

REVIEWS

Atom Egoyan's **Next Of Kin**

Seldom do you find a low-budget film – never mind a first feature – as technically accomplished as *Next of Kin*, produced, written, directed and edited by 24-year-old Toronto independent filmmaker Atom Egoyan. The narrative is engaging and crisply paced, the dialogue sure and authentic, the performances solid, the locations, sets, and small details appropriate. Then there is the camera – a camera which not only moves, but moves swiftly, fluidly, assuredly. It adds up to quite an achievement for a \$37,000 film made on Canada Council and Ontario Arts Council grants (it looks like it should have cost \$100,000). Egoyan must share the credit with cinematographer Peter Mettler (director of the praised 1982 experimental feature *Sciserre*) and a dedicated crew of young Toronto film professionals.

A cultural comedy with disturbing undertones, *Next of Kin* premiered at the Festivals of Festivals and was Canada's sole entry in October at the Mannheim Film Festival in West Germany. Egoyan's background is in theatre (he has written 10 plays, including one to be produced in New York this fall, *External Affairs*) and, to a lesser extent, film criticism (while at University of Toronto, he wrote some of the most lucid and intelligent reviews ever to appear in the student press), so, not surprisingly, his films reveal formal considerations.

His previous film, *Open House*, a half-hour drama which aired on CBC-TV, was like *Next of Kin* a deliberately self-conscious study of a family in crisis, but Egoyan's distance from the material was too pronounced: you felt you were witnessing an exploration in film form rather than a movie with characters, story and action. In this respect, Egoyan has made great progress with his first feature: *Next of Kin* is a warmer, livelier, more engaging film.

Egoyan begins *Next of Kin* in the middle of its story, structuring the first 20 minutes so that the narrative both catches up and works backward, creating a haunting, effective exposition. It establishes the surreal aspect of its story. Peter (Patrick Tierney), a 23-year-old, upper-class, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, lives at home with his quarrelling parents. He is unhappy, disaffected, aimless, spending his days "pretending" (i.e., daydreaming), which infuriates his staunchly conservative parents. Though the film never explicitly states it, Peter's problem is that he does not want to be a WASP.

The family is undergoing psychotherapy – the sessions are videotaped so patients can review them later – and one day Peter looks instead at the tape of an Armenian family, the Deryans, guilty over having given up their infant son Bedros 20 years earlier when they were poor. The father George (Berge Fazlian) takes his frustration out on his daughter Ajah (Arsinee Khanjian) while the mother (Sirvart Fazlian) suffers silently. Since Bedros would now be his own age, Peter decides to impersonate him: he seeks both to ease the family's pain

and rid himself of his own unwanted identity.

For Peter, the project is his first venture out of the home and the ultimate test of his "pretending" skills. The Deryans immediately accept him as their son. It doesn't matter that he doesn't look Armenian: all their lives they have fantasized a role their son would have played in the family, so when one arrives they don't ask questions. Playing it straight, Egoyan works this family's lavish affections toward their improbable son Peter – for whom the epithet "Whitebread" surely applies – for much deadpan humour.

Soon Peter faces a choice between his hollow WASP existence and the rich emotional life of this strange ethnic family. It sounds like a cliché, and would be a terrible cliché were it not for Egoyan's persistent undercutting of the narrative. A nightmare lurks at the edges of Peter's adolescent dream of choosing his own family, giving *Next of Kin* a quirky, unsettling feel: wholesome family drama played out in the Twilight Zone. In one scene, Peter curls up on the kitchen table so the mother can cuddle him as she did the infant Bedros; it's funny but disturbing – especially since it's the same table upon which they consumed Peter's homecoming meal. Add to this the film's roving, probing camera style, said by the director to represent the spirit of the missing son. Through this device, the film subconsciously contrasts its visual style with the family's deadening need to fix Peter/Bedros in its own image of a son – an image which remains largely infantile (they have even preserved Bedros' teddy bear).

In the ensuing contest of wills, the family easily overwhelms the hapless Peter. He finally loses control of his escapade when the Deryans throw Bedros a surprise birthday party. With the family's relatives gathered to pass judgment, Peter is presented for approval then led to the cake, where his sister beckons him to look closer, closer, until a pair of hands pop out to grab his face. They are George's hands – it's only another of the practical jokes the Deryans enjoy playing – but it signifies how completely and hopelessly Peter has plunged into alien territory.

Working the narrative against expectation, Egoyan never gives the audience the big discovery scene it anticipates.

Instead, Peter remains as Bedros, achieving his dream of family bliss at the cost of destroying himself. As he lies in bed surrounded by his new family, dread mixes with satisfaction: Peter realizes he is among strangers, strangers who love Bedros, not Peter. As his sister places his photographs into the family album during the final credits, the grotesqueness of his fate is underlined: the roving camera has represented the spirit of the real Bedros, while Peter's frozen image suggests his soul's imprisonment. The last laugh; chillingly, is on him.

Part of the story's charm is that Peter's ruse is never revealed, but this limits the film's overall scope. The ambiguous ending sidesteps Peter's identity problem, and many issues set up by the film hardly get touched – questions of culture, class differences, the gap between "real" and "pretend." Given the film's high level of accomplishment, one wishes Egoyan had pushed his material further; one senses many of these issues remain unresolved for him, to be explored in later works. Perhaps it's that the film's intellectual premise demands Peter be something of a cipher, but Patrick Tierney's performance makes him a more sympathetic character, so you want to know more than the film is prepared to tell you about his life, his relation to his parents (who are only broadly sketched caricatures), his emotions. Nevertheless, its ironic texture, visual style and feel for genuine cinematic exploration make *Next of Kin* a promising debut and should establish Egoyan as a young Canadian director worth watching – and supporting – in the coming years.

Bruce Malloch ●

NEXT OF KIN d./sc./ed. Atom Egoyan
d.o.p. Peter Mettler sd. rec. Clark McCarron art d.
Ross Nichol p. man. Camelia Frieberg, Jeremy
Podeswa a.d. Mark R. Battley gaffer Bill Brown
cont. Susan Haller grip Imre Geiszt best boy
Frank Foster boom Paul McGlashan ward. Delanie
Prasek asst. cam. Doug Koch sp. efx. ed. Michele
Moses mus. ed. Gordon Kidd asst. ed. Bruce
McDonald titled Metamedia stills Tim O'Brien,
Kaloust Babian p. assts. Hagop Apkarian, David
Churchill, Jim Coburn, Paul Harris, Vivian Palin,
Pierre Yereimian class. guitar Atom Egoyan sd.
efx. David Rokeby. Traditional folk music by The
Song and Dance Ensemble of Armenia. Produced
with the assistance of The Canada Council and
Ontario Arts Council p.c. Ego Film Arts, Toronto
colour 16mm running time 72 minutes, l.p.
Patrick Tierney, Berge Fazlian, Arsinee Khanjian,
Sirvart Fazlian.

