diary of a Sinner* will they do much more than establish good credit ratings for future films with it?

Not likely. Intrinsicly the film is weak, and as Ewing modestly admits, "... has a lot of flaws due to inexperience and the conditions under which it



Scene from "Diary of a Sinner"

was made." Oddly enough, though the story line is a far different thing, the virtues and weaknesses in *Diary of a Sinner* are similar to those in Ewing's early *Picaro*. Again there are sequences that seem strangely out of place, and swift style shifts in which disturbingly honest revealing scenes are interspersed with unreal and fantastical episodes too suddenly. It continues to suggest a potential for something better.

In the *Diary* at one point two girls talk frankly about their feelings about death and suicide, while the pimp and ex-priest wait in the park outside impatient with evil intentions. The girls, photographed and lit with spectacular beauty by Jock Brandis, seem to be an insert from some other, fascinating film.

The audience of carefully distanced single males watching the film when I attended, seemed engrossed and satisfied. But what they saw was innocence itself compared to the fare the serious film buff finds in every second film.

For instance in a shower sequence two couples slather soap on each other as enthusiastically as ten year olds, giving the scene a wholesome playfulness that is a far cry from the sensuous lathering scene in Teshigahara's *Woman in the Dunes*. Ewing mentioned that the censors cut about five minutes. They cut the end of the shower scene for example though he couldn't see why, since the end was the same as the beginning. "Maybe," he suggested, "they just felt, 'That's enough of that!'"

Anyhow, any skinflick in which a jaded nearly 30 pimp (played by Ewing) in confessing to his lusty ex-priest pal begins with, "I love Union Station", can't be all bad. And the shots of the station, the city, the lake, and the Kew Beach district as well as the girls and the beautiful pink-glowing body of professional Calla Bianca doing a gorgeous strip, keep the visuals always interesting.

To top it all, Bo Diddley, a friend of Ewing's, made music, and the music is fine.

—Natalie Edwards

## Diary of a Sinner

Sophisticated audiences have many defences against the moral appeal of a work of art. Popular audiences, on the other hand, are suspicious of artistic pretentiousness. So the artist with an urgent moral vision of the world is forced to choose between artistry, which will alienate the vulgar, and morality, which will be wasted on the cultured. Faced with this dilemma, writer-actor-producer Iain Ewing and his faithful director Ed Hunt have chosen to preserve the integrity of their moral vision and to risk neglect by the art-house crowd. Like a Salvation Army band, they play a simple tune for simple ears. Following *Pleasure Palace*, a drama of redemptive love in the sordid underworld of nude modelling, their second film, entitled *Diary of a Sinner*, opened recently at the Coronet Theatre on Yonge Street.

The simple story, told in a series of abruptly disconnected episodes, concerns a suicide pact forced upon a lonely and sex-starved ex-priest (Tom) by his debauched but world-weary fellow roomer (Dave). Perceiving in Tom the death wish that lurks in all humanity, Dave (played by Iain Ewing himself) proposes a week of unbridled sexual licence, to be followed by the suicide of whichever one of them the toss of a coin shall decide. Tom consents and asks to wallow in sex until he is sick of it. And wallow they do, in every beastly vice that Toronto can offer, from the body-rub parlours of Yonge St. to Discipline and Bondage in a basement in North Rosedale. But before the week is up Tom has grown weary of the fruitless quest for self-abandonment in pleasure. Out of his nausea and chagrin he is entranced by the image of Simone, a pure and lovely woman in the thrall of an evil heroin pusher and abattoir operator. To win her love he offers to kill this monster, in which undertaking Dave readily assists, since his own true love (Joan) was debauched by the very same man. None the less, Dave still demands fulfillment of the pact. Proving his manhood to the newly-won Simone, Tom accepts the challenge. Dave loses the toss and promptly plunges into the polluted waters of Lake Ontario.

Regarded as a low-mimetic fiction, *Diary of a Sinner* might appear somewhat implausible in conception and more than a little crude in execution. But such a view would fail to recognize the archetypal skeleton concealed in the

sagging flesh. Only in form and style is *Diary* a cheap and rather vacuous soft-core porno flick. In its essence it can be seen as a profound moral fable on one of the central themes in Western art: the struggle of the soul of Man against the downward pull of evil and annihilation. Dostoevskian in its insight into the workings of a nihilistic soul, *Diary* is an urgently contemporary rehandling of the Faust theme. If Iain Ewing's Dave is a chaotically incoherent character — jovial, sinister, chivalrous, harsh, giggly, romantic, cynical, tit-crazy — it is because he embodies the very essence of Chaos itself. Disintegrated by nihilism and satiety, he is incarnate Evil, offering nothing but oblivion and death.

