

Having emerged in the blatantly sexist Fifties, television has traditionally reflected sexist assumptions in its programming, especially the stark division between daytime and prime-time programming. Although the TV day begins with relatively thought-provoking shows that address adult viewers as conscious, thinking people – in this country, *Canada A.M.*, or *Today* and *Good Morning America* on U.S. television – by 9:00 network scheduling implies that all such people have now gone off to work and a surfeit of gameshows, soaps and reruns takes over. The tacit assumption seems to be that daytime viewers are too dumb, sick, young, or unimportant for the networks to schedule anything but the most frivolous programs.

Middy, the CBC's new, noon-hour week-day newsmagazine show, is thus a welcome addition to the daytime schedule. It opens with a 10-minute news segment, delivered from the CBC Toronto newsroom by alternate newscasters like Keith Morrison and Sheldon Turcott, and continues for the remainder of the hour from the stark, new *Middy* set housed in *The Journal* studio. Alternate hosts Valerie Pringle, Bill Cameron and Keith Morrison smoothly fuse the mix of regional items, in-studio interviews, soft features, and land-line studio link-ups into a compelling, rapidly paced show. At a budget of \$1 million spread annually across 260 episodes, *Middy* is decidedly inexpensive fare, even for daytime programming. But it transcends such financial limitations through the sheer professionalism of its hosts, technical engineers, and regional reporters.

Middy includes a roster of regular "columnists": Kathryn O'Hara (Mont-

SCAN LINES

by Joyce Nelson



real) on consumer affairs, Deborah MacGregor (Toronto) on business, Tom New (Windsor) on movies, Pete Luckett (St. John) on greengrocery/cooking, Rick Forchuck (Vancouver) on TV, Bob Fournier (Halifax) on science, Peter Grantham (Vancouver) on medicine, and Marla Lukofsky (Toronto) doing humorous items on coping with daily life. In a slightly bizarre twist (a spoof?) on the fitness craze, Brenda Lauzon leads viewers in "the 90-second workout." Jetted daily from region to region – doing the upper-arms in Vancouver on one day, the thighs in Dartmouth, N.S. the next – Lauzon and her tiny travelling workout at first seems a rather frivolous and strange drain on an already tight budget. But, on further reflection, it strikes me that *Middy*'s 90-second workout effectively unites the country into the body-politic.

While *Middy* is obviously not a "hard news" show, it does have the opportunity to serve as the first edition of CBC's news arm, breaking stories that will get further coverage in prime-time. In this

sense, it is fitting that *Middy* operates out of the facilities of *The Journal* – sharing an executive producer (Mark Starowicz), editing staff, studio space, technological capabilities, and news-gathering personnel. Dubbed the "Baby Journal" by some members of the press, *Middy* can actually build interest for the prime-time news coverage, allowing daytime viewers an opportunity to sense the ways in which a given news-item is shaped. For example, during the week of Feb. 11, *Middy* carried a portion of New Brunswick premier Richard Hatfield's statement to the press shortly after his morning delivery. On the show, this was followed by Bill Cameron interviewing Hatfield friend Dalton Camp, on the repercussions and implications of the statement. That evening, *The Journal* featured a much longer text of Hatfield's statement, followed by an interview by Barbara Frum with Dalton Camp and Southam News general manager Nick Hills. *Middy* viewers of *The Journal* could detect that, during the course of the day, the focus of the story had subtly shifted from the propriety of

Hatfield's actions (his meeting with Solicitor-General Elmer Mackay, his delay in responding to allegations), to the propriety of the press's reporting of the whole affair, with Dalton Camp decidedly more defensive and hostile about the coverage.

Middy will probably build viewership for *The National Journal* by engaging daytime audiences in the news process. If the show can capitalize on its scheduling position as a first edition of CBC national news, it could actually be quite effective in revealing for regular viewers of both shows the subtleties of news-coverage itself.

But certainly *Middy* does stand on its own as a useful addition to the otherwise rather mindless daytime ghetto. If at times it verges on the current TV tendency for "happy-talk" and light-heartedness, it stays just this side of patronizing and throw-away items through the quiet ease of its studio hosts. Moreover, there is obviously a quite conscious attempt to celebrate the country in this hour. Daily segments like "Almanac" with its quick survey of Canadian weather, "Today in History," and "The Papers" with current quotations from *Le Soleil*, *La Presse*, *The Windsor Star*, *The Edmonton Journal*, *The London Free Press*, *The Medicine Hat News*, and *The Calgary Sun*, as well as the mix of regional columnists and feature stories, all serve to make *Middy* a bright and interesting daily portrait of life above the 49th parallel. Senior producer Michael Harris and director Sidney Cohen have taken an over-looked timeslot in the scheduling day and, with almost no money at all, turned it into an appealing, satisfying noon-hour.

