

cup of tea, and says, "Yes I do, and if I weren't 99 years old you wouldn't be here — would you? So you see, it has its advantages." Deepa Saltzman has been so inspired by getting to know this remarkable lady, she plans to make a series of films about active old people. Her next film will probably be about a blind 104-year-old Sufi doctor in Delhi, India. It's definitely worth waiting for ...

## Lyle Leffler — Last of the Medicine Men

*Produced, directed and edited by Michael Hirsh, cinematography by Jock Brandis, sound by Elaine Waese and Charles Bagnall, production assistant Elaine Waese, graphic montage by Peter Dewdney, illustrations by Rowesa Gordon, Nelvana Ltd., 525 King Street West, Toronto, Ontario.*

There most definitely is a Lyle Leffler — he's the proprietor of the Valley City Herb Distributors in Rockton, Ontario after having made and sold tonics and teas all his life. The film highlights Mr. Leffler and his family with such ironic humour and gentle objectivity that the audience never quite knows whether to laugh or take it all seriously (and the filmmakers were too smart to destroy this subtle undercurrent). After all, who could avoid being fascinated by a traveling medicine man whose wife, Baby, wrestled their dancing bear while he played accordion and sold snake oil? Shot in southern Ontario, footage covers the family's manufacturing plant, old photographs of the Leffler traveling van, the collecting of herbs and teas in the fields, and Mr. Leffler's 84th birthday party. Definitely an entertaining and unusual documentary on a living folk hero.

—A. Ibrányi-Kiss

## REUNION

*Script, Direction and Editing: Murray Battle, Performers: Karyn Morris, Jack Zimmerman, Pauline Hebb, Zanna Ellis, Lighting/Cameraman: Mark Irwin, Sound Engineer: Fraser Smith, Assistant Director: Anthony Azzopardi, Assistant Cameraman: Paul Dunlop, Set Designer: Elizabeth Ascott, Costume Designer: Ruth Hope, Laboratory: Bellevue Pathé Ltd., Sound Mixer: Ian Jacobsen (Film House), Produced by: Murray Battle and Mark Irwin at York University, 28 min. 16mm, colour.*

An interesting and unusual film turned up at the October showing of six student films at York University, Ontario. It was *Reunion*, a first fiction film by Murray Battle, and the 1973 first prize winner in the Student Film Festival in Montreal that year. (see *Cinema Canada* coverage issue No. 10-11).

In the film we observe the illusionary aspects of appearances through the tale of a man who has been a soldier, has later been imprisoned, and is making a belated return visit to what was once his home and family.

Nothing is what it seems. The man appears to mistake his grown daughter Margie for the young woman his wife was twenty years earlier. And the young woman, apparently trying to make some contact with him through this time and memory lapse, and perhaps also in order to reconstitute her own past through her mother's and the role of this strange, tight, singular man in it, effects a peculiar, eerie transition.

Dressed and made up in late forties' style, she presents herself to her father, and numbly dances with him to the seductive tones of *Serenade in Blue*.

Freudian comments need hardly be specified as daughter and father dance in an uneasy simulation of a past that existed only for one of them. And in spite of the fact the plot seems as full of holes as a lace dress, and the rescue of the daughter from the uncomfortable dilemma of bedtime is coincidentally convenient rather than a structured element of the plot, and the mysteries of why the father was jailed and for what, and why the mother died and of what are never solved, still the film maintains a solid level of its own existence on its own terms. And this is a remarkable achievement in a first fiction film.

It is permeated with a sense of loss and of unhealed wounds that are partly created by the skilled use of exaggerated disorienting sound, coupled with slow, deliberate visual pacing, and mirrored in the stately careful acting presentations by Jack Zimmerman and Karyn Morris, both very fine.

The underlying comment in the film implies that a sentimental attitude to the past cannot bridge the distance no matter how keen the intentions, and in the story the hurt feelings and misunderstandings of twenty years earlier are not cleared away, and the man leaves at the end still determined to maintain his illusions and his pain, leaving his daughter unable to mend or alter the past he lives in.

The chief assets of the film however are not just in the complications of the story line or the psychological hints of the relationships, but in the control director Murray Battle and photographer Mark Irwin have achieved over their material.

In one sequence, the father sits nervously in a chair in his old apartment. We are led into this scene by the daughter's monologue, in which she asserts she always knew he'd come back. A close-

up of his eyes is accompanied by a ringing sound as his finger circles the top of his wine glass. We flash into some brief shots of soldiers, a sense of terror and brutality, and a scream. The sound of the scream wavers, trembles, and turns into the siren of an ambulance outside the apartment. This transition in and out of his thoughts is created with a remarkable fluidity, cleverly controlled by sound.

While we watch these two strange remote characters, their separation through time and memory as clear as their obvious physical presence together, we are in the power of a young filmmaker who knows how to create his own particular world, one where his own myths, dreams and realities can exist.

This is the kind of power that excites. With this it is possible that writer-director-editor Battle, whose first film with Mark Irwin was a striking impressionistic documentary called *Union Station*, can produce some fine future Canadian films.

The York University program also included three capable documentary films, a proportion justified by the high interest in this genre in the department, and its undeniable practicality. *Being First* by Ruth Hope (who created the successful costumes for Battle's film) is a study of the training of an athlete for competition. *Jon Higgins*, examines the musician and teacher and, made by York students with the aid of Terry Filgate, uses Indian music to fine advantage in a well produced work; and *Press Porcepic*, a rough but informative short on this out-of-the-way publishing house made by Paul Caulfield.

The only abstract film was an impressionistic melange on *Highway 400 North* and the one humorous film was a tongue-in-cheek treatment of a modern problem in an old style, a silent and titled presentation of *Her Decision* backed by the incomparable piano accompaniment of Charles Hoffman.

Not all of these films are ready for commercial distribution, but it seems to me that any distributor ready to prove a sincere interest in Canadian filmmakers could easily tuck one of these shorts into a bill in place of those sunfish and sailing-in-Bermuda shorts. Without a doubt the reactions of a regular movie audience would do much to creating a professional attitude in the film makers. For jeers or cheers, what is needed is an audience.

— Natalie Edwards

*Note: Reunion, Her Decision and Press Porcepic are distributed by the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.* □