

REVIEWS

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's

Au rythme de mon coeur / To The Rhythm Of My Heart

In 1981, as part of a nation-wide retrospective of his work organized by the Canadian Film Institute, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre travelled across the country, visiting the various film co-operatives which in turn frequently hosted at least a part of this retrospective. While the purpose of these visits was to allow Lefebvre to talk about his films, he was also concerned to discuss with the co-ops the problems of independent film production in Canada at the present time. At a certain stage of this journey, Lefebvre began to keep a film record of his visits – partly just as a diary, a filmed "postcard" (as Lefebvre explains it) that, upon his return, he would be able to send to all his new friends scattered across the country; partly (I assume) as an example for these young filmmakers of a film that can be made simply and inexpensively out of the materials of one's day-to-day life.

To the Rhythm of My Heart is, then, a very private film – a discussion on film by Jean-Pierre Lefebvre for his friends, a discussion about the relationship of images to reality, of light to shadows, of summer to winter, and of life to death. It is the achievement of this "little" film that it can carry such a strong philosophical charge without appearing to be ponderous or pretentious.

To the Rhythm of My Heart incorporates three different modes. First of all, there are the visits to the co-ops, from Vancouver to St. John's, and the sense of "playing about" with a camera that these sequences convey. It is "fun" to make movies. People like to reproduce images of themselves. Photography and filmmaking enable us to preserve traces of experiences that we have collectively enjoyed. Secondly, there is the Eastern Townships footage – the Santa Claus sequence near the beginning of the film, the barbecue sequence near the end. These scenes celebrate the shared community values of that region in Quebec in which Lefebvre lives. But finally, most pervasively, there are the philosophical sections, the disquisitions on light and shadow and life and death which frame the film, which give it its seriousness and, perhaps as well, its more lasting value.

To the Rhythm of My Heart contains a crisis within it, a loss not anticipated when the filming was begun. Accompanying Jean-Pierre Lefebvre on some of his visits was Marguerite Duparc – Lefebvre's wife and long-time collaborator on all of his films. During the course of these visits, however, Marguerite Duparc fell ill and died. Like the rocks eroded by the weather off the Gaspé coast, Marguerite Duparc herself becomes a victim of the ravages of time.

While the naturalization of this death may be ethically troubling to a number of viewers, these moments in the film



● Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, airborne: "We have an innate need of images of ourselves"

are most delicately handled. Played first over a shot of water eroding rocks and then over an image of Marguerite sitting by the shore, a simple octave melody (itself devised by Lefebvre) comes to represent most tentatively the anguish of change, both in nature and in life. And constantly, through the commentary, Lefebvre questions the value of the images he is creating, searching (as he explains) for the means to make a choice "between the world of spectacle and the spectacle of the world."

Marguerite Duparc was producer, editor, and wife for Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, and her loss at least partly explains the absence of editing in this film. While individual sequences have been selected and assembled, all the editing has been done in the camera, including the opticals – the fades and dissolves. Repeatedly, the film plays upon the alternations of presence and loss. A quizzical cat opens the film, but that cat has died. There is a beaver pond in the film, but the beavers have disappeared.

Dazzling images of a winter landscape fade out to black and fade in to white again. "All is light, or the absence of light," the commentary declares. "All is transition, transformation, change, rhythm – a journey." Indeed, it is this theme of the journey that unifies the film.

After the loss of Marguerite and another seasonal change, another woman appears. While these images too will be troubling to some viewers, in terms of cinema they are magically presented. The new woman first appears at a distance in the snow, as we had first seen Marguerite. It could be Marguerite. But it isn't. It is Barbara. Death has occurred and new life is on the way, for Barbara is pregnant. Loss has been suffered but, as if part of a natural process, presence is restored. Summer gives way to winter which becomes summer again – and with it fresh possibilities and new forms of life.

