

# FILM REVIEWS

## John Trent's Crossbar

d. John Trent asst. d. Tony Lucibello, Richard Flower sc. Keith Leckie, Carol Fisher ph. Vic Sarin, Mike Storey, David Towers sp. Doug Wardle light. Archie Kay, John Wilson, Len Watier, Harry McLachlan cast. Bill Clemenis, Ian Challis design co-ord. Bob Powers p. designer Robert Forrow asst. design. Alicia Grunsky set dec. Bob Parker, Graeme Maitland, Doug Tiller make-up Inge Klaudi, Mieke Koekkoek stage Bill Stunden, John McCarthy, Ralph MacDonald cost. Horst Danz, Ken Druce, Sarah Currie hair Barbara Alexander l.p. Brent Carver, Kate Reid, John Ireland, Kim Cattrall, Murray Westgate, Sean Sullivan, Jan Muszynski, Sara Bostford, Larry Reynolds, Tom Butler, Steve Pernie, Peter Krenz, Lynn Spence, Deborah Kipp, Myron Natwick exec. p. Stanley Colbert p. Brian Walker prod. co-ord. Duncan Lamb, Bonnie Falcker post. p. Toni Mori p. sec. Vickie Ohashi unit manag. Sylvia Snow pub. Wendy Forbes p.c. CBC col. 16mm running time 78 min.

Cinema's new hero is the crippled athlete. Rivalled in popularity only by the perpetrator of bank heists, the disabled jock is now the preeminent, courageous and inspirational movie character. One thinks of the paralyzed skier in *The Other Side of the Mountain* and *The Other Side of the Mountain Part II*, the blind figure skater in *Ice Castles*, and the hapless boxer in *Rocky* and *Rocky II* — whose principal handicap seemed to be stupidity.

As admirable as many of these struggles are, they remain shallow as film stories because of their literal-mindedness. Such movies are always promoted as being 'inspiring' and 'heart-warming', but the situations of the main characters are so far removed from the viewer's experience that only sympathy, and not empathy, is felt. Is it not possible to be 'inspired' by anything other than the flight against an obvious physical impairment? As a subject of film drama it's just too pat and ready-made.

*Crossbar*, a 90-minute drama which was broadcast on the CBC on October 6, is a Canadian contribution to this sub-genre. A novelization of the film, written by John Gault and based on the screenplay by Keith Leckie, is described as "the inspiring story of two courageous Cana-



For *Crossbar*'s Aaron (Brent Carver) and Katie (Kim Cattrall) it's 'nowhere to go but up' — and over!

dian Olympic athletes who together won a heart-thrilling victory," and as a "beautifully inspiring story you won't be ashamed to cry over."

It concerns a young high-jumper, Aaron Kornlyo (played by Brent Carver) who, after winning a bronze medal at the 1976 Olympics, loses one leg in a farm accident. He attempts, with the help and sometimes hindrance of his parents (played by Kate Reid and John Ireland), and his friend and fellow athlete, Katy (played by Kim Cattrall), to overcome his injury and qualify for the 1980 Games in Moscow. One's skepticism about the plausibility of a one-legged high-jumper is eliminated by the knowledge that a Canadian, Arnie Boldt, holds the world record in that

event in the Olympics for the Disabled.

Predictability, predictably, is the film's fundamental problem. A well-worn plot device, which could be called the Big Switch, is used over and over again: a situation is introduced, stays the same for awhile, and then is quickly reversed, producing, one supposes, a dramatic mini-climax. This has the effect of making almost everything black or white; there are few subtle gray shadings. For example, Aaron's father, Myles, discourages him from training, and the two have a running feud. By the end of the story, they are totally reconciled, and Myles cheers his son on. The young athlete, in a short stint as a high school coach, makes an enemy of Langley, a cocky student trying the high jump. In a later scene, the two

become good buddies, and both jump excellent heights. The pattern repeats itself again and again: first the sports bureaucrats will not let Aaron compete, then they relent under pressure at the proverbial last minute. Suspense soon dissipates.

