

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

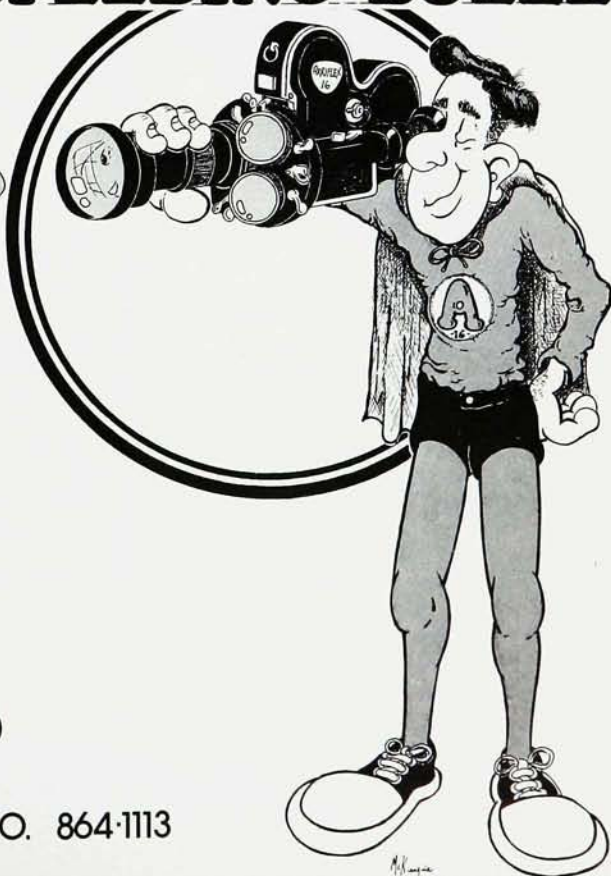
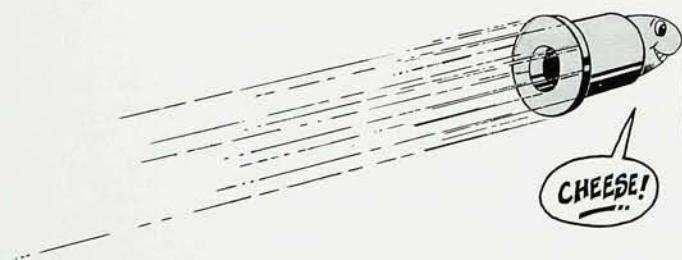
simply shine! Only American actor Timothy Bottoms' thoughtful portrayal of Daggett frequently manages to out-shine both the Inuit performers and the breathtaking landscape. Philip Kaufman's direction is sensitive and uncompromising; the cinematography, under the direction of Michael Chapman, is stunning 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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