Graham Parker’s
Anne’s Story

In a film dealing with the rape of a little girl and its effect on her as a young adult, there is enormous dramatic potential just waiting to be realized. Unfortunately, in Anne’s Story, a recent CBC television movie directed by Graham Parker, this potential remains just that and the film never rises above the merely interesting.

Anne is a child of six visiting her grandmother’s farm for the summer. One day her uncle follows her into the barn and rapes her. Fearing his threats, she tells no one and becomes quiet and withdrawn. When her father comes to get her at the end of the summer and announces that he and her mother are getting divorced, she says nothing. As a young woman, the effects of the trauma are still with her as she struggles to become a country and western singer. To escape her boozing mother she moves back home and there meets Matt, a kind and gentle man to whom she eventually reveals her secret. They start to travel together (platonically) as a singing duo, until finally Anne overcomes her past and begins a physical relationship with him.

It doesn’t take undue cynicism to find the script, written by Graham Woods, a little too simplistic and tidy to be truly satisfying. The story of the girl with the tragic past who meets a sweet and sensitive man who changes her life is a familiar formula. Still, the plotline might have worked again if it weren’t for some other major shortcomings of the film.

The first problem is the film’s style and editing. Anne’s fear before the assault and her uncle’s violent threats afterwards are shown. When, years later, Anne tells Matt about it, music overdubs the dialogue and within a few shots she has told him and is crying in his arms. Director Parker is to be commended for his handling of these scenes; an approach that exactly avoids exploiting the trauma and sensationalism of rape which other films—equally well-intentioned—fail to do.

Where Parker fails—and in a major way—is in his presentation and development of Anne’s character. A quiet and introverted person like Anne reveals herself in subtle ways: nuances and gestures take on heightened importance as keys to understanding her character. Consequently, time and a sensitive shooting style are required. But Parker provides neither. While brevity and a sense of distance were necessary for the two key scenes above, these elements work against Anne’s character by inhibiting viewer identification. The film certainly elicits sympathy for Anne, but sympathy is an outwardly directed emotion: what Parker fails to do is establish a sense of empathy, which is inward. This drama about rape (strangely) has very few emotional scenes—intense or otherwise—and thus keeps the viewer distanced from the material.

The acting in the film is good, but not exceptional, as none of the performers are really given a chance to show what they are capable of. Karen Woodliffe, as Anne, handles the dramatic and musical demands of the role equally well, giving a sensitive performance. The same holds true for Brent Carver, as Matt, who comes across well despite his very undemanding role.

The supporting cast is also convincing. So there is little doubt that the film would have benefited if these performers had been given the opportunity to more fully develop their characters.

Like much CBC drama, Anne’s Story so temptingly treads the middle ground it ends up being neither boring nor exciting. This happy medium approach may suit some material, but in this case only serves to betray the potential of its subject matter. It should have been a powerful tool for political action.

Jennifer Hodge’s
Home Feeling: Struggle for a Community

Cinema verite filmmaking has always been a powerful tool for political action. This is certainly the case with Home Feeling: Struggle for a Community, Jennifer Hodge’s most recent work. The film is a controversial one and it caused a great deal of media flurry this summer when its public screenings became the scene for outbursts of community unrest. The film looks closely at explosive issues in the Jane-Finch area of Toronto, an area of high unemployment, racial tension, and growing dissatisfaction with the powers that be.

The Jane-Finch corridor was a 1970s attempt on the part of Toronto city planners to move the urban poor into a new public, high-rise housing 25 miles from the city’s centre. Jane-Finch is now somewhat of a suburban nightmare characterized by high-density housing, with 60,000 people crammed into an area the size of six square city blocks. At least 15% of this population is West Indian, and filmmaker Hodge focuses on the plight of this visible minority, especially in terms of employment, culture shock, and police-community relations.

Some of the most poignant moments in the film are those which reveal what it’s like to be a new immigrant, unfamiliar with the culture and struggling against all odds to make a life. One Jamaican woman, Rosemary Brown, talks openly of working for seven years to bring her children to Canada, only to find that she and they no longer know one another after such a lengthy separation. Other interviewees talk about the difficulties of being unemployed, and stigmatized by living in Ontario public housing. The film gives an incredibly intimate portrait of people struggling to keep their pride in the face of high adverse circumstances.

But the film also focuses on police-community relations, and here it has struck a sensitive nerve. Exploring the attitudes of police harassment, the film raises the troubling question of racial discrimination. “This is the people’s side of the story,” Hodge told New Rep. Stephen Dale, “the story of those who are never heard and don’t have access to the media. When police want public opinion they call the papers. These people can do that.” To me, it is obvious in the film and in the community’s reaction to the film that the police represent the dominant culture, are the frontlines, so to speak, of that culture. Hodge herself admits: “In many ways they represent the powers in society, the agents of employment, social planning, the people who control these people’s lives. Not surprisingly, then, they are the targets for much of the rage in the film. Perhaps unjustifiably so. In their interviews with