At the end of *Crossbar*, there is an attempt at profundity which ignores basic human psychology. Just before Aaron is to make the jump which would qualify him for the Olympics, he reaches some sort of nirvana beyond the sordidness of competition; because he now knows his limits and has proven something to himself (coming this far despite his injury), there is no need to go on to Moscow in 1980. The apprehended truth then, supposedly, is that the purest athletic spirit is superior to competition — a script development which makes a sequel unlikely, and which does not satisfactorily explain away Aaron's previously intense ambition.

The film's best moments are its most strictly visual ones. At the opening, after a montage of the 1976 Olympics, we see Aaron asleep, re-living his accident as a nightmare, the vision of a harvesting machine moving inexorably closer. He wakes in a cold sweat, and is next down standing at his bedroom window, the first time we see that he now has only one leg. The filmmakers use Arnie Boldt in the jump sequences, and because of the clever use of camera angles and intercutting throughout *Crossbar*, it really seems as if Brent Carver, as Aaron, has only one leg.

All of the high-jump sequences are fascinating to watch: clearing the crossbar, like many accomplishments, looks easy, but is very difficult. Unfortunately, Aaron's work to increase his jump height is given less screen-time than the melodrama. After several botched attempts at jumping, his progress is ludicrously compressed and before we know it he has cleared the qualifying height of 6' 8". The filmmakers may have felt that there was not enough of a story to be had by concentrating on the actual training and jumping, but a sports movie that actually showed more than a minimum of sports, and explained an athlete's obsession would be very welcome.

The acting in *Crossbar* is uniformly fine. Brent Carver plays Aaron as a sort of witty, country-hick jock. Kim Cattrall gives her character, Katy, formidable determination and confidence, a frequently irresistible force against various immov-

able objects. John Ireland and Kate Reid are equally convincing; you can easily picture the daily life of the Kornylos outside the limits of this particular story. Murray Westgate stands out among the supporting players as a sports official who is so confidently glib that you become certain there is more to the character than is visible at first glance.

*Crossbar* is enjoyable entertainment, and — unlike many Canadian films — could never be accused of pessimism. It is hopeful, and given the proximity of the Moscow Games, timely.

Gerry Flahive

## Don Shebib's Fish Hawk

d. Donald Shebib sc. Blanche Hanalis from a novel by Mitchell Jayne ph. René Verzier ed. Ron Wisman sd. Ingrid Cusiel l.p. Will Sampson, Charlie Fields, Geoffrey Bowes, Mary Pirie, Don Francks, Chris Wiggins, Kay Hawtrey, Mavor Moore exec. p. Stanley Chase, Daniel H. Blatt p. Jon Slan p.c. Fish Hawk Co. Inc. (1978) p.c. 35 mm running time 97 min.

The sole redeeming feature of Don Shebib's latest film, *Fish Hawk*, is that it is a Canadian film that stars neither Donald Sutherland nor Christopher Plummer. This is particularly depressing because I (like so many others) clung to the hope that Don Shebib would fulfill the exciting promise of *Goin' Down the Road* and *Between Friends*. Nothing in *Fish Hawk* suggests those films were made by the

same man.

*Fish Hawk*, according to the press release, is family entertainment about the relationship of a drunken Indian and a young white boy in turn-of-the-century rural Ontario. After learning from one another, they separate to foster firmer identities on their own native soils. I don't think I'm revealing too much of the plot by adding that only the Indian has any dignity: all the whites over twelve are bigots, idiots, or themselves closet drunks. Even decent Don Francks, the boy's father is less than a MAN. He's hen-pecked, and likes to tie one on to escape his wife.

Since this is a family film, the truth is told. Eventually each character reveals him/herself to be a real mensch. They are all good old boys. But that in itself does not exclude drama. Indeed, there is danger: two struggles with nature's fiercest — a grizzly bear and a wild boar. Of course in these struggles the skill of the Indian, the man closest to nature, is called upon to save the skin and commerce of his white neighbours. His struggles with the animals direct him away from drunkenness toward a path of dignity and self-help. At the end of the film he decides that his place is not with the white man, but rather with his own people, the Osage.

