

ers in the hands of investigating officials. Whatever the reasons, the treatment of the prisoners isn't exactly hospitable. That the guards and officials take advantage of the orders for their own amusement, even to the limited extent that they do in *Les Ordres* is a warning: something about man's inhumanity which has little to do with the Québec Crisis directly. They are no more personally involved in the events of the Crisis than most of the prisoners. They happen to be on the safe side of the War Measures Act. And they alone are not to be held responsible, **their orders come from higher up**. Michel Brault implicates everyone in general and no one in particular for a situation which appears to be beyond *anyone's* control. Of course, it is not.

**An accident is an accident.** (Bingo) If someone is killed by a bomb meant *only* to "terrorize", the "revolution" calls it an accident. It's just the price that must be paid. The same thinking, success at all costs, supported the War Measures Act. Let someone else pay the price. No doubt the intentions of those behind the War Measures Act were good, if that's any consolation. Indeed, everyone's intentions in the Québec Crisis were probably good. Or so they thought.

There's still more to learn. When and if more is revealed, and surely *Les Ordres* would be a revelation to many of those Canadians who will decline to see it, then a reasoned interpretation of the subject might be possible. To some extent and perhaps prematurely, *Action* attempts just such an interpretation, imposing a very logical, though uncommitted view on what, to this point, cannot yet be understood in logical or uncommitted terms. Robin Spry's calm and even narration, like Michel Brault's controlled and understated direction of *Les Ordres*, belies the high emotion of the Québec Crisis. *Action* generally confirms everything we want to believe; it's not a film to disturb accepted views, whatever and however many they may be. To do that, it will take something more. It might be the CBC's planned fifth anniversary documentary. It might be another film like *Les Ordres*. It might more likely be the accumulation of information in all forms and over many years which will shape the eventual reading of the Québec Crisis.

Certainly no one won by the events of 1970. Some lost much more than others. The media has done as well as any.

— Mark Miller

## Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est:

### Dreams and Despair on the Main

Nice Neighbourhood, Montreal East. Some call it home, among them the sad and defeated people of André Brassard's film, *Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est*: the old women in the back alley tenements and the transvestites and lesbians who frequent Sandra's on the Main.

Of course, *Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est* is no more a study of the Montreal East than it is of gays and old women. The subject is Québec, Michel Tremblay's Québec, taken from his many plays *en pièces détachées* (as one of his titles describes it) and recreated on film by Brassard. Tremblay's Québec is very much like the world at Sandra's. It's easy to watch from a distance: there's a floorshow, a parade of dreams and illusions, much to our amusement although not always to our understanding.

The owner of Sandra's hates the gays but admits that they're good for business. So they stay. In effect, he exploits them without sympathy. They serve his purpose, just as they serve Michel Tremblay's dramatic needs. Tremblay too, exploits them as metaphors of Québec and he can't be pleased with the story that they must tell. Indeed when Carmen, the cowgirl singer who is opening a week at Sandra's, obscurely remarks to the owner, "love stories never were your thing", she could be speaking to Tremblay himself. Certainly, *Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est* is not a love story.

Once upon a time in the East, there were two generations of Québécois, the "past" and the "present". The older of the two, the woman of Tremblay's play *Les Belles Soeurs*, gathers in the modest apartment of Madame Lauzon to help her paste the one million Gold Star trading stamps that she has just won. They begin by stealing the stamps one book at a time and end up ransacking the apartment. What else are friends for?

That same eventful day, the appar-

**Belles Soeurs** ready themselves for an equally climactic evening at Sandra's. Carmen is making her debut at the club. Helène, once Queen of the Main, is making her comeback. And Hosanna is at last realizing his dream. There is to be a drag ball with the theme, *Famous Women*. Hosanna will be Elizabeth Taylor as Cleopatra. Unknown to him, so will everyone else, just for spite.

Other characters cross paths between Madame Lauzon's and Sandra's including, in the film's most compelling vignette, a young waitress who dies on an abortionist's table murmuring, "I came into the world by the back door, but I leave by the front". Indeed, life was never sweeter. *La Dolce Vita*.

Tremblay's is a world without love. It's also a world without men. There's only Sandra's owner and significantly, he lives off the avails of people acting out illusions. This night, their dreams have been replaced by despair. Only Carmen survives the evening at Sandra's. She's apparently Tremblay's hope for the future (and the subject of his next play, *Saint Carmen of the Main*; she may get hers yet).

It's difficult to consider the Brassard film as distinct from the Tremblay plays, and yet to think of them together is not always to the good of either. Without some background from the plays, the film must seem rather obscure. Who are all of these people? On film, they live in a void and are developed as characters with a few throwaway details and references to their respective plays which demand further substantiation. In the theatre, the same characters are drawn in some sort of context, usually domestic, and are defined as much by their reactions as their actions. In his collaboration with Brassard on the screenplay, Tremblay has contrived to allow his "gang", as he has called it, to leave the dramatic shelter of their plays and ride headstrong together down the Main on a wave of despair.