● Patrick Tierney and 'family' in *Next of Kin*: wholesome drama in the Twilight Zone



Allan Eastman's **Danger Bay**

A scene from *Danger Bay*, the new half-hour drama series coproduced by Toronto independent Paul Saltzman, CBC-TV, and the Disney Channel: deep in the British Columbia interior the Bad Guy aims his rifle at the Good Guy, valiant veterinarian Dr. Grant "Doc" Roberts (Donnelly Rhodes). The good doctor escapes, though, in a helicopter piloted by the capable and lovely Joyce Carter (Deborah Wakeham), who unthinks the villain with a blast from her craft's propellers. The Bad Guy aims at his fleeing partners but they get away, too. Disgusted, he flings his rifle to the ground without firing a single shot. It's odd. Guns on TV are as familiar as the medium itself, but a TV gun that doesn't go off is rare – which says the makers of *Danger Bay* are up to something different.

Danger Bay builds its stories around real-life environmental concerns, not cops-and-robbers fantasies. Each episode tries to teach the audience some unusual facts, like the origin of the expression "Mad as a hatter." The show scrupulously avoids excessive violence, sexism, racism, and exploitation, creating its own benign unreality where guns are aimed but never fired. Using the medium's established conventions, it seeks to give disenchanted TV viewers a show which is not only good but good for them.

The question remains: can a show like *Danger Bay* improve television merely by changing the content? Much of the show's format is as conventional as any TV half-hour. The same plotlines structured around three commercial breaks – a sameness ameliorated somewhat by the uncommon flair of Doug McKay's location cinematography. Same combination of terrific job and wonderful family for Doc Roberts, whose kids (Christopher Crabb and Ocean Hellman) are as cute and likeable as any TV siblings. Same loyal supporting cast – along with Carter, there's a bright, efficient and pretty researcher (Michelle Chan) to explain the scientific stuff and an adorable seal pup, Danger. Same synth-pop score pulsing as relentlessly as any action thriller's, as if it alone were charged with putting the danger in *Danger Bay*.

Then there are the show's progressive elements. Doc's an environmental protector and crusader against injustice to man or beast. Show this public servant a wrong and he'll set it right, hang the risk, cost or paperwork. He'll also doing his best as a single father. His kids share the household chores. Joyce holds a traditionally male job. Chan's researcher is Chinese. There are welcome alternatives to the stereotyped blandness of the TV family, and if *Danger Bay* is to make a dent on public consciousness it will be through the dynamic it creates among these characters, the little daily things they do which speak of a larger context. As it stands after two episodes, the show could probably push these elements further. Doc handles only small change like rabid dogs and miscreant prospectors and still gives most of the orders.



● **Danger Bay** stars kids Ocean Hellman, Chris Crabb, and leads Wakeham and Rhodes

Mom's absence isn't really explained, Joyce's relationship to Doc is largely undefined and the researcher's role limited to the lab. Both kids may cook, but the boy makes peanut-butter omelettes while the girl prepares dinner for company.

Danger Bay also must integrate its social concerns with the requirements of good drama, something it doesn't do in director Allan Eastman's first episode. The story seems more science lesson than drama, the characters never really come alive, and the music annoyingly covers what seems like 95 percent of the show. Gil Shilton's second episode works much better, which may mean *Danger Bay* will improve each time out. The story has conflict and tension, so the educational aspect is submerged — where it belongs. Joyce and Doc banter back and forth, the kids come in at the top and end for comic relief, and the music is less prominent. It's a solid, well-crafted TV half-hour.

It's hard to establish *Danger Bay's* true political line. Despite its left-leaning aspect, it also bears an unquestioning reverence and trust in advanced technology. No birch-bark and pinecone backwoods nature show, *Danger Bay* sets Doc Roberts in command of an impressive technological array — which of course he uses only for good. In episode one technology rescues Doc's daughter from rabies. An improved vaccine not only saves her life but greatly reduces her treatment, while sophisticated telecommunications and transportation systems deliver it to Vancouver overnight. In episode two Doc's medical knowledge and the lab's findings uncover the real reason grizzlies

are attacking campers. While the forest rangers would simply shoot the bears each time, Doc's probing intelligence — an intelligence patterned on, developed and assisted by technology — works out the entire picture. There's nothing false about this, and an intelligent TV hero is refreshing, but let's hope the whole series does not ignore the various ills modern technology has also produced.

There doesn't seem to be any reason to be cynical about *Danger Bay*. Its makers seem sincere and committed in their attempt to create a genuine alternative to current TV fare. Unfortunately, these good intentions may not help their scramble for viewers and survival. To succeed, *Danger Bay* must consolidate its present strengths and take more risks, while audiences must be patient and accept that early victories will be small.

Above all, the show must avoid becoming merely a TV form of diet cola — same product, except no bad sugar, no bad caffeine, no bad calories and no bad fun. Such an approach appeals immediately to a certain mentality. But in the long run, compared to the guilty, irresistible pleasures of the original, how many will continue to bother?

Bruce Malloch ●

DANGER BAY d. Allan Eastman, Gil Shilton, Michael Berry **exec. p.** Paul Saltzman **creators** Saltzman & Peter Dixon **exec. story cons.** John Duggan **p.** Mary Eilts **post-p.** Paul Quigley **l.p.** Donnelly Rhodes, Ocean Hellman, Chris Crabb, Deborah Wakeham, Kyle Skinner, Hagen Beggs, Michele Chan, Tom Heaton, Roy Vickers. *A more complete crew list was unavailable from CBC for this issue.*

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Jean Beaudry
& François Bouvier's

Jacques et Novembre

Is it surely no accident that this extraordinary first feature has already been selected as one of 15 by young directors from around the world for the Tokyo International Film Festival next summer. For the sensibility that informs *Jacques et Novembre* — by its acceptance — and celebration — of the fleetingness of life — is profoundly Japanese in spirit.