*Fish Hawk* is a film that contradicts the *auteur* theory, or as Shebib would put it, all that crap French intellectual critics spewed out in the 50's. The film has no directorial character. There is none of the moody energy of Shebib's previous work, nor are there any attempts to expose the raw nerve endings within the dramatic situations — the type of directorial approach Shebib shared with his Italian-American counterpart, Martin Scorsese, when both directors used techniques that

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Though from vastly different backgrounds, Will Sampson and Charlie Fields find a common ground in **Fish Hawk** (photo: John Williamson)

discomforted audiences, but frequently indicated unusual talent. Shebib freely admits that **Fish Hawk** is an assignment film, and that he appreciates the opportunity to work on, rather than promote his own project *ad frustrating infinitum*. Perhaps he made **Fish Hawk** to prove to the industry that he no longer wanted to be considered an outsider. One can't condemn a filmmaker for wanting to make a living, but if a **Fish Hawk** is the price for coming in out of the cold.....it's a hell of a price.

If **Fish Hawk** is not a director's picture, it is a producer's picture. Producer Jon Slan has aimed for a family audience — and with Indian actor Will Sampson (**One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest**), for a U.S. television sale. Slan starts with a good central idea, but the Blanche Hanalis script is terrible. (The script is based on a novel by Mitchell Jayne.) The screenwriter has set out to write a simple, warm-hearted story but has fallen into the usual traps. Simple-mindedness, instead of simplicity surrounds the characters. They speak too much, the message conveyed in dialogue instead of action. The dialogue itself is cute, easy: you know, the sort of lingo that supposedly makes Andy Hardy sophisticated. The drama produces stereotyped opposites pitted against one another. A well-intentioned script be-

comes simplicity run amok. Unfortunately the other elements of the film don't rise above the level set by the script. I've read numerous comments about the stylish photography in **Fish Hawk**, its beauty, its evocation of rural Ontario eighty years ago. Bunk! The film has no period feel about it. It looks like the Caledon Hills in the fall of 1979. There isn't even seasonal variation, reminding us that this film was shot on a tight production schedule. Whether this is the result of cost-cutting production priorities, or simply a lack of creative art

direction, the film exhibits the producer's hand. There *have* been other evocative period films made in Canada: **Mon Oncle Antoine**, **Kamouraska**, **The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz**, all considerably cheaper to produce than **Fish Hawk**. There's a problem when a period film has no period. But back to the direction for a moment: it's no more than competent. The film has a professional veneer. The action sequences are reasonably well-staged, the actors performing their tasks adequately, but only Geoffrey Bowes as the town half-wit moves us. None of the other actors are pushed to project that sub-text of life going on behind their words and actions. In this, the director has failed to animate interaction between the characters. What you see is what you get. Except that Will Sampson, as Fish Hawk, *does* have a sense of presence. He projects an elusive larger-than-life quality, and his charisma helps the film. But what has happened to Don Shebib? **Fish Hawk** is a mediocre representation from the new wave of big-budget, Canadian filmmaking. The film won a Peace Prize at the Moscow Film Festival this year, a decision as adventurous as the experience of the film.

Ken Dancyger

## George Mendeluk's Stone Cold Dead

d. George Mendeluk sc. George Mendeluk ph. Dennis Miller ed. Martin Pepler sd. Donald Cohen m. Paul Zaza l.p. Richard Crenna, Paul Williams, Linda Sorensen, Belinda J. Mont-

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gomery, Monique Mercure *exec. p.* Peter Wilson *p.* John Ryan, George Mendeluk *assoc. p.* Larry Frolick *p.c.* Ko-Zak Productions Inc. (1978) col. 35mm **running time** 110 min. **dist.** Astral Films.