Defying the superficial conventions that represent Evil as hideous and inhuman, Iain Ewing shows us the pathos of a soul whose fall into the void has been from a height of clear idealism. There is pathos in his story of Joan, the girl enslaved by the heroin pusher, and pathos in his thwarted desire to be a rock singer, the brightest of them all. Like Lucifer, he was once a bright angel, and in his fallen state, seeking to put the cold touch of nihilism and death upon other souls, there is manifest self-hatred. As he says, in a line that captures the lean economy of the film's dialogue: "I never loved Joan; it was only a game." His vindictive hatred of woman, and of all idealism, is the face of idealism gone sour. As he offers to Tom the dismal satisfactions of his own infernal existence, which Tom at first perceives as paradise, we can almost hear him say, with Marlowe's Mephistophilis, "Why this is Hell, nor am I out of it!"

It is a mark of Ewing's daring intuition that his characterization of Evil goes so far as to encompass the grotesquely comic. Traditionally of course, sin is indeed absurd, a travesty of true humanity made in God's image. While Tom's erotic encounters lead upward to Love with the pure Simone, Iain's gross couplings touch bottom when he is assaulted in a basement by lady-wrestlers in Viking costumes. Squawking feebly for help, he is held down and lashed on his chubby pink buttocks — an image of infantile impotence. Evil is overcome by being rendered ludicrous.

Playing opposite this suburban Satan, Tom Celli gradually invests the protagonist with spiritual dignity and moral grandeur. As an ex-priest he embodies the thwarted desire for a transcendent faith, at once vulnerable to Iain's delusive promise of erotic bliss, and hungry for a higher satisfaction. Out of the dark night of the soul in which the Tempter has found him, there comes the re-awakening of the spirit. He communicates to Iain his insight that "Materialism is the religion of modern man", and begins to yearn for less barren

gratifications. He talks derisively of Catholicism, agrees to hear Iain's "confession", and even engages in a rather perfunctory Black Mass at Iain's suggestion. Yet we can see that, even as he parodies his priestly function, he is recovering his conviction of its meaning. At the same time, Iain, while he initiates these mockeries of faith, implicitly acknowledges its power. The gamble for Tom's soul has become the harrowing of what remains of his own. The heart of the film is the sequence following the Black Mass: in a surreal fantasia (in tinted monochrome) Iain nails down the lid of a coffin over Tom — an image expressive of the essentially annihilating nature of his patronage.



Iain Ewing and Tom Celli

But the vestiges of Iain's humanity continue to compete with his Despair (the sin for which there is no forgiveness). In spite of himself, and in memory of his love for Joan, he helps Tom to vanquish the beast who has imprisoned Simone. Only after learning of Joan's death does his hatred for life cause him to demand fulfillment of the pact that will result in Tom's, or his own destruction. He has performed a saving act in assisting Tom to the realization of a redeeming love. But for him there is no salvation. The filthy waters, to which he has earlier compared his soul, close over him.

The vision of modern life, or more particularly of Toronto life, displayed in *Diary of a Sinner* is melancholy indeed. The spirit that animates the screenplay is a bleakly tragic one. For although the plot depicts the redemption of a soul by Love for spiritual desolation, the character with whom the author has chosen to identify cannot find redemption for himself. Indeed, it is just his diseased vision of a loveless, depraved, vicious world which Tom needs to be rescued from. In other words, *Diary of a Sinner* is a fantasy in which Iain Ewing destroys himself in order to save the inno-

cence which his own nihilism endangers. A sacrificial act of the imagination, it is a Faust story written by one of the damned who retains enough love for his former brethren, for his unfallen self, to commit suicide rather than to spread damnation further. Iain Ewing is a character out of Graham Greene, a saint who volunteers for Hell.

Robert Fothergill

## Love at First Sight

She takes one look and BAM — it's love at first sight. But what is wrong with Dick and why does he call himself Roy, and in what way is he disabled?

