

enter public ?

by Jane Dick

Despite all predictions, Montréal's 16mm Festival has survived another year. In the following article Jane Dick gives a quick survey of the fest and reviews two films that premiered there.

Approximately 2000 people saw films this year at the Montreal International Festival of Cinema in 16mm, April 26 - May 3. This was the seventh such festival organized by the Coopérative des cinéastes indépendants, and following in an ever-increasingly depressing tradition, their scant financial support was further minimized this year - make that close to nil. Nevertheless the coordinators of the Festival, Dimitri Eipides and Claude Chamberland of the Centre du Cinéma Parallèle, organized their showiest festival in years. Posters and programs were plastered all over the city, an attractive booklet was printed up, and films were shown in two locations - the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Cinéma Parallèle.

Screenings at each theatre were staggered to allow for travelling time between locales, making it possible for festival-goers to see all of the films, something other festival organizers might keep in mind.

Twenty-nine films were presented from around the globe, nine of them Canadian. Many of the films had their Canadian première at the Festival. As in past years the films ranged from short to feature-length, from the out-

right experimental - James Scott's **Coilin and Platonida** (England and West Germany), and Antoinetta Angelidi's **Variations sur le Même Sujet (Ideesdies Fixesirae)** (Greece/France) - to the tried and true documentaries like **Damase Breton, Cordonnier** by Léo Plamondon of the National Film Board.

Such films were offered as Jon Jost's **Angel City** (USA), a sometimes witty, frequently early-Godardian exploration; Larry Clark's **Passing Through** (USA), a powerful drama and testament to the spirit of black music; **Dolly Cake** by Michael Jones (Canada), a madcap, bizarre little story of a housewife and her household 'guests'; and **Marika and Marevna** (England) by Jana Bokova, a marvellously refreshing documentary on two aging women artists, daughter and mother respectively.

Several first films were presented - among them Tibor Takacs' remarkable **Metal Messiah** (Canada) and Mary Stephen's stunningly photographed **Ombres de Soie** (Canada).

From Australia came Stephen Wallace's **Love Letters from Teralba Road**, a film of unrelieved and deadly depression but fascinating because of the acting performances which gave one the uncanny feeling of being privy to reality.

On the whole the production values and imagination of the documentaries presented were consistently high while the other films ranged widely in technical quality (often due to lack of funds) and though wildly imaginative, were not always successful in realising their own ambitions.

Whether or not the festival this year was 'successful' is difficult to assess - everything can always be better - but it was well-received by those in attendance and offered a wide cross-section of interesting and thought-provoking independent films. One major flaw - not utilizing artists that were present. For example, Tibor Takacs was introduced as being available for discussion after the screening of **Metal Messiah** but was whisked away without a word as soon as the lights went up, leaving a huge question mark hanging over a bewildered audience. Certainly, dialogue between artists and their public is important and this opportunity should have been exploited. It could only be an asset to a festival that admittedly needs a helping hand.

Details of next year's festival are of course not yet available but the hard work of planning and soliciting funds and films is already underway. The determination and the films are there. Enter public?

Tibor Takacs' METAL MESSIAH

d. Tibor Takacs, sc. Stephen Zoller, narr. Jean Paul Young, ph. Joseph L. Sutherland, ed. Tibor Takacs, sd. ed. Tibor Takacs, sd. rec. Peter Chapman, Mike Hoogenboom, a.d. Tibor Takacs/Stephen Zoller, m. Dana/Clement/Moses (original music), l.p. Jean Paul Young, Richard Allen, David Jensen, exec. p. Don Jean Louis, p. Tibor Takacs/Stephen Zoller/J. L. Sutherland, 1977, col. 16 mm, running time 75 minutes.

One hopes, always, when sitting down to a 'first' film, to be treated to a real stunner — one that is daring, brash, and innovative. One expects a first film to be flawed. But one is scarcely prepared for Tibor Takacs' *Metal Messiah* which is bursting at both seams.

It is an impressive first film — stylish, energetic, and technically of a consistently high quality. It is a film of striking images, intelligent humor and some very real human agonies. It also has serious shortcomings.

The film begins in an intriguing manner. An awesomely large headlight curves around the screen, heralding the arrival of a train into a lonely darkened station. It is March 17, 1983. We are in Anywhere City, a place where appearance and reality coincide, and we are slowly introduced to the characters, beginning with our narrator, Philip Chandler: A Detective from the Neon Past. "Most people around here go insane," he informs us drily as we leave the train station to cruise the late-night city streets.