Years ago, I saw a movie called **Astro Zombies**, a real cheapie with John Cardine making monsters in the basement while spies chased after the secret formula. It was truly awful, but it had one peculiar, memorable quality: every so often, it would instantly and without warning, stop being one kind of fantasy -- cliched science fiction for nine-year-olds, and become another -- cliched soft-core pornography for the raincoat-in-the-lap brigade. This wondrous transformation was wrought single-handedly by the woman who played the chief spy. Though she did nothing out of keeping with the rest of the movie, she was so charged with sleaze that the instant she appeared **Astro Zombies** became a whole different movie, with no connection but the plot, to what it had been before.

Similar shifts occur in **Stone Cold Dead**.

The main fantasy revolves around Boyd (Richard Crenna), a plain-clothes cop with a hangdog face and a trench-coat. He's assigned to stop the sniper who's killing Yonge St. hookers, and he's obsessed with busting Kurtz, a big-time

pimp and pusher. He enlists Monica, an uptown call girl, and McGuire, an undercover cop posing as a hooker, in his crusade. After the usual killings, clues, suspects and fights, he finally uncovers the secret identity of the mad killer.

If you think you've seen this one before, You're right! **Kojak** with overtones of David Janssen in **Harry O**: picturesque trash and neon lights. It's "Down these mean streets a man must go, who is not himself mean..."

The second fantasy centres on Kurtz, played by Paul Williams, with that sort of low-key menace associated with Orson Welles -- whom Williams begins to resemble a weird parody of. We first meet Kurtz in a low-angle two-shot. He sits on a sofa, bored, while a blonde kneels before him to do his fingernails. When she's finished, she raises his hand to her lips, puckers, and we cut to a high-angle close-up, a classic voyeur shot into her use-me use-me eyes -- a vicarious little taste of what Kurtz experiences while she gently, gently exhales steamy breath onto his fingertips. Kurtz is such a super-pimp that he has underlings to do the actual work, and a giant shaveheaded black man to do the killings that he orders with oblique, arch-Socratic dialogue.

Sound familiar? How about **The Man from U.N.C.L.E.**, or Victor Buono as the heavy in some Matt Helm epic, or Orson

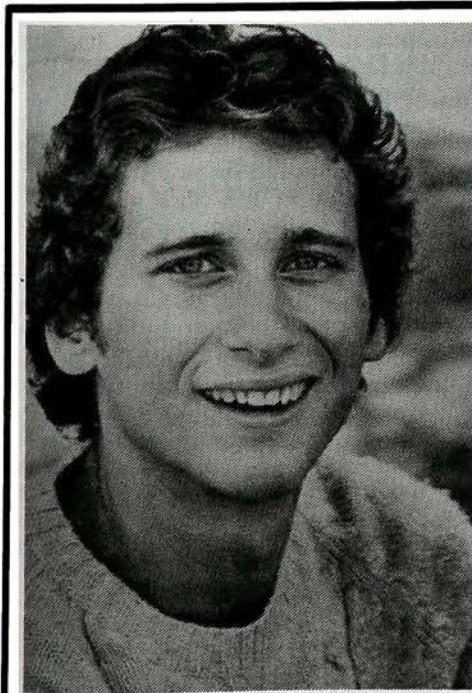
Welles in **Casino Royale**, or a thousand other tacky James Bond imitations.

Scenes with Kurtz and Boyd together underline the incompatibility of these two fantasies. Boyd treats Kurtz to a mild form of routine police harassment, the kind of harassment that if Boyd's world were fully dominant, would just never happen. Kurtz would be too sensible to ever go near Yonge St. and too well-insulated for Boyd to ever get near him. On the other hand, if it were all happening in Kurtz' world, as soon as Boyd became a big enough nuisance, he'd be snuffed out as casually as Kurtz snuffs two other cops.