By the time you know, the belated title has told you that *Love at First Sight* is a film by Rex Bromfield starring Valeri Bromfield and Dan Akroyd, and you can settle back for a cheerful half-hour with one of the most human, ordinary, funny and engaging Canadian couples ever: Roy and Shirley.

She's like the essence of Judy Holliday. One of those crazy dames who walk past the gates of hell, chewing bubble gum and reading aloud from a tourist guide. Dense but delightful.

And he's tall, dark, and in Shirley's opinion, obviously handsome, but with a difference: he has a disability. It's the kind of thing that in the hands of playwright David French creates a diatribe, but blooming under Bromfield's touch, only accentuates the vulnerable, incomplete qualities of man. Everyone has some flaw. But if you're in love, like Shirley, you hardly even notice.

Love is blind. And so is Roy.

Did you automatically flinch? Not to worry. Bromfield isn't out to create false heroics, sloppy sentimentality or to moralize. Roy's blindness doesn't make him tragic or incapable. Shirley doesn't give a hoot, not that much fazes Shirley anyway. And as Bromfield sets up the story so that you don't have to feel pity or concern, you are able to nervously enjoy the very human predicaments this couple get into on their visit to Niagara Falls.

For instance: While Shirley waits impatiently in the car, Roy enters a thin woods to relieve himself out of sight of the road.

"Can you see me?" he calls.

With the exasperation that indicates this has been going on some time, she answers, "Yes."

After awhile he calls again, "Can you see me now?"

"Yes! Go further!" she calls.

Finally, his voice again: "Now can you see me?"

"No. Roy! Where are you?" she panics, realizing neither of them know.

This scene finally melted even a sophisticated Cannes audience this year. As Bromfield exclaimed with happy relief: "It really broke them up."

Bromfield's sense of humour is so rare nowadays one feels like capturing it under glass. But film will do. Subtle, understated, it is based on character, not silly situations. It is, in fact, the gentle humour formed of an attitude to life, of a genial acceptance of the human condition and the lovable qualities of the human's ridiculous, idiosyncratic nature.

It is also the humour of survival, of the Good Soldier Schweik and Buster Keaton and of the lovely crazy comedies of the thirties. Maybe it's just in time!

To make this type of comedy work, the acting must be nearly perfect. And I think it is. Shirley is played wonderfully by Valeri Bromfield, the director's sister, she was part of the old Second City troupe and is now a regular performer on the Bobbie Gentry Variety Show. And Ray is an observant and sensitive portrayal by Dan Akroyd who can be seen here in Toronto with the present Second City group at the Firehall Restaurant, 110 Lombard St.

The characters are both believable and amusing. Facial expressions and reactions do not seem to be created for the benefit of audience but rise naturally from the incidents of the plot and the basis of the character. Seemingly unperformed, the roles distill the essence of those recognizable human foibles that make us love each other and forgive ourselves.

When this works, true comic art is created. Rare as it is wonderful, any director illustrating an ability to produce it should be hung with bells and fed delectable things every hour on the hour by a happy public.

Bromfield's film background includes a tiny comedy *I Am Chinese* made in 1966 and shown at Cinecity; many CBC fillers and shorts, those on artists like Pachter, Redinger, Zelenek and Danby amounting to an hour's viewing altogether; and a short on Karel Appel called *Appel Salad* which avoids all didacticism, to the annoyance of those anxious to be educated. Even at this early stage in what, hopefully, will be a long and fruitful career, he has good control of actors, excellent editing judgment and generally inconspicuous well-considered use of technique.

But best of all he has subtlety, and in subtlety lies the birth of humour, in my opinion. For when an audience must search a little for the gag, or patiently let the ludicrous force of circumstances shape the absurdity that becomes amusing, then the audience itself is creating the humour rather than accepting a calculated, cued barrage such as TV comics utilize. And when the audience finds humour in a situation, they are not just amused, they are happy.

-N.E.

## Montreal Main

Frank Vitale's remarkable first feature film, *Montreal Main*, probes deeply into the troubled and insecure inner core of the people who will not conform to society's limiting black-or-white, male-or-female classification. And in so doing it suggests the diversity of sexuality, the shades and shifts lying inherent and unacknowledged in all people. Watching, you flash Lolita, Peter Lorre as "M", parental incest, and a flood of forgotten allusions from history and literature about the secret mysterious world of indeterminate sex and forbidden love.