If in every other sense, *Jacques et Novembre* is Canadian, (or rather a Montreal film) this is simply because it is a film in the purest sense: a perfect balance between the universality of its theme and the specificity of its location. For *Jacques et Novembre* addresses a topic that concerns all human beings, namely death.

Jacques, in a performance of stunning simplicity by Jean Beaudry, is 31 years-old and dying of an unspecified disease. It is November, which will be his last month. The film is a diary of Jacques' farewell to life, or more accurately, three films: the film itself, and within it, the film that Jacques' friend, Denis (Pierre Rousseau), is making with him about Jacques' ultimate month, intercut with a video diary that Jacques keeps when he is alone. Beautifully constructed — the editing is also by Beaudry — the film plays totally effectively on all levels, cutting effortlessly from film, to video, to stills, and pushing each level of medium to its fullest expressive capability, conscious all the while of the evanescence of its subject.

Jacques et Novembre displays remarkable control over all its elements; not once does it falter; not once does it slip into sentimentality. Above all, it is a film permeated with respect for filmmaking, and for its subjects; and when one considers furthermore that it was made for \$15,000 in costs, the achievement of these young filmmakers is simply miraculous.

Jacques et Novembre was originally conceived as a documentary film on the last weeks of a 24-year-old cousin of Bouvier's, stricken by leukemia. The rapidity of the boy's death, sadly, outpaced the filmmakers. However, the impact of what Bouvier terms "this extraordinary death" left a searing imprint on the project that explains the (as yet unpaid) devotion to the film of all concerned with the production as well as the uncompromising nature of the filmmakers' approach. *Jacques et Novembre* stares death in the face, yet does not flinch.

But it is not in any sense a morbid film. As its varied literary references (a Jacques Brel song, a line from Marquez's "100 Years of Solitude") make clear, it simply accepts — as we must all accept — that dying is a part of life. The courage of this film is in its belief that this realization is something all human beings can share in.

Jacques is thus Everyman and as such embodies what is both mortal and eternal in man — a very powerful video scene of Beaudry's emaciated body against a wall of light and shadow unmistakably states the "Ecce homo" theme. But Jacques is also more than a

symbol: he is the particular, specific individual having to come to terms with his own finitude in the context of life that will continue without him. This saying goodbye to life is brilliantly handled with both sadness and humor in all its heart-rending fullness: his reconciliation with a distant, hard-working father; his ex-girlfriend who is pregnant with another man's child; his tiresome relatives with whom he no longer has time to pretend; the sale of all his worldly possessions to raise money for the film-within-the-film.

In one hilarious scene, Jacques, calculator in hand, is adding up a balance-sheet of what his life has amounted to. Totalling the years spent eating, sleeping, reading and watching television produces an unaccounted-for time-gap. Then he remembers sex. He carefully quantifies his sexual experience and comes to the conclusion that he's known only 39 days of pleasure in his 31 years.

Slowly, painful hurdle after hurdle, with its funny moments and its bitter ones, Jacques makes his peace with the life that he is leaving. An immense calm permeates the ending of the film: gaunt, thin and ashen, Jacques has begun the final journey. Alone in his nearly empty apartment, he waters his collection of plants, each one carefully named and representing significant moments of his life — a jade is November. The film does not so much come to an end as, with a mounting intensity of visual awareness, it seems just to hold its breath.

"In fact it wasn't death that mattered to him, but rather life," goes the passage from Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel that Jacques has read to him twice, and fully describes the spirit of *Jacques et Novembre*.

For after seven years since the project got underway, after having experienced every conceivable difficulty known to filmmakers, after having been spurned and rejected by Quebec film-funding juries, *Jacques et Novembre* is a profound, life-asserting affirmation of artistic and cinematic integrity.

Simply put, *Jacques et Novembre* is a triumph.

Michael Dorland ●

JACQUES ET NOVEMBRE d. Jean Beaudry & François Bouvier **a.d.** Marquise Lepage, Marcel Simard **sc.** Beaudry, Bouvier with Claude Laroche, Marcel Simard **p.** Bouvier & Marcel Simard **art d.** Bouvier **cam.** Serge Giguère, Claude De Maisonneuve **sd.** Marcel Fraser, Diane Carrière, Dominique Chartrand, Christine Lemoine, Michel Charron, Gilbert Lachapelle, Andre Dussault, François Reid **ed.** Beaudry **mus.** Michel Rivard **p.c.** Les Productions du Lundi Matin, with the financial participation of the crew, Telefilm Canada, the Canada Council and the National Film Board of Canada. **dist. (Canada)** Cinema Libre (514) 526-0473 **foreign:** Films Transit (514) 527-9781 **colour** 16mm and video **running time** 72 mins. **l.p.** Jean Beaudry, Carole Frechette, Marie Cantin, Pierre Rousseau, Reine France, Jean Mathieu.

● Jacques (Jean Beaudry): ledger of a life





● The doll that steals the show in *Curtains*

'Jonathan Stryker's' *Curtains*

On some secondary level, *Curtains* seems to have been conceived as a showcase for rising Toronto actresses. The premise – six actresses are invited to the home of feared director Jonathan Stryker (the same name as on *Curtains'* director's credit – more of that anon) to audition for the plum role of mad Audra and are stalked by a mad killer – is full of opportunities for love scenes, death scenes, scenes of bitterness, bitchiness, rage, compassion, triumph, almost anything you can think of. What we get instead are stalk-and-slash scenes, scenes of Stryker 'auditioning' and 'directing' and material that looks like it came from a different movie.

Of course, stalk-and-slash is what *Curtains* is mainly about: the masked (solely to hide from the audience) killer and the isolated bitsy. It's at best a thin sub-genre, but here the murders are so trite in conception (hands emerge to clutch and cut from behind the tree where she's paused in her flight) and so blandly genteel in shooting and cutting that we're denied what pleasures of suspense and splashy axe-in-the-eyeball effects the genre does have to offer.

Dramatically, *Curtains* focusses on Stryker's ludicrous directing methods, which consist of pointlessly angry and condescending harangues, insults and humiliations (a believable character this is not) and the actress' responses which, under the circumstances are not surprisingly limited to becoming tense and defensive, tense and weepy, tense and angry, etc. On top of this, the whole thing is so badly written that it's astounding the performers managed to make anything at all of their roles.

But some did. Lynne Griffith did such a good job defining the compulsively funny, insecure stand-up comic that one suspects she wrote her own lines. Samantha Eggar and Linda Thorson both turned in decent jobs without straining their professional capabilities and, in the latter case, without the benefit of any big scenes to help her along. The rest – Anne Ditchburn, Lesleh Donaldson, Sandee Currie, Sandra Warren and Deborah Burgess – who knows? They weren't on screen long enough for

me to be certain they're all in the final print, let alone long enough to develop characters.