The Boyd/Kurtz axis is far from being the only nonsense in **Stone Cold Dead**. Consider the sniper who, with Boyd in hot pursuit, stops to change coats. Why? Who knows. All it does is weaken the effect of the chase. Or, there's the hooker who picks up a trick, charges him for a straight lay and then agrees to whip him, for no extra fee. Hookers just don't do that. Extra services, especially kinky ones, always cost. Then there's the hooker, talking tough to a pimp, who says she's "into heroin". They don't call it heroin, George, like grass smokers don't call it 'marijuana'. If you love your drug, you have a pet name for it. Or there's the sniper's rifle -- a beautiful, sexy, evil piece of custom-built death that would never, never come into the hands of the killer: another killer, maybe, but not this one. There's Boyd, making a speech about whores, pimps and pushers that ends with him wondering what he's doing there. Obsessed people, and that's what the script insists Boyd is, don't wonder. They *know* what they're doing there. They also don't appear anywhere near as valium'd out as Richard Crenna; their obsessions give them energy --lots of it.

I could go on, and on, and on... The absurdity of Boyd giving Monica her full night's fee to keep her off the street, when it's already well-established that she doesn't work the street. The greater absurdity of Monica, who has no reason to like Boyd, returning it next morning. The point I'm trying to make is that **Stone Cold Dead** is mostly a mess, because George Mendeluk, who produced, directed and did the screenplay got his ideas from old T.V. shows, and didn't know enough, or care enough, to put in the simple research and thought that would have made his ideas hang together.

On the other hand. Belinda J. Montgomery cares. She




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plays the woman who -- for what must be fascinatingly twisted, personal reasons -- lives, not imitates, the life of a street-walker. Ms. Montgomery, Andrea Cousineau, Maria Clark and the others who enact hookers, strippers and butch pimps have their roles down cold. They have the expression and the stance that clearly reads "Available: Reasonable Rates." They have the explosive speech and the cracked voices, the jumpy, stabbing mannerisms of aggression masking other feelings. They are the unsentimentalized, unglamorized embodiment of the downtown Toronto streetwalker. Utterly believable. Try to remember the last true-to-life hooker you saw in a fictional film.

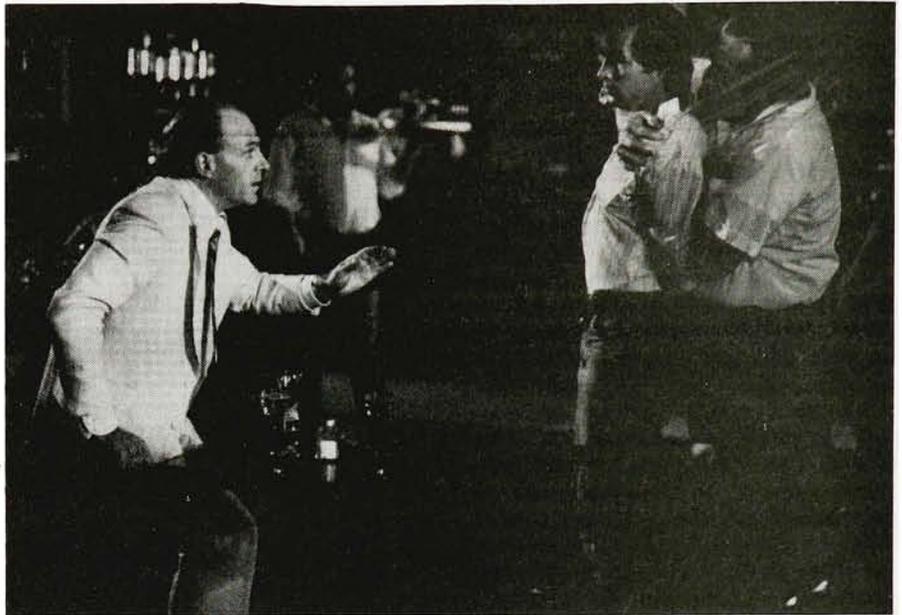
Despite their merits, Belinda J. Montgomery and company aren't enough to save *Stone Cold Dead*. They simply aren't on screen enough. And, by the time the film is in general release, they may be on screen even less. The version, I'm reviewing here, was the director's cut, shown at the Festival of Festivals. There's a chance that, by the time various producers, distributors and censors finish with it, *Stone Cold Dead* will have lost some of those very scenes that prevent it from being a stone, cold, dead waste of time.

