

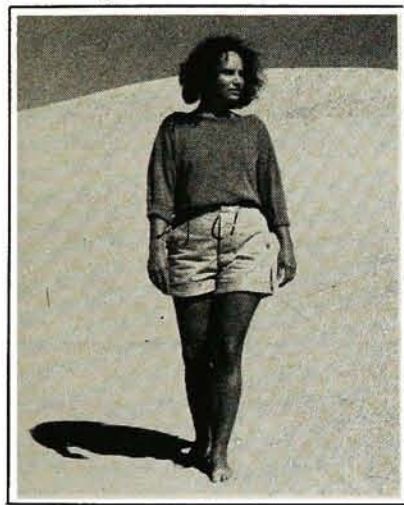
MINI - REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

ONE WOMAN WAITING

The wind whines over the dunes; the sand shimmers and shifts; the sounds of little bells spin in the air. A woman walks into frame, her bare feet leaving a looped pattern of tracks. She sits down. A tiny figure crosses the far horizon and advances. It is a second woman who, facing the first, puts out her hand and appears to transfer something. They gaze at each other, and then embrace. The second woman leaves in an opposite direction. A series of dissolves gradually darken the frame, and both sets of footprints are obliterated. The wind, sand and music fade with the image.

West coast filmmaker Josephine Massarella's interestingly absorbing experimental film consists of a single shot and a static camera until the dissolves. Upon its crystalline imagery can be projected whatever male and female wish - or experience. There's no dialogue, and the natural sounds



and mystical music contribute towards a mildly hypnotic state that impels the viewer towards an interior interpretation.

d./cam./sc. Josephine Massarella. **orig. mus.:** Hildegard Westerkamp. **re-record:** Paul Sharpe. **l.p.** Marianne Kaplan, Karin Stanley. **running time** 8 mins. **col.** 16mm. **Availability:** Josephine Massarella (604) 731-9807.

A TOUCH OF ALICE

An unpretentious little romp through the week-long summer puppet workshop organized by the Mermaid Theatre for the children of its home town, Wolfville, N.S.

The kids get down to their version of "Alice in Wonderland" - writing the script, and making the masks and puppets with the help of Jim Morrow of the theatre company. The lone pair of lads in the group happily play violin and flute, and the violinist composes an overture for the piece.

A short "acted" episode with the 11-year-old participant Jennie Richmond, who plays Alice, is enlivened by the puppets and masks looming over her bed in a panicky-pleasurable dream.

In all, a good little film to get the kids interested in the idea of puppet-theatre. Starting from a story, through the various aspects - masks (inhibitions seem to dissolve when one is put on!), puppet-making, movement, music, acting, and the delicious messing around with foam-slab, glue and paint for the puppets and masks - and ending up with an actual performance for family and friends.

p. Hollow Reed Motion Picture Studios (Wolfville, NS) Film Arts (Toronto). **exec. p.** Don Haig. **d./cam.** Hubert Schuurman. **ed.** Michael Todd. **sd. rec.** Andrew Foster. **narr.** Jennie Richmond/Jim Morrow. **running time** 13 mins. **Col.** 16mm. **Availability:** Kinetic Film Enterprises Ltd., 781 Gerrard St. E., Toronto M4M 1V5 (416) 469-4155.

MEMORIES OF PARADISE

Margaret Dragu celebrates the Summer Solstice, longest day of the year, with an 18-hour performance in the Royal Botanical Gardens in 'Steeltown' - Hamilton, Ontario. "It's sort of like clapping for Tinker Bell," says Dragu, adding later that "... I thought we might fall over after six hours..." But they didn't, and the Solstice Girlz (sic) romp along in their short white Grecian-style tunics, flourishing large wreaths of twigs entwined with fluttering drapery.

Facing the camera, Dragu talks about how she started dancing at Romanian weddings that went on for three days with continuous food, dance and music, and somehow ended up being a stripper for eight years, and that's where she got her training - "I loved stripping." She reminisces about her club work and how the scene had to be experienced - lots of drugs and sex and rock-and-roll - "I felt like an alien creature." And there's a snippet of Dragu in white tie and tails, with a red rubber clown nose, parodying Marlene Dietrich singing "La Vie en Rose"

"The Solstice was a radical change for me... I wanted to reach another audience other than the late-night crowd," so Dragu inclined toward a

Druid style, in the natural light and without any "tricks" from the stage. "I wanted the whole City of Hamilton to rush down into the park and join the Solstice Girlz and celebrate the sun coming up."

A fair-size group participated in the dance for Mums and Kids to a calypso beat; watched a jazzed-up "Here Comes the Bride" ensemble, and "Swan Lake in the Park", with Dragu as the male partner; and finally joined the Solstice Girlz (festooned with inner tubes-in a march to the beat of the Burlington Tech Tour Band with its baton twirlers and cheerleaders strutting their stuff.

What a wonderfully wacky and off-centre idea but, unfortunately, it's difficult to gauge how well it was realized. The problem with the film is, its mind isn't made up. The filmmakers flit between the Solstice celebration and Dragu as talking-head without, it would appear, having decided the shape and style of the end result. Personally, this reviewer is left waiting for a film by and about Margaret Dragu and her background - Romanian weddings, stripping, the cabaret scene, tricks of the trade - the whole fascinating works. In the meantime, *Memories of Paradise*, aired in