Which brings us to that material from another movie. There was an earlier version of *Curtains*; people who crewed on it say the movie went through a year of production, through major rewrites and reshooting. What's left, for certain, from that earlier version, is about a dozen shots involving a two-foot doll with a subtly horrifying face of sorrow and resentment. Whoever created that doll should be applauded, as should the crew, who managed to make the movie look consistent and fairly good (despite a couple of badly-lit exteriors and Stryker's woefully underfurnished house) under what must have been very trying circumstances.

As noted, Jonathan Stryker is the name on the director's credit, but a sheet in the press kit (possibly left in by mistake) claims this was cameraman Richard Ciupka's directorial debut, while word from the crew says that Peter Simpson directed at least some of the reshoot. The press kit says that Simpson, with writer Robert Guza, Jr., also originated the idea. They thought it up while jogging around Queen's Park.

Peter R. Simpson is the president of Simcom Ltd., a company more noted for making good deals than good movies (*Prom Night* is theirs). It's not likely Simcom will be making any good deals with *Curtains*, but hopefully it will feel that the loss of potential profit is more than offset by the valuable lessons learned by its president in the actual making of a film. On the nature of those lessons, we will not speculate.

Andrew Dowler ●

CURTAINS d. Jonathan Stryker **exec. p.** Richard Simpson **p.** Peter R. Simpson **ed.** Michael Maclaverty **cfe. p. des.** Roy Forge Smith **mus.** Paul Zaza **d.o.p.** Robert Paynter **bsc. add. photog.** Fred Guthe **p. man.** Gerry Arbeid **sc.** Robert Guza, Jr. **(1st team) p. coord.** Gaille Ledrew **p. acct.** Robert Duckworth **asst. p. acct.** Roma Panczyszyn **asst. p. man.** Phillipa Polskin **p. asst.** Carlo Squassero **unit pub.** Linda Moyle **1st a.d.** Tony Thatcher **2nd a.d.** Karen Pike **3rd a.d.** John Pace **cam. op.** Fred Guthe **cam. tech.** Paul Neilsen **clapper loader** Yves Drapeau **cam. trainee** Curtis Brown **sd. mixers** Doug Ganton, Thomas Hilderley **boom** John Thomson **gaffer** John Berrie **best boy** Richard Allen **elect.** Steve Danyluk, Jerome McCann **key grip** Norm Smith **grips** Michael O'Connor, Brian Danniels, Sean Ryerson **gen. op.** Greg Daniels **ward. mist.** Mary Jane McCarty **asst. ward.** Mary Ann Wilson, Britanny Burr, Constance-Buck, Gaye Gardiner **make-up** Sonagh Jabour **asst. make-up** Christine Hart **hair** Jenny Arbour **asst. hair** Maureen Mestan **asst. art. d.** Barbara Matis **2nd asst.**

art. d. Birgit Siber, Suzanne Smith, Debra Gjendem, Brendan Smith **key set dec.** Carol Lavoie **1st asst. set dec.** Linda McClelland **2nd asst. set dec.** Paul Dreskin **set dec. trainee** Marlene Puritt **props buyer** Barry Kemp **propmaster** Anthony Greco **asst. props** Gordon Sim **const. man.** Bill Harman **hd painter** Nick Kosonic **prosthetics** Greg Cannom **asst. prosthetics** Jeffrey Kinney **prosth. trainee** Linda Preston **sp. efx.** Colin Chilvers **loc. man.** Ray Elias/Brian Ross **cont.** Pauline Harlow **set. photog.** John Williamson **stills** Pat Harbron **asst. stills** Dave Hill **trans. capt.** Michael Curran **asst. trans. capt.** Gof Martin **drivers** Al Kosonic, John Ciccone, Simon Clery, Rick Moyle, Gordon Thorne, **crafts.** James Tamblin **(2nd team) p. man.** Ilana Frank **unit man.** Helga Stephenson **loc. man.** Fran Solomon **p. coord.** Susan Mander **p. assts.** Carl Marks-George, Diane Mitchell **1st a.d.** Stephen Wright **2nd a.d.** Donato Baldassarra **3rd a.d.** Jerome McCann **gen. asst. to d.** Brock Simpson **cam. op.** Fred Guthe, Robert New scs, Marvin Midwicki **dlapper loader** Christopher Bonniere **focus puller** Greg Farrow **cam. trainee** Ray Bronstein **sd. rec.** Bryan Day **boom** John Thomson **sd. mixers** Joe Grimaldi, David Appleby **1st asst. ed.** Jeremy Maclarverty **2nd asst. ed.** Haydn Streeter **ed. trainee** Laurie Russwurm **sd. ed.** Peter Burgess, Charlie Bowers, Jeremy Maclarverty, Terry Burke **asst. sd. ed.** Michele Cook, Gary DaPrato **mus. con.** Carl Zittler **gaffer** Roger Bate **best boy** Adam Swica **elect.** Ira Cohen, Sandy Carroll, Al Lalonde **key grip** Carlo Campana **2nd grip** Christopher Dean **3rd grip** Greg Palermo **grip** Dennis Thompson **gen. op.** Jock Brandis **ward. mist.** Mary Jane McCarty **asst. ward.** Maureen Gurney **make-up** Shonagh Jabour **asst. make-up** Suzanne Benoit **hair** Jenny Arbour **set dec.** Linda McClelland **1st asst. set dec.** Greg Pelchat **2nd asst. set dec.** Brendan Smith **props** Ed Hanna **stunt coord.** Bob Hannah **const. man.** Bill Harman **cont.** Pauline Harlow **trans. capt.** Michael Curran **drivers** David Chud, Allen Kosonic, Dave Brown, Jerome McCann **crafts.** Laurie Manoim **asst. crafts.** Daria Stermac **cast.** Karnick Armstrong, Liz Ramos **lp.** John Vernon, Samantha Eggar, Linda Thorson, Anne Ditchburn, Lynne Griffin, Sandra Warren, Lesleh Donaldson, Deborah Burgess, Michael Wincott, Maury Chaykin, Joann McIntyre, Calvin Butler, Kate Lynch, Booth Savage, William Marshall, James Kidnie, Jeremy Jenson, Donald Adams, Diane Godwin, Janelle Hutchison, Virginia Laight, Kay Griffin, Bunty Webb, Daisy White, Vivian Reis, Sheila Currie, Frances Gunn, Katya Ladan, Suzanne Russell, Jenna Louise, Anna Migliarese, Elaine Crosley, Mary Durkin, Angela Carrol, Julie Massie, Pat Carroll Brown, Teresa Tova, Janice Nicholson, Alison Lawrence, JoAnne Hannah. **p.c.** Simcom Ltd. **dist.** (Cdn.) Norstar, (U.S.) Jensen Farley **running time:** 90 mins.