Andrew Dowler

## Julius Kohanyi's *Summer's Children*

d. Julius Kohanyi asst. d. Steve Wright, Bryan Gliserman sc. Jim Osborne cont. Lisa Wilder gaf. Jock Brandis cam. Richard Wincenty, Carl Harvey ed. Fred Brennan sup. ed. Michal C. Manne sd. Ingrid Cusiel elec. Scotty Allan props. Christophe Bonniere grip. David Hynes a.d. Terry Crack boom. Andrew Dowler m. Chris Stone Audio cast. Elinor Galbraith make-up Sandra Duncan l.p. Thomas Hauff, Paulty Jardine, Don Francks, Kate Lynch, Patricia Collins, Ken James, Wayne Best, Kay Hawtrey, Brian Miller, Marilyn Harris. p. Don Haig assoc. p. Nelson A Smith p. man. Sally Dundas p.c. Haha Productions, Haig-King Film Arts (1978) col. 35 mm. running time 90 min. dist. New Cinema Entreprises

It was evident after the screening of *Summer's Children* at this year's Festival of Festivals, that Julius Kohanyi's apprehensions about opening his first feature in Canada were, to an extent justified. No



Ready for the second round in *Summer's Children* (photo: Jack Rowand)

doubt members of the audience were aware that the central focus of the film was an incestuous relationship between a brother and sister. Perhaps they had also read *Variety's* description of it as an example of "new screen liberalism," always a tantalizing subject in Ontario with its censorial vigilance.

But, if they were expecting a story on the lines of *Mumur of the Heart* or *Luna*, one can understand their disappointment. For this film is solidly set in the Canadian, rather than the European, context of repression and guilt.

From the beginning, the film shows its links to this tradition in its dark visual style. A young man packs his bags in a dimly lit room. He walks out of a typical, southern Ontario farmhouse, gets into his blue Mustang and drives off into the night. Standing on the porch, bathed in light, a young woman in a white nightgown stares after him. The man drives erratically along the highway and crashes. He is seen slumped against the wheel, with blood seeping from a wound in his neck.

After these striking images, a rather mysterious sequence is shown under the titles. It is still night, and a Mustang is being towed along the streets of Toronto. After the scene has ended one discovers that it is, in fact, *another* car, and that the man from the previous scene is now working for the garage that owns the tow

truck. Here, the story proper begins, and the man is Steve Linton (Thomas Hauff) who now lives in the city, unaware that the woman in the first scene, his sister Jennie (Paulty Jardine), has followed him. When he finds out, he determines to seek her out. As Steve goes through the seedy downtown environments, his guide is a strange character he meets in a beer parlor. Albert, Don Francks, who calls himself The Professor, is a small-time bookie in a shabby white suit, with a fair share of street cynicism.

In his treatment of the search, Kohanyi has made a significant visual decision which clearly sets the tone of the film. This description of the city's underside diverges from the "film noir" style of those directors influenced by Samuel Fuller: a style which has become a sort of visual orthodoxy through its application by Martin Scorsese in *Mean Streets* and *Taxi Driver*, Paul Schrader in *Blue Collar* and *Hardcore*, James Torback in *Fingers*, and Philip Kaufman in *The Wanderers*. Canadian applications of what might be called 'Michael Chapman sleaze' can be seen in *Drying Up The Streets* and *Stone Cold Dead*. *Summer's Children*, however, with Josef Seckeresh's understated photography of the street scenes creates a quieter, more naturalistic atmosphere. The corruption and decay of the Toronto strip area are suggested without the exaggeration to which Robin Spry and George Mendeluk

resort.

Kohanyi makes liberal use of flashbacks to fill in Steve and Jennie's background. Unfortunately there is so much background to be filled in that, the flashbacks become obtrusive to the main narrative. But, gradually, one does begin to appreciate why Jennie and Steve turn to each other, given the constricted atmosphere of the small Ontario town where they grew up, with so little hope or opportunity.