The film — how does one say? — grabs you.

What is it about? Briefly: a Metal Man (who has all the presence of a David Bowie gone through the wringer) comes to earth, is given power in the form of a guitar, made into a rock star, and crucified. But what the film is *about*, ultimately, is not so clear.

It's a clever hodgepodge of several film genres and familiar media culture from film noir to Fellini, from *A Clockwork Orange* to *Dodes Ka Den*, from German expressionism to TV commercials, from the classic to the punk. Takacs has managed to use all his borrowings to advantage as well as paying them witty homage. He also manages somehow to pull these widely-



Metal Messiah by Tibor Takacs

divergent ingredients into an inevitable, but not necessarily coherent, whole.

Certainly, in one sense, the film is fun to watch — to discover the multi-levels of reference in operation at any one time. It's a lively film, obviously made by someone who loves film with a passion. Unfortunately, in his fervour Takacs has taken too many lovers to bed at one time — as a viewer I did not regret any *one* presence, but each was paid only passing due.

Takacs' experience has been in commercials and it shows. He has a flair for the short-term, and a vibrancy that is exciting. But he is not able to sustain the drama he purports to be filming. The film is episodic — each segment more urgent than the last. But building to what, and why?

The narration, which opened the film and followed it a short ways on, dribbles off somewhere along the way, taking the already too-cryptic story with it. Philip Chandler also vanishes from sight. Whether this is significant or not is never made clear. It's possible that his identity merges with that of Metal Man but to what purpose, and is it worthwhile, ditching the film's most charming character in the bargain? For as goes Chandler and his wry story-telling, so goes the film's sense of humor. And there I think, is Takacs' greatest problem — he takes himself too seriously. He begins to believe in his own artifice and tells us things we already know and/or about which we no longer care.

For instance, Metal Man encounters a high-school dropout (The Kid) in utterly confused rebellion against society. Hereby we explore alienation. Woe to those of us who seek new insights, it is the alienation of the 60's, when we first discovered we were alien-

ated, and which we should have abandoned for the more sophisticated angst of the 70's.

Moving right along... he meets Max the Promoter (a delight in spite of himself) who equates the electric guitar with power. So what else is new? The plot thickens.

If you're in for a bit of nastiness, meet Violet and the Children of Truth. Vi and co. perform on our poor manipulated hero (they put makeup on him and press a few buttons in a separate room) and turn him into — shades of anticlimax — a rock star. Yes Virginia, things could be worse.

Logically, this culminates in a rock concert. Metal Man becomes Messiah to an orgiastic group of punk-rockers and is crucified somewhere between bump and grind.

This is a daring scene and for the most part is handled extremely well. The lighting, the sound, the camera angles and the raw sexual energy combine to vividly conjure up a rock concert, lacking only one thing — a sense of audience, surely the crucial factor in any concert. A Rosy Crucifixion is the title of this episode and 'rosy' is indeed the killing factor. The crucifixion is altogether half-hearted at best. Oh, it's a hefty and striking image that massively imposing, heavy metal cross that is raised on stage. Powerful, you bet! But our Messiah is fastened so loosely to his perch and remains there so briefly as to be tantamount to a joke. Furthermore, the legendary martyrdom of rock stars is by now old hat. What could have been a potentially devastating scene becomes merely an act of little consequence followed by not much of a conclusion. He descends his cross in a flash, and the cycle begins again as another train enters the station. Nothing was sacri-

ficed, no one was saved. A pretty cheap price to pay for one of the hottest symbols around.

Takacs has done what many young filmmakers try to do — make a film that *says* something. He has also fallen prey to the temptation to touch all bases at once. Eager to sport his erudition, he attempts to show us all that he knows — an unnecessary occupation if there ever was one.

Takacs' film is undeniably well-made, consistently interesting (if not always satisfying), and crammed full of incredible images. The priority is on image. Theoretically, the meaning of a film should be clear from its images alone but in fact, there is little to support Takacs' pictorial dexterity. He has presented us, with *Metal Messiah*, a detailed but unruly outline of

a terrific idea without having thought through its implications or brought it to any meaningful conclusion. As a member of the audience I do not mind in the least *working with* a film — I do, however, mind anything half-digested.