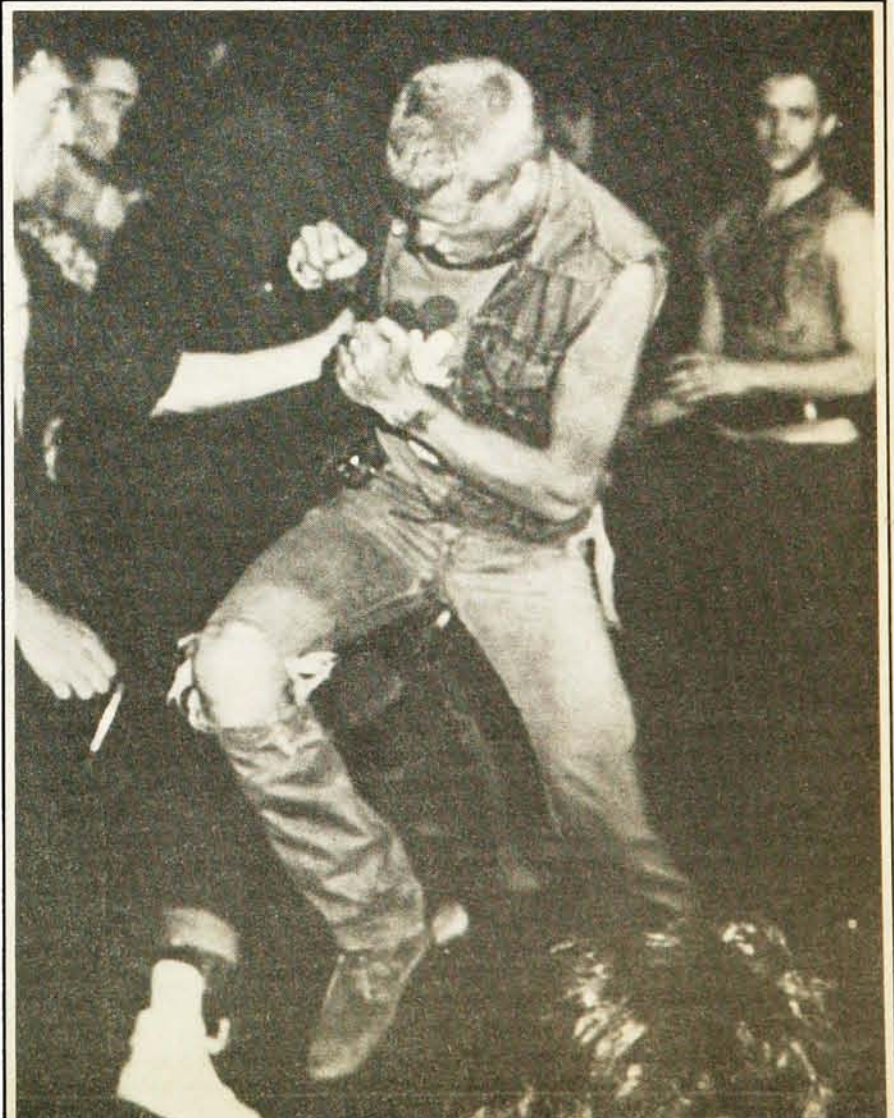
Edward Mowbray & Ruth Taylor's *Not Dead Yet*

This honest piece of anthropological and cultural research had its world premiere at the recent New Media Festival in Toronto. *Not Dead Yet* reveals, for the first time, a portrait of an important sub-cultural movement – punk. Traditionally left to marginalization by the rest of the mass-media, considered freakish, camp or anti-social by the middle class/class, victimized by moralistic portrayals of punklife on television soma-shows, directors Edward Mowbray and Ruth Taylor have here fashioned a very sympathetic and energetic document. The work features the music and thought of twelve Toronto area punk bands, their members, friends and supporters of the movement that they represent. *Not Dead Yet* breathes authenticity because it is born out of, and respects the community that it portrays. In fact the producers and creators were very conscious of consulting all the people in the tape and made sure that they would approve of its conception and evolution throughout the year-and-a-half that it took to put it together. It is a model for all documentarians, aided by the fact that Ruth Taylor is herself, a member of United State, one of the groups featured in the tape.

Co-director Edward Mowbray, had a brief career in television before turning to independent video production. His video art has toured North America and Europe.

Executive producer Tom Taylor, has had a long career as an illustrator, editor

● *Not Dead Yet* holds up a mirror to our own ugliness



and filmmaker and Christopher Lowry, the other executive producer, produced the award-winning *Chambers: Tracks and Gestures* with Atlantis, while Alan Collins, was the inspiration and seed for the production of *Not Dead Yet*. Originally conceived as a shorter work, *Not Dead Yet* grew into this full-blown, full-blooded celebration of freedom of expression in the year of Big Brother Ronald Reagan, the world's oldest video artist.

I have to admit that I attended the premiere screening with more than a little apprehension. Oh, it wasn't the chains and leather and spiked purple hair that frightened me, although the hair did tend to obscure the viewing from time to time. (The placing of 12 monitors around the round room of Ontario Place's Trillium Pod, level fifty, solved sight problems.) Nor was it the fact that I thought that the sound track would destroy my geriatric audio system. (I'm used to it and the soundtrack was uniformly and universally excellent.) I was frightened of seeing another one of those sloppy rip-off punk films, badly produced, terrible sound, an excuse for selling records for just another corporate recordband.

What I found was a somewhat conventional documentary. Informative. Sympathetic. And very accessible to a general audience. In essence, an act of communication committed to videotape. The programme was beautifully shot by a team of videographers led by Mowbray in 3/4" and then pumped up to 1". Considering the claustrophobia of the two bars where the performances were recorded, the videography gives space and tension to the music.