The flashbacks expose the central flaw in the picture; Jim Osborne's script, seems to be too ambitious for the form into which it has been set. Labouring attempts are made to hold the obvious sub-plots together. Thus, the car, which Steve's buddy in the garage is seen periodically working on, becomes a symbolic replica of Steve's old car, right down to the blue paint. In one sub-plot, Elaine — Jennie's designer friend — sleeps with Steve; then, in an admittedly touching but arbitrary scene, confesses that she has also slept with Jennie. Another twist of the plot finds Albert leading Steve into a hobo jungle, where Steve is consequently beaten up after discovering that Albert, too, has been involved with his sister. No attempt is made to integrate Steve's food freak girlfriend, Kathy (Kate Lynch), into the core story. To an extent, the inconsistencies of the plot are mitigated by

some uniformly excellent performances. Against all odds, Thomas Hauff and Paulty Jardine, as the siblings manage to make the characters of Steve and Jennie real, convincingly portraying, the anguish of their guilt-ridden relationship. Patricia Collins and Kate Lynch also do well with the feeble roles they are called upon to perform. But the real acting honors go to Don Francks, for his portrayal of Albert. After more than his share of bad luck and ridicule over the years, Francks, with a new sense of depth in his acting has demonstrated his versatility and skill in a recent burst of meaty roles, here, and in *Drying Up The Streets*, *Riel*, *Fast Company* and *Fish Hawk*.

In his documentaries, Julius Kohanyi showed himself to be a director of ability and intelligence. In *Summer's Children*, he has shown that he can draw sensitive and compelling performances from actors and deal with 'controversial' material without sensationalism. That he has already received a good reception from the people who count for future production opportunities bodes well for his career. But, it must be admitted, this film's scaffold-like plotting is a more distinct handicap to its commercial success than its introspective tone or its 'daring' theme.

J. Paul Costabile



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## SHORT FILM REVIEWS

### Glenn Gould's Toronto

d. John McGreevy ph. Roger Moride ed. Ted Roberts sd. Brian Avery m. Glenn Gould p. John McGreevy, Pat Ferns p.c. John McGreevy Productions, Nielson-Ferns International (1978) col. 16mm

*Glenn Gould's Toronto* is a documentary about, as Director John McGreevy puts it, Glenn Gould's personal view of Toronto. Well not quite. It's as if Gould also consulted the Ontario Ministry of Tourism to find out the "must see" places in town. The film should more accurately be called "Glenn Gould, a resident of Toronto, isn't and doesn't want to be." As he so aptly puts it at the end of the film:

"you can find tranquility in a city, but only if you opt not to be a part of it." But I'm getting ahead of myself.

*Glenn Gould's Toronto* is a one hour documentary, part of a Nielson-Ferns-John McGreevy series on the great cities of the world. Other cities in the series are *Peter Ustinov's Leningrad*, *R.D. Laing's Glasgow*, *George Plimpton's New York*, and *Germaine Greer's Sydney*. McGreevy has chosen his tour guides wisely: all have what they call in advertising, a high recognition factor — a key to successful television sales. Furthermore, they ooze respectability, are literati, somehow associating this series with a cultural purity that is hard to resist. A good sell. Ripe for marketing. Corporate filmmaking on the march. I've never seen a film about a city made for a mass audience, with so slight a purpose.

Living in Toronto myself. I feel self-

consciously pressured to like any film about home. So to save my conscience, let me say that *Glenn Gould's Toronto* is professional, competent, mildly amusing average entertainment. *Experiencing* this film was quite another matter.

Documentary film has to have a purpose. In 1928, the German filmmaker Walter Ruttmann made *Berlin: Symphony of a City*: editing as movement, movement as the pulse of life in a great metropolis from dawn to dawn. Ruttmann's film is the original film poem of the city as an organizing force in our lives, as a core to contemporary existence. Willard Van Dyke in 1939 made his contribution with *The City*. Shot in New York, the film condemned the problems of city life and welcomed the possibilities of renewed urban life in planned suburbs. The film's message has proved to be a pipedream, but it still exudes a passion and concern lacking in the Glenn Gould film. More recently the city has been the focal point of experimental films — the beauty of cities in Haanstra's *Mirrors of Holland* (1950), and their potential for playfulness