

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. Intrinsically 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."