

REVIEWS



● Cross-Canada post-existentialism: Michael Jones and Joel Sapp in *Stations*

plight of a *Ben Hur* movie extra. Comic relief aside, *Stations* seems just as profoundly mixed up in its religion and politics as Jones' Zen humour suggests. The film's radical visual technique and thinly veiled attack against the CBC's national bias is at odds with the film's symbolic structure. In fact, the editing, acting and camerawork systematically alienate the viewer, but unlike a Jean-Luc Godard film, there's no consistent point of view left on screen that audiences can feel sympathetic towards. Actor Mike Jones' portrayal of Tom Murphy is stiff. We never really see him as an effective TV journalist. He wavers between lines, as if he's unsure himself whether the character he's portraying is a Christ figure, or post-existentialist dropout. The use of non-professional actors, recruited from among the train's passengers during the shoot, works against the casual neo-realist encounters the script and cinema verite camerawork try so hard to create.

The most striking footage in *Stations* is taken from a "home movie" which Mike Jones' father shot when his son was attending a Newfoundland seminary. (The autobiographical element of the film is made very clear.) The footage offers us an eerie glimpse into a collective heritage, a "great code" as Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye would call it, but *Stations* fails to illuminate the landscape it traverses. If the soul (i.e. Tom's personal relationship with God, embodied in his relationship to Harry) is the movie's subject, its subject appears dead.

If, in a more general sense, *Stations'* theme is man's alienation from man, the film's medium shots and 'alienation' techniques distance it from audiences, defeating its own manipulative interests in communication. Ingmar Bergman's films are perhaps the best evidence of how a protagonist, intimately shot, can communicate the depth of his or her personal crisis, beyond any spoken words. But the lack of closeups of Tom in *Stations* forces a viewer's emotions

STATIONS d. William MacGillivray sc. Lionel Simmons, MacGillivray d.o.p. Simmons asst. cam. Charles Clark sd. Jim Rillie boom Alex Salter ed. MacGillivray, Simmons p. Gordon Parsons, Chris Majka p. assts. Andrew McLean, Elaine Pain l.p. Michael Jones, Joel Sapp, Beth McTavish, Maisie Rillie, Mary Walsh, Bernard Cloutier, Richard Boland p.c. Picture Plant, with the assistance of the CFDC, Canada Council, CBC, NFB, and private investors. color, 16mm, running time: 95 mins.

and sympathy to be subordinate to reason. Positioned in such a way, it is probably not surprising that at least one viewer at the Atlantic Film Festival identified more with the film's multi-layered sound, than with its story-line. At times, the location sound on the train had all the makings of a great Canadian sound poem.

William Dodge ●

HOUDAILLE: DAYS OF COURAGE, DAYS OF RAGE

*"Don't wait up for me my love,
I'm sitting in tonight"*

So goes the background song to this useful and permanent reminder of the 1980 occupation by the workers of the Houdaille auto plant in Oshawa, Ont.

Made a year after the actual event, the use of archive material, historical photos, and interviews with the workers, gives a clear rundown of the reasons for the drastic action.

Pre-war conditions weren't so hot at Houdaille, and after World War II they didn't get any better. The workers talk about the company's humiliating attitude towards them, and how the spirit of rebellion grew. When the Oshawa plant was to close in 1980, the severance pay and benefits were totally unrealistic. One week's salary for every eight years in the plant – a man with 25 years' service was offered \$800.

The occupation of the plant by the men was paralleled by the occupation of the offices by the women. The warmth of the workers' comradeship comes across well, together with the demonstrations of support from wives and children. The fighting message is clearly and explicitly conveyed.

p./d. Laura Sky, colour, 16 mm. running time: 23 mins., 1981

CIMARRONES

A rough, uneven, yet absorbing first film from Montreal filmmaker Carlos

Serge Bergon's Joy

What little, what very little, of joy there is in *Joy* comes from its star, Toronto-based Claudia Udy in her film debut. She seems likeable and talented and never gives up trying to pump life into both her flatter-than-cardboard character and the movie as a whole. And she's doomed from the start; not even Jehovah could animate this particular lump of clay.