Long after sexual diversity is acknowledged and understood, Canadians will be proud of this early work, this original, brave, revealing and beautifully constructed film.

It has the integrity of a diary, or a confession. It is an inside study of humans hunting for those relationships that define emotional life. In a world where sexuality is no longer linked inevitably to parenthood, and people are becoming disconnected digits in a computerized society, desperate for individual meaning, the relevance of the need to love and be loved, and perhaps the impossibility, have implications that reverberate into the twenty-first century.

With zero population, and the next generation about to become the first so-called "permanent society" the male and female will obviously develop into other beings than those their genders define now as essential to the survival of the species. Vitale's film previews a world where the only real need the characters have for each other is the need to be needed. During the course of the film the consequences of that and the resulting emptiness make us realize that in losing adherence to animal functions and their structures (hunting, bearing, protecting, helping each other survive) we drift into a realm where individual purpose is lost and emotional survival endangered.

Thus a grimy group of Montreal Main's loft-dwellers, artists and gays, and their incestuous infatuations, jealousies and experiments, offer not only a widening experience for an audience, but a portent of a future generation's problem in finding out how to be needed as individuals, when no one is.

Credits for script and cast are the same. Following studio, star and auteur systems in filmmaking, group or cooperative works are now developing a new strength and popularity. Vitale's work is a forerunner here also. A kind of Imaginary Documentary, he and his friends have found a way to present what amounts to a conjecture, or day-dream, in the style of reality.

Charged with a raw realism created

by the semi-improvisational technique, it hoodwinks the audience into forgetting this is no Actuality Drama, *à la* Allan King, but an exploration of possibilities that, like daydreaming, permits safe investigation without actual danger. Perhaps it is Vitale's way of clarifying his thinking, looking for solutions, diverting his energies and avoiding mistakes; indeed, *living* a projection of his life based on truth: an Imaginary or Pretend Documentary.

At any rate, it works and works well. Vitale is one hell of a filmmaker. His background includes *Country Music Montreal 1971* a competent and original study, shown on the CBC; being associate-director and co-producer on some four or five films during the time he lived in New York; and experience as unit director on *Joe* and as a cameraman for *Newsreel*.

Vitale's editing is often superb; intuitive and exciting. The style of the film encompasses lyricism, impressionism, routine shots and awkward, jumbled, hand-held shooting, in a combination that at first seems jarring until one realizes that it simply mirrors the way we see life: things are beautiful sometimes, ugly another. The technique, style and theme blend inseparably and Eric Block's camerawork is totally unified with Vitale's direction.

Unfortunately improvisational acting techniques seem to have caused almost impossible sound problems for Pedro Novak, and many words, phrases and comments are muddled, missed and lost. This is too bad particularly because on a first viewing you need all those words to help keep everyone sorted out and the plot figured, since the film doesn't follow precise chronological or linear action.

The music is aptly composed by jazz improvisational artist Beverly Glenn-Copeland and is fittingly lyrical on the surface, nervously pulsing underneath, underlining and in harmony with the film.

Finally, the story: The main plot involves a bearded photographer named Frank, played by Frank Vitale, and his many-leveled and complicated infatuation with a twelve-year-old boy named Johnny. Whether motivated by beauty, jealousy, longing for youth, innocence, mystery or rebellious defiance of ethical codes, the friendship between the two includes attractions of parenthood, brotherhood, sexual love, danger and perversity. The theme is reversed and carried into a sub-plot involving Frank's friend Bozo and his attempt at a love affair with a charming, normal girl named Jackie.

Both expose the ignorance of the straight world about other emotional worlds, the radiating consequences of love and lovelessness, and the limitations of a system that believes the myth

that gays are witty, supercilious fun-people, sarcastic and superficial, and that everyone else knows their own sexual self.

This is a subtle, splendid film.

—N.E.