It might seem that *To the Rhythm of*

My Heart is too personal to be discussed in this way or that at least there are two levels within this film – the public and the private. I believe, however, that this assumption would be an error. The film presents to us with a disarming intimacy the "in-between" world in which Lefebvre himself lives. If through its sense of season, its feeling of loss, and the presence of two women (one of whom is an Anglophone), *To the Rhythm of My Heart* (which is "reality") bears an eerie resemblance to a film that Lefebvre made over fifteen years ago, *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça* (which is "a fiction"), these correspondences register the inseparability of Lefebvre's work from his life. "I live somewhere between the images of reality and the reality of images," as the commentary explains at the beginning of this film. The rest of the film establishes the truth of this statement.

Because *To the Rhythm of My Heart* was made for Lefebvre's young friends in the co-ops across Canada, understandably Jean-Pierre Lefebvre has prepared an English version of this film; but since the French language can carry a higher rhetorical charge than English and since in French Lefebvre's voice is capable of greater subtlety and nuance, the French version is marginally more effective than the copy in English. In whichever language, however, *To the Rhythm of My Heart* is a remarkably simple achievement. This little "home movie" depicts, finally, a double journey – a journey outwards towards the activities of others and a journey inwards towards the rhythms of the soul.

Peter Harcourt ●

AU RYTHME DE MON COEUR/TO THE RHYTHM OF MY HEART d. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre anim. cam. Yves Rivard p. Jim Kelly p.c. Cinak Ltée, with the assistance of the Canada Council dist. J.A. Lapointe Films Inc., Montreal, (514) 331-7832 16mm black & white running time 80 mins.

Bill MacGillivray's

Stations

In its conceptual scope, *Stations* is one of the most ambitious feature length films to have emerged from the Maritimes. Its selection as the headliner of the third annual Atlantic Film & Video Festival, held recently in Halifax, was significant, considering the many ways in which the film probes the wilderness that exists outside the cultural dictates of central Canada and in the heart (or "personal art") of the independent filmmaker.

Directed by Halifax filmmaker Bill MacGillivray, *Stations* follows the journey of Tom Murphy, a TV journalist living in Vancouver with his wife and kids. Tom is assigned to a cross-country grass roots story by his national TV boss who has just dismissed a "personal" project of Tom's. The project involved a close friend named Harry whose sudden death has profoundly affected Tom. Harry grew up with Tom in Newfoundland. They went to the same seminary. His death has raised doubts in Tom about the manipulative, dehumanizing aspects of the media. It has also brought back bad memories of Tom's father who rejected Tom when he and Harry decided to quit the seminary.

Crossing the country by train, Tom and his cameraman interview passengers, but Tom remains haunted by his friend's death. Gradually, the value of his media assignment diminishes and a more meaningful journey into the Self takes over. The exterior landscape slips into a stream of images, past and present, connected by an almost metaphysical soundtrack. "How far north can you go?" asks American artist and filmmaker Robert Frank in the middle of a cryptic rap with Tom. Frank plays a bit role as an anonymous passenger on the journey, but his appearance is not lost on Atlantic filmmakers who remember Frank as the big inspiration behind the formation of the Atlantic Filmmaker's Cooperative. The train finally reaches Halifax and Tom decides to quit his job and take the ferry to St. John's, Newfoundland. As Frank says earlier: "Home is when you get on the boat."

The film's final homecoming scenes include a warm party in St. John's where there is a hint that the breach between Tom and his staunchly Catholic father will be resolved. But there is a simplicity about this ending which undermines many of the film's strengths. It's as if returning to one's roots (the film's transparent "regional" argument) automatically restores unity to a troubled soul and resolves the conflict between regional folk culture and the centralizing forces of an artificial media culture. The ending also brings us straight back to the problem of the film's ambiguous title. "Stations" suggests Tom's journey – the journey of a penitent but are we supposed to equate Newfoundland with Tom's redemption?

"That's like the Zen of being part of Confederation," says actor Andy Jones in the midst of a comic skit in a St. John's bar. In this homecoming scene, Jones is describing the economic woes of his province in a clever satire about the