Some distance is in order. As an artist Takacs is too undeveloped to be objective about himself but he would do well to practise a stricter regimen of self-criticism and learn to be aware of the moments when he has not given enough and of those wherein he has given too much.

Takacs has style, bravado and guts. I want to see his next film and hope it's as energetic as *Metal Messiah*. I also hope, and this sincerely, that he acquires some discipline in the interim.

posing for us. Given that the film is a memory-piece this can and may be part of the style and if so, my apologies — if only underneath the vogue-ish postures one could not read delight at dressing up and representing so much elegance.

The story itself is evocative of things almost attained and inexplicably lost. Recurring images of the two women as blue-uniformed schoolgirls wrestling tell us of an innocent sexuality that in adulthood becomes a subdued eroticism, gently evoked — the crook of a sleeping arm upon a silken sheet, a brocade bag reflected in highly polished wood, a cigarette gracefully held by slender fingers.

Their adult relationship is rendered tenuous by keeping action to a minimum — making it illustrative rather than demonstrative of the quiet, poignantly sad voice-over narrative, one woman's musings on their lost love and private despairs. Much of the film is still shots, simple actions repeated several times in succession, and choreographed sequences of glances. Considered use is also made of film tones to designate time and place.

Mary Stephen exhibits considerable adeptness at melting form and content. *Les choses délicates* are handled delicately, the pain of lingering sadness is treated with an admirable discretion. Visually, as a filmmaker, Mary Stephen is a winner. As a story-teller she is quietly skilled. It is a shame then to see such talent and potential squandered on reverent imitation. Flattery, in this case, serves only the ones on whom it is bestowed.

Thinking of Duras, at the close of *Ombres de Soie* one audience member sarcastically suggested that we retile this one 'China Song'. Too reminiscent of styles developed some years ago, *Ombres de Soie* is a mannered film, the product of a well-behaved and dutiful child, a student who has learned her lessons too well. One feels that the director would throw her hands up in despair at the mere suggestion of spontaneity. But this is exactly what she most needs.

There is a place in film for Duras, Resnais, and company, and they have served us well in their fashion. However, I question the need for more of the same. We could, though, quite conceivably have need of a Mary Stephen if she is capable of fighting her way out from under the gloss of her mentors. □

Mary Stephen's OMBRES DE SOIE

d: Mary Stephen, ph. John Cressey, so. Jim Pogue, sc. Mary Stephen & Ann Martin, ed. Mary Stephen & Ann Martin, pr. John & Mary Productions, Paris/Montréal, 1977 colour, 62 min. Chinese with French subtitles.

Ombres de Soie is a film as elusive but not as seductive as its title. It is the story of two moneyed Oriental women, childhood friends who go their separate adult ways, maintaining sporadic contact, yet remain inextricably linked. One of them marries, the other dies, presumably suicide due to the marriage. The story is, in the best tradition of the French *nouveau-roman*, more suggested than actual, and takes place in a Marienbad-esque Shanghai.

If *Ombres de Soie* were a woman one could only call it 'stunning' — it would turn heads in the street and stop men in their tracks. It would not however render them gibbering fools nor even mildly weak-kneed. It has all the external trappings of inspiring womanhood but lacks the necessary vitality and soul to be truly beautiful.

Ombres de Soie is a film of rare and exquisite beauty. Each image is precisely chosen to convey specific moods 36/Cinema Canada

with not an iota of extraneous information. Not one inch of the screen ever betrays anything that could detract from the studied attractiveness of each image.

Studied is the key word. That Mary Stephen is enamored of Marguerite Duras, Alain Resnais, and their ilk is evident. She has taken great pains to imitate their finer modes — at the expense of her own creative impulses.

This is Mary Stephen's first film and it is a lovely thing to behold. She has put together a tight and meticulous artwork with scarcely a fault to it; a feat not to go unremarked in a film world that all too often condones sloppiness. *Mais — il manque quelque chose* — as though she held herself back, timid of allowing her own inner visions to shine through.

Her images are striking, rich with color, and imbued with a highly refined sensitivity to design to which the viewer can but humbly bow. Having her husband John Cressey on camera is a definite asset — his photography is brilliant.

One only wishes that, having selected her décor and compositions with such care, Mary Stephen had been as meticulous in choosing and directing her actresses, since much of our sympathies for the story depend on their ability to make their presence *felt*, to lend power to their own images. Alas, the beauty of the two women is not matched by an adequate maturity or worldliness. On screen they are conscious of

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