

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 ●