### White Dawn

Shot in Canada's Arctic region (Frobisher Bay, Baffin Island) last summer, the \$2.6 million American production of Canadian author James Houston's novel *The White Dawn*, opened in Canada and the U.S. in July. A Paramount Pictures release, produced by Martin Ransohoff, *The White Dawn's* associate producer was author Houston who co-wrote the screenplay with Thomas Rickman. The film is an enthralling and haunting experience. Unquestionably the finest feature film evocation of Arctic Eskimo life to date, it even surpasses Flaherty's silent classic, *Nanook of the North* in style and insight. Neither a melodrama, nor a documentary, nor a simple-minded travelogue, *The White Dawn* with its superlative cinematography, editing and scoring, is a fine example of modern technology exploited to its utmost capability in capturing and evoking the tangibles and intangibles of Arctic existence. A rather conventional plot (three "civilized" men inadvertently destroy the peaceful life

of an Inuit community in the late 1890's) is an unfortunate handicap in an essentially visual film; the script often oversimplifies in words and dramatic action, issues already expressed visually in all their stark and glorious complexity. But it's the images, the sounds, the sensations you recall and savour long after the end of *The White Dawn*. Ransohoff is to be commended for having such faith in the basic material of Houston's novel that he has permitted very few compromises due to commerciality. Two of the film's American "stars" — Lou Gossett and Warren Oates — never really manage to out-pace the solid competition from the non-professional all-Eskimo "supporting" cast including Simonie Kopapik as Inuit-leader Sarkak; Pilitak as one of Sarkak's wives; and the young man who played Sarkak's son. It's *their* film and they

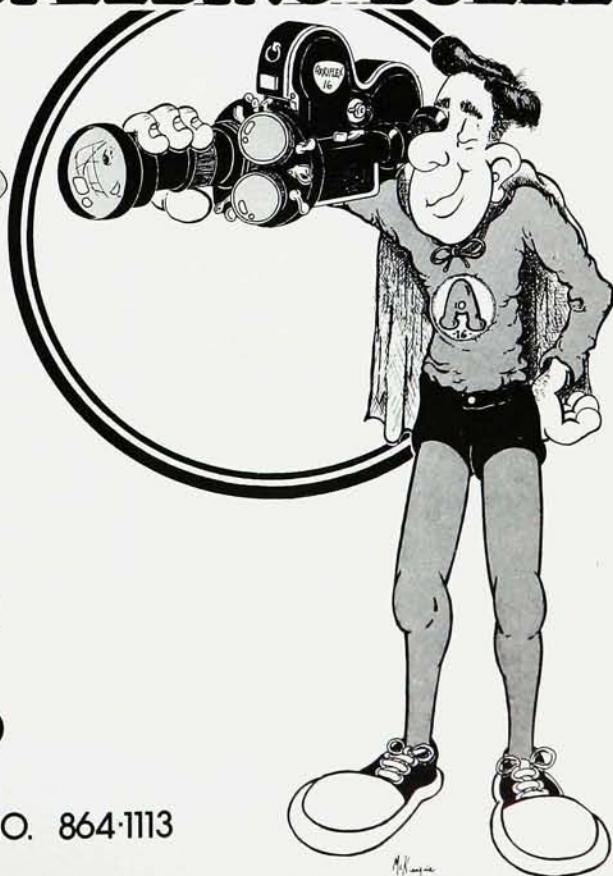
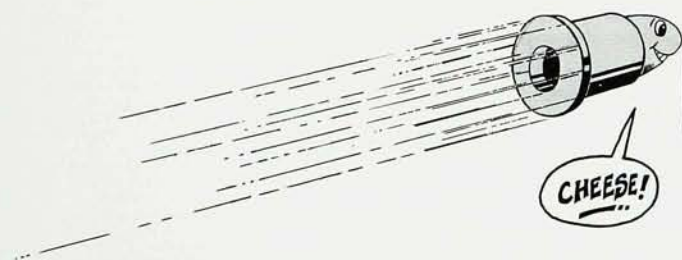
simply shine! Only American actor Timothy Bottoms' thoughtful portrayal of Daggett frequently manages to out-shine both the Inuit performers and the breathtaking landscape. Philip Kaufman's direction is sensitive and uncompromising; the cinematography, under the direction of Michael Chapman, is stunning and measures up beautifully to the grandeur of its subject; and Henry Mancini's score is a masterful balance of primitive themes and subdued modern interpretation — it's his finest work ever. Aside from the NFB's excellent films on the Netsilik Eskimos, one wonders why the two greatest feature-length films on the life of the Canadian Eskimo (*Nanook and Dawn*) have been undertaken by American directors and producers.

—Laurinda Hartt



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