The real virtuosity though, comes from the montage, structure and assembly. The five months spent in post-production seem to have led to a flowing and intelligent edit. Parts of performances of each of the bands are imperceptibly interwoven with interviews with members of the punk community. These are interlinked and arranged by a commonality of theme... violence, image, conformity, the media, sexuality, politics, nuclearism, lifestyle, survival and above all, the impact of the music. The whole package is heightened to a level of analytical artistry by the use of super slow-motion and a complex overlaying of the soundscape. All of this works on a visceral and intellectual moment-for-the-moment experience which expresses and reflects the subject in the only way that would be honest. It is as close to the real as you can get without getting slammed.

But, above all, *Not Dead Yet* is a political work. It offers an alternate vision. It allows for the message to surface without letting the message become superficial. It uses no narrative device. It lets people speak for themselves. It provides a context but no artificial overview, comment and analysis. This comes later, after the show.

The message of the punk community is one of universal hope. It is an international movement. Mowbray told me that you can go to any small town anywhere in the world and find one or two punks standing defiantly on the corners of main street. They are there to remind us about tolerance. About conformity. About our own once-ideal youth. About lost energy. Entropy. About copping out. Selling out. Hypocrisy. Injustice. Mediocrity. Boredom. Unemployment. About naive tragedy. About the death of our society. About the sense of community. Belonging.

The punk movement acts as our signpost. They exist as expressive humanists, concerned about life, civil liberty and the pursuit of happiness through the pursuit of their art-form - their music. They hold a mirror to our own ugliness. It is not they who are ugly or freakish. It is we.

Peter Wintonick ●

NOT DEAD YET d. Edward Mowbray & Ruth Taylor **exec. p.** Tom Taylor, Christopher Lowry **assoc. p.** Alan Collins **based on an idea by** Ruth Taylor & Collins **chief videography/ed.** Mowbray **p.c.** Victory Video Arts **videotape**, 1984 **running time**: 60 min. **dist.** available for broadcast and videocassette **l.p.** Toronto area punk performers and bands Chronic Submission, United State, BFG (Bunch of Fucking Goofs), Jolly Tambourine Man, Blibber, The Rat Crushers, Direct Action and more.

Giles Walker & John Smith's

The Masculine Mystique

Don't rock the boat, it could upset the captain and send him scurrying overboard, leaving the women and children to man the ship.

Male-female relationships just haven't been the same since women have been making waves and coveting the helm. And some men have emerged visibly shaken from the battle. After all, gone are the carefree days when a man could crack a match, inhale deeply (without fear of cancer), tip his hat and quip "Here's looking at you." These days, the lady just won't be amused.

The erosion of male supremacy is indeed a problem that should be examined more closely, and the NFB, in its great wisdom, has taken on the job.

Co-directed by Giles Walker and John Smith, *The Masculine Mystique* casts an amused eye on how four rather "unliberated" men - Blue, Alex, Ashley and Mort - are coping with feminism and modern-day women. Essentially a docu-drama, the film alternates scenes of their personal lives with head-on encounter sessions where the men bare their souls, question each other's motives and try to confront their feelings about the women they are involved with.

On the whole an honest, often amusing and touching account, the film is,

however, treading on treacherous waters, and no matter what your opinion of the film itself may be, the issues it raises won't leave you indifferent. Although the tone is lighthearted and undogmatic throughout, the film does make a statement that is bound to unleash within you a high-pitched, emotional reaction.

Blue, a charming but fussy "anal-type" bachelor, desperately wants a relationship and is searching for the perfect woman, that very special person who will sweep him off his feet. One suspects, however, that once he finds her she's sure to be only second best to his dog, Macklusky, on top of being subjected to a lifelong refrain of did-you-put-the-cap-on-the-toothpaste, dear? Alex has it all - wife, kids, house in the suburbs - and loves it, but feels trapped and is looking for more freedom. Routine can be oh-so tiresome. Ashley is separated and the father of two, and in his grim determination to assume his single parenthood, has no room for any kind of romantic involvement. Mort, on the other hand, who cares for his children, would rather welcome a chance to share this responsibility with a new, caring, and loving woman.

However different these men's problems and desires may be, they are all struggling to come to grips with a volatile situation where roles are shifting and stereotypes no longer rule. And, more importantly, they are all trying to cling to a past they understand... and can control. It is hard not to giggle as we see Blue desperately trying to charm his girl with locker-room humour, Mort pleading with his lady to move in with him-and-the-kids for a cozy life of peanut-butter sandwiches and togetherness, or Alex and Ashley simply escaping it all, one to the bar scene, the other to the woods.

Why these "regular guys" would choose to have a relationship with any of the women in this film, though, is a matter of pure masochism. No doubt cast to enhance the masculine plight, they are certainly miles ahead of them on the scale of liberation; all have seemingly emerged from the search for self with a highly rationalized life-plan and an eye out for sexist jokes. Although it is refreshing to see women in strong roles, these are on the whole too one-dimensional to be believable. Surely feminists can also be loving human beings.

The construction of *The Masculine Mystique* is essentially what makes it work. At once constructed and improvised, it combines carefully mapped-out scenes with spontaneous dialogues, and juxtaposes dramatic and documentary segments, using clever camerawork

and editing to smoothe over the transitions and contrast the tone.

Real people instead of actors are used throughout the film to increase "naturalness and believability" and, although the gamble often fails, in this instance it pays off, particularly where the men are concerned. Asked to confront their emotions and actually talk about their feelings, the men in this film are cast in a role they very seldom assume, whether in real life or on film. Therefore when they talk, you tend to listen, knowing that this is neither learned jargon nor memorized script.