The basic problem seems to be that the producers, RSL in Canada and ATC 3000 in France, wanted to make a hot movie to appeal to the genteel, "erotica" rather than "porn", and took the worst routes to achieve their somewhat dubious end. Courting respectability, they've larded the movie with heavy significance: *Joy* is, supposedly, a Freudian character study. The heroine is neurotic, doing as she does because she's unconsciously seeking her lost daddy. We learn this at the end. You could never guess it from watching, because, courting acceptance, determinedly weeding out anything dark and dangerous that might, just possibly might, turn off an audience of nice young marrieds, they have made her, and everyone else, relentlessly normal. This, logically enough, makes the ending hopelessly limp and reveals the "significance" for what it is: sheep-dip drizzled on the meatloaf.

Of course, it wouldn't matter if *Joy* were exciting. The thrill of sensuality, like the thrill of laughter or suspense, is its own justification. But *Joy* is not sensual. It is flat, slow, wooden and cliché-ridden. It is hideously inept: near the end, *Joy* is raped. The rape breaks up her big love affair, which in turn precipitates her mini-breakdown, the film's climax. So the rape is fairly important to the story. But, you can't tell it's a rape until you see her later reactions. While it's happening, it's distinguishable from the other sex (in which she is an eager participant) only by the slight sheen of sweat on her body and the extra hoarseness in her cries. As I said – inept.

The night *Joy* opened in Toronto, samples of *Joy* perfume were given out to the first, I think, 100 women to enter the theatre. As a love note to the genteel, it was a good try. As an attempt to cover up the stench emanating from the screen, it was an abysmal failure.

Andrew Dowler ●

JOY d. Serge Bergon p. Benjamin Simon l.p. Claudia Udy, Kenneth Welsh p.c. ATC 3000 (France)

Note: The producers of *Joy* applied for official status as a Canada/France co-production. The application was refused by the Canadian authorities because of the substance of the film. Subsequently Canadian producers Stephen J. Roth and Robert Lantos had their names removed from the credits. Of the 35 Canadian crew-members (see *Cinema Canada* No. 96) only d.o.p. Richard Ciupka's name remains – misspelled.

MINI REVIEWS

Ferrand. It opens in a rather static and boring way, with a man in a "tropical room" setting relating a forgotten part of Peruvian history. The Inca population, decimated by Spanish conquerors, was reduced from ten million to two million in 70 years, so black slaves were brought from Africa to work.

These African slaves who escaped and lived free in hidden communities were called Cimarrones. Then comes a dramatised event taken from old documents in the National Archives of Peru.

A band of Cimarrones free two black slaves from a Spanish caravan. The senor is abandoned in the desert, without food and half-naked, so that he may know what it is like to be a slave.

This small drama, in spite of over-exposed and primitive footage, has great power in the editing and, indeed, some images conjure up Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*. The film also has a judicious mix of pipe and string melodies, with some drums and a xylophone-type of instrument.

Ferrand has raw filmmaking talent, and one looks forward to more of his work.

d./sc./p. Carlos Ferrand narr.: Burt Henry colour, 16 mm. running time: 24 mins., 1982

TALES OF TOMORROW: OUR ELDERS

A truly affecting look at the realities of being old in today's North American society. Two very different ways of life are examined – an 80-year old wheelchair activist in her apartment,

and a retired businessman, 74, living in the Toronto Baycrest Jewish Home for the Aged.

Alex Kielish is still active in mind and body, but his beloved wife suffers from Alzheimer's Disease. He finds it excruciatingly difficult to accept the facts – his wife doesn't know his name, who he is, or that they have been married for 54 years.

Other residents of Baycrest do their best to liven things up. They've organized a "road show", The Great Memory Machine, and take it to nursing homes, schools and other institutions. To keep alive their culture and heritage they have devised a recreation of the sweat shop – sewing invisible garments, waiting for the bagel woman (2¢ each!), talking about organizing against the boss, and ending by singing Solidarity For Ever.

Sarah Binns has suffered from rheumatoid arthritis since her twenties. At 72 her doctor asked her to have an experimental operation on her knees. It was successful, and she now manages to stand after many years. Alone in her little apartment, using a wheelchair a good deal of the time, she manages very well with a small amount of home help. Sarah Binns talks eloquently of her outside interests and her younger friends, and of the need to keep the mind active.

A compassionate film which gives a voice to elderly men and women, and shows them going forward with courage and lots of humour.

d./sc./p. Barbara Halpern Martineau Colour, 16mm running time: 22 mins., 1983

Pat Thompson ●