NEON: An Electric Memoir

Six years in the making! More than a striking record of the glories of neon signs across North America, this neat little opus provides a potted history of neon from the first sign – for Packard in 1923 – right up to the wonderful vulgarities of Las Vegas.

The man who lit up Broadway (Douglas Leigh) talks about the world-famous Camel cigarette sign, and smoke rings being blown are captured up there on the screen. Old "cold" signs (no longer lit up) pass by, followed by dragons on Chinese restaurants, Art Deco movie-house marquees, and cowboys on bucking broncos. And on to the work of neon artists who maintain the enthusiasm and encourage the general public to take this art-form seriously. "Let There Be Neon" in New York is dedicated to making neon accessible, and it can make anything from a sunset to a coathanger. And, as one artist reminds us, big art galleries do very well with neon exhibits, which are always popular and draw crowds.

There's a glimpse of a "bender" (he who bends the neon tubing) shaping a sign and fitting the parts to a life-size paper pattern, and a dissertation on how to get the clear bright colours – "If you know your gasses, you can make 150 different colours."

All this wonderful stuff before your eyes should be enough, but the filmmakers have seen fit to add a commentary by a fictional character – "Gloria Raposo's story, as told to John Frizzell." With triple-thick eyelashes, and drink cupped in thin, grasping hands, Gloria (Jackie Burroughs) parks above the deli, hair illuminated redly by the flashing

Mini-Reviews

by Pat Thompson

neon sign outside her window. She rambles and reminisces about her travels across the States, meetings with neon artists, the signs she knew and loved – reeling off endless lists of place names and artists. Unfortunately, at the same time, rivetting images are on the screen, plus background music, leaving an audience knowing not which way to turn!

It's a great pity that a splendid piece of narrative writing doesn't work. The images and colour on screen are so vital and pulsing that only a word or two of information is needed along the blinding rainbow way.

The ending is a fabulous cascade of effervescent visuals displayed by the various hotels and casinos of Las Vegas. As the come-on signs fizz and shimmer, a truly 20th century art grabs a-hold of yer!

d. Rudy Buttignol/Ken Ketter sc. John Frizzell cam. Rene Ohashi. Mark Irwin csc. Rudy Buttignol. Chris Terry, John Walker mus. Paul Hood ed. David New lp. Jackie Burroughs (Gloria), Larry Cosmon (The Bender). **running time**: 25 mins **col.**: 16mm/videotape. **Availability**: Isme Bennie International, 307 Davenport Rd., Toronto M5R 1K5 (416) 968-6116

A VIEW FROM A PORTRAIT

The camera roams the room, the voice-over is Spanish, and a guitar is strummed gently. Then comes a female voice-over in English remarking that something happened tonight.

This voice narrates a series of events in youth, and dwells on a photo-session with Lewis. He commands her to close her eyes and think of something really pleasant... the whole world clouds over, everything disappears silently, and very

slowly the portrait comes into the world.

A tangled tale then unfolds – the framed portrait of the girl (Mary) looks at her own life. There's her marriage to Billy, a doctor; her sister, Miss Rosie (the ubiquitous Jackie Burroughs), wandering in and out complete with polio and a cane; and the strained, unsatisfying, ultimately boring daily round. Mary starts to stay in bed most days. With a bright fire burning and the telephone to hand, she discovers all her little weaknesses – with laziness at the top of the list. She tests her singing voice and also begins to pray convulsively. Astrologers and psychics are invited to the house, and Miss Rosie lurks. Mary's crisis comes after singing "One For the Road" and "Ave Maria", and she flings off her clothes and dances through the house. Picking up the photograph of herself she remarks, "Reflected madness."

My stars! This convoluted little piece tries to cram everything in and just never stops. The script should have been rewritten severely before shooting. Its serpentine meanderings need to be restrained. The film looks good, the acting's not bad, but the filmmaker is of the "more-is-better" school. There are some tiny seeds of hope on the screen, but a little less, plus some clear logic, would have been infinitely preferable.

p. d. sc. Paul Galvez cam. Barry Stone ed. Dan Garson sd. Tom Mather lp. Mary Ann McDonald (Mary), Jackie Burroughs (Rosie), Geza Kovacs (Louis), Wally Bondarenko (Billy), Gregory Ellwand (Paul) **running time**: 50 mins. **col.**: 16mm videotape **Availability**: Better Production Films, 10 Huntley St. Ste 2104, Toronto M4V 2K7 (416) 922-3773.