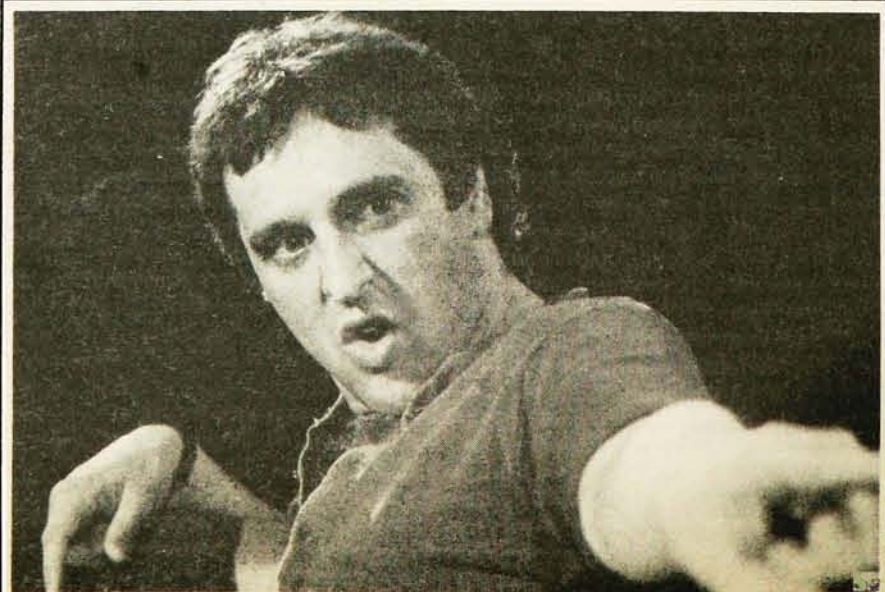
Not that you learn that much from *The Masculine Mystique* - no myths are dispelled nor characters redeemed. In fact, the film raises more questions than it answers. Billed as a docu-drama, or more dubiously as "a new genre of feature-length alternative dramas," it is never made clear where the documentary - which Webster's, for one, describes as a motion picture that records news events or shows social conditions without fictionalization - ends and the drama begins. Is this the story of four specific guys or are we to believe that they are part of a widespread social phenomenon? Furthermore, the film, produced by the NFB, also features NFB employees. Is this to say that, since one of the Board's mandates is to monitor the socio-cultural pulse of the nation, the attitudes and views expressed in the film reflect those of Canadian men and women across the nation? If so, depending on your age and your degree of liberation, you might tend to disagree. Finally, what are a bunch of NFB people doing raising their collective navel-gazing to the eyes of a nation? Are they to be seen as role-models for us all? Or, can it be that if "real men" don't eat quiche, they are all working at the Board, having relationships with "real women"?

These are not laughing matters, although I suspect that none of this humour was really intended by the people involved in making the film. The National Film Board of Canada can surely not touch on such important matters without finding itself with a large controversy on its hands. Like politics and religion, the question of male-female relationships is very contentious indeed. It forces everyone to take a position and define how they themselves live, love, relate to others and perceive themselves within the society they live in. All of which makes for a pretty emotional scene.

So, to conclude, if the idea of a crew of NFB people shooting the breeze about life while you're out there earning a living is unappealing, I suggest that the obvious qualities of this film will be lost on you. But, if, on the other hand, you are curious and think you can control your own emotions enough to manage to view the film with some degree of objectivity, its humour and unpretentiousness might well win you over. *The Masculine Mystique* could just turn out to be the starting-point for a more meaningful dialogue between the sexes.

Josée Miville-Dechène ●

● Stefan Wodoslawsky in *The Masculine Mystique*: no laughing matter



THE MASCULINE MYSTIQUE p./d. John N. Smith, Giles Walker **sc.** Smith, Walker, and David Wilson **d.o.p.** Andrew Kitkanuk **ed.** David Wilson **mus.** Richard Gresko **sd. rec.** Jean-Guy Normandin **sd. ed.** John Knight **mus. rec.** Louis Hone **re-rec.** Hans Peter Strobl **assoc. p.** Ken McCready **exec. p.** Robert Verrall, Andy Thompson **l.p.** Stefan Wodoslawsky, Char Davies, Sam Grana, Eleanor MacKinnon, Mort Ransen, Annet Zwartenberg, Ashley Murray **p.c.** National Film Board of Canada, **colour** video + 16mm **time** 86 min. 40 sec.

REVIEWS

Camera Canada

Three short dramas this month directed recently by Bruce Pittman for the 1984-85 TV season - David and Cornet at Night on CBC and The Painted Door on Global. All three films are available for sales and rentals, 16mm/video, from Magic Lantern Film Distributors, Toronto (416) 844-7216 and Vancouver (604) 271-3311.

DAVID

Earl Birney reads his poem upon which the film is based, and ruffles through an old photo album. As his voice flows on, the screen dissolves into the actual drama of two youths many years ago.

David works in a lumber camp in the Rockies where he meets Bob and fires him with enthusiasm for climbing the impressive mountains surrounding them. At weekends, the pair take off, and the older David acts as Bob's instructor and mentor. The ultimate aim is to climb The Finger, a mountain which needs skill and knowledge to conquer.

The friends progress from relatively easy outings to more arduous experiences. David urges Bob to "Let the mountain teach you patience," as they cling to a rock face and wait for the rain to stop before going ahead. Bob also learns painfully that only the fittest survive, both man and beast.

It is the final assault on The Finger that brings Bob to "The last day of my

youth", and a life-and-death decision that colours the rest of his life.

Exceptionally good atmosphere and photography in the mountain sequences and, after a slow start, the drama builds to a gripping climax. The actual on-screen presence of Earl Birney doesn't add much to the story, and his contribution could have been confined to a mellow, voice-over rendering of his poem.

d. Bruce Pittman **p.** Michael MacMillan, Seaton McLean, Janice Platt **sc.** Joe Wiesenfeld **cam.** Alar Kivilo **lp.** Eric Murphy, Milan Cheylov, Earl Birney. **Awards:** Canadian Film & Television Association/Columbus Film Festival/Houston International Film Festival. Produced in association with the CBC and Telefilm Canada.

CORNET AT NIGHT

The first dramatization of this short story by Sinclair Ross by the NFB in 1963 and directed by Stanley Jackson was a pleasant little black-and-white tale. This time round it seems much stronger due, no doubt, to the first-rate casting and an entire shoot on location in Ogema, Sask.

It's the post-Depression era on the Prairies. An isolated farm needs help to stook wheat. The farmer works alone and is forced to send Tom, his 11-year-old son, into town to bring back a man "with strong arms." The boy encounters a rail-thin, probably consumptive, city jazz-musician, who's come west for some clean air. He hires him, promising to show him the ropes.

The musician plays a mean, bluesy, insinuating cornet and, upon discovering a piano in the house, he gives out with a fascinating ragtime beat, capturing the attention of the boy's mother.

Tom does his best to instruct the musician in stooking but, though willing in spirit, his body is too weak. When he leaves the farm after a few disastrous days, he's given the family a tantalizing glimpse of a totally different world beyond the little farm on the prairie.