Between them, they have done the plays a disservice. It's distressing to find, for example, that Helène of *En Pièces Détachées* is daughter of one of *Les Belles Soeurs*, niece of *La Duchesse De Langeais* and hangs out at the same club with Hosanna listening to Carmen from *À Toi, Pour Toujours, Ta Marie*

**Lou.** It's a small world, in fact perhaps smaller than Tremblay would wish known. And the considerable impact that the plays have individually is lessened by the knowledge that Tremblay would use them again, if only in part, as a matter of convenience.

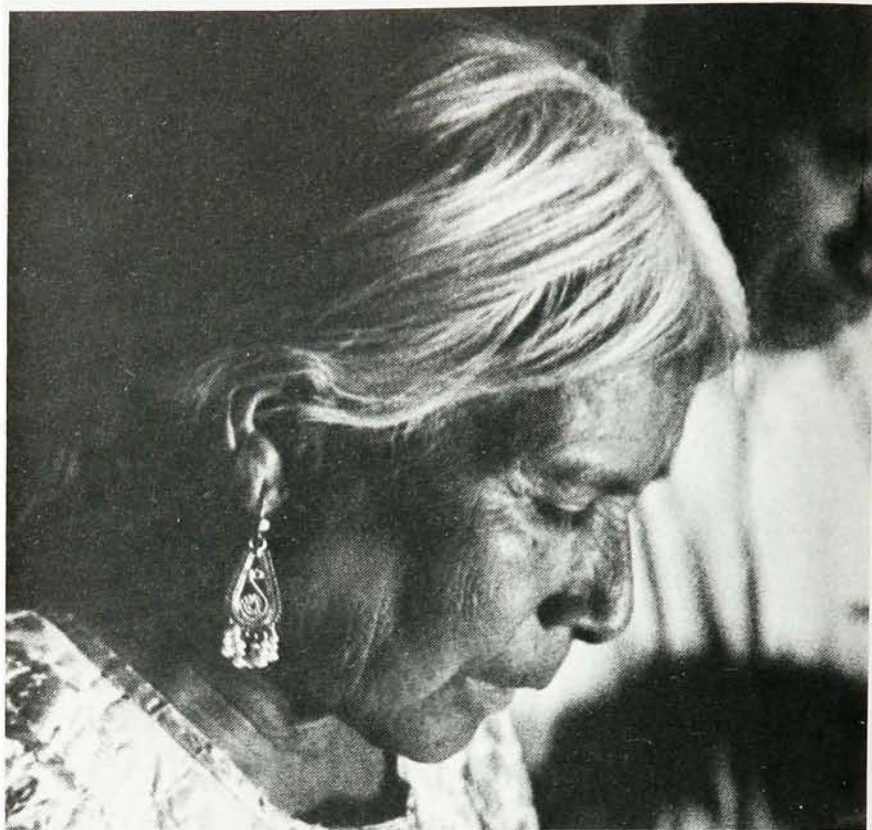
Tremblay's strength as a writer is his use of language. Of course, here it loses the proverbial something in translation and certainly in subtitling. More than that though, the film denies his plays' narrative power. He has permitted the climactic scene at Sandra's, which is so important to **Hosanna**, to be recreated as if Hosanna's description in his long second-act monologue is somehow inadequate. Quite to the contrary, after **Il Était Une Fois Dans L'Est**, it will never be as powerful again.

This is Tremblay's Québec at its most desperate and Brassard's Tremblay at his least sympathetic. Perhaps with this film, they have parenthesized their seven or eight years of theatre together, Tremblay as a playwright and Brassard as his director. In a commercial sense, this is the Best of Michel Tremblay; all the old favourites are here. If this is a teaser though, it's a teaser for something which, at times, has the appearance of an East Montreal soap opera. On stage, Tremblay's work is much more than that.

— Mark Miller

### Three Mexican Movies

Film makers George Payastre and Claudine Viallon premiered three documentary films made over a two year period in Mexico and Guatemala. The films are on the religious ceremonies of the Mayan and Mazatec In-



Mazatec woman in "Brujo"

dians. **Viadosa** (The Painful Way) is a ceremony of the road to the crucifixion. **Quintajimultic** (Five Days Without Name) is a film on the carnival, which takes place yearly in the five day period of the Mayan calendar that do not fit in the calendar year. Christians turned the period into their religious week, and so

the festival is a Christian one. The third film **Brujo** (Shaman or Sorcerer) is about the sacred mushrooms used by the Mazatec Indians. George and Claudine spent considerable time living with the Mayan and Mazatec Indians in order to gain their trust and permission to film the ceremonies.

Together the three films run sixty minutes, and the two film makers are planning a lecture film tour. Although they are not anthropologists, they researched the subject matter intensively before filming, and spent a great deal of time in Mexico living with the Indians, over a 3 year period. George is French, and he is planning to make a French language version of the film, which is simply a matter of a narration track, since the sound in the film is Spanish and Mayan, and Mazatec dialects. The two of them made the three films alone, with a little help from Fred Easton for location sound recording. The films are of particular interest to those who are curious about Indians and the Spanish and white influence. George is planning on showing the films to Anthropology departments and students in their film tour. The two film makers have a preference for documentary films, but not necessarily ethnographic ones. The films cost around \$15,000.00 for all of them, and post-production assistance was given by the Canada Council.

— Peter Bryant

George Payastre on location