Andrew Skelly comes across so naturally as Tom, the young boy, that he manages to hold his own amid the first-rate professionals - Marilyn Lightstone, R.H. Thomson and Walter Mills.

d. Bruce Pittman **p.** Michael MacMillan, Seaton McLean, Janice Platt **line p.** Gillian Richardson **sc.** Joe Wiesenfeld **cam.** Mark Irwin **esc.** L.P. R.H. Thomson, Marilyn Lightstone, Andrew Skelly, Walter Mills. Produced in association with the CBC and Telefilm Canada.

THE PAINTED DOOR

This taut little tale is based on another short story by Sinclair Ross and, again, set on the Prairies. However, the wintry location shooting was done near St. Chrysostome, Que., with interiors in the NFB's Montreal studio.

A few moments of love and desire, of frustration and regret, of isolation and, in the end, unnecessary death. Ann's husband John sets out to walk

to his father's farm to help the old man with his chores, even though he knows a blizzard is blowing up. He's asked his friend Stephen to keep his wife company. She protests that she'll keep busy and will finally paint the door and trim in their kitchen. Stephen arrives; the storm rages; they talk and play cards. Flashbacks recall the youthful threesome, and the dances where John never danced but Ann took the floor with Stephen.

In the emotionally-charged atmosphere, the pair are convinced that the husband will not return through the wild weather, and they sleep together. With dawn's cold, clear light, neighbours come to break the news of John's death. Ann stands in the snow by the frozen body, not too far from the house, pulls off the mittens she knitted, and discovers horrifying proof that, during the blizzard-ridden night, her husband found out that he had been betrayed.

Strongly acted, with a gripping and tense atmosphere, and some lovely camerawork, especially in the confines of the house.

d. Bruce Pittman **p.** Michael MacMillan, Seaton McLean, Janice Platt, Andy Thomson **line p.** Gillian Richardson **sc.** Joe Wiesenfeld **cam.** Savas Kalogeras **lp.** Linda Goranson, August Schellenberg, Eric Peterson. Produced in collaboration with the NFB, and with the participation of Telefilm Canada and the Global Television Network.

Pat Thompson ●

BOOKSHELF

For Research and Reference

Basic questions affecting cinematic art are raised in a stimulating collection of essays by Canadian filmmakers and scholars, bringing a remarkable variety of views to a complex problem. Ably edited by William C. Wees and Michael Dorland, *Words and Moving Images* deals with the interrelationship between the verbal and visual content of film, and more generally with the link that connects or separates literature and cinema. From the silent films' intertitles to off-screen commentary and lip sync, the juxtaposition of word and image, as discussed in this book, has created a latent, and often unperceived, hurdle to full cinematic expression (*Mediatexte Publications, Montreal, \$10*).

In *Women's Films and Female Experience*, Andrea S. Walsh examines over 30 top-grossing "women's films" of the 1940-50 period, and measures their impact on women's social and interpersonal relationships. She holds films like *Mrs. Miniver*, *Gaslight*, *Mildred Pierce* as anticipations of the strong feminist movement of later years (*Praeger \$22.95*).

John McCarty's knowledgeable study, *Splatter Movies*, finds that blood and gore, preferably in slow motion and close up, distinguishes splatter movies from run-of-the-mill horror films. He iden-

tifies some 500 such movies with striking illustrations and an informative text, compiling a fascinating history of the genre (*St. Martin's \$24.95/12.95*).

Ably edited by G. William Jones, *Talking with Ingmar Bergman*, taped at an SMU students' seminar, reveals the Swedish director's insights into cinematic concepts and techniques, and his struggle to come to terms with life and himself through his art (*So. Methodist U. Press, Dallas, TX; \$25/12.50*).

David Quinlan's *Illustrated Guide to Film Directors* surveys some 500 outstanding American and British directors, plus a sprinkling from other countries. Informative and thorough, its complete filmographies and critical appraisals offer sharp insights into their personalities and records (*Barnes & Noble \$28.50*).

James Monaco's insightful and extensive overview of the U.S. movie industry, *American Film Now* is reissued in an updated and enlarged edition. It offers a well-informed, lucid and often witty appraisal of film as business and art, and comments intelligently on the achievements of leading filmmakers (*NY Zoetrope/NAL \$24.95*).

Italian films from 1942 to the present are surveyed by Mira Liehm in her well-researched volume, *Passions and Defiance*. With special emphasis on the Fascist period and its aftermath, she places each film within its historic, cultural and political context in a thoughtful assessment of its contribu-

tion to cinematic art (*U. of California Press \$29.75*).

Issued by Canada's National Film Board, *Glossary/Glossaire* is a bilingual lexicon of technical terms used in film/video production, data processing, management and related fields. Available from NFB Research and Development, 125 Houde St., St. Laurent, Quebec (*Check for \$5 made to Receiver General of Canada*).

The Rich and the Famous

A director who virtually created the political fiction film genre is discussed in Costa-Gavras, John J. Michalczyk's penetrating study. Based on extensive research, in-depth interviews and screenings of his films, the book probes the director's psychological motivations and the nature of his commitment (*Art Alliance Press, Cranbury, NJ; \$39.50*).

A newly revised edition of Donald Richie's *The Films of Akira Kurosawa* updates the original study of the leading Japanese director's work. A perceptive, detailed and richly illustrated volume, it examines Kurosawa's choice of themes, story-telling techniques, camera work and directorial style (*U. of California Press \$12.95*).

Crafts and Techniques

In *Special Visual Effects*, Jack Imes Jr. describes the great variety of current

state-of-the-art techniques. His comprehensive and practical survey covers in-camera effects, 2- and 3-dimensional animation (cartoons and puppets), front and rear projection, mates, mechanical effects and props. Well illustrated, this clearly written volume provides much available information (*Van Nostrand Reinhold \$30.50*).

Painter, printmaker and set designer, David Hockney reveals his photographic creativity in a brilliant and exciting collection of montages, *Cameraworks*. Hockney's analytical technique synthesizes his perception of reality's "endless sequence of details which our eyes deliver to our mind" (*Knopf \$50*).

Producer Michael Wiese's *The Independent Film/Videomakers Guide* is a knowledgeable and detailed manual discussing every aspect of the process, from financing and market research through budgeting and production, to distribution and promotion. In each area, it offers creative suggestions and practical advice (*Focal Press \$14.95*).

Valuable as a consumer guide, *How to Select and Use Home Video Equipment* by Marjorie Costello and Michael Heiss delivers expert advice, free of technical jargon, for an educated choice among available VCRs and how best to enjoy them (*HP Books, Box 5367, Tucson, AZ 85703; \$9.95 + \$1.95 handling*).

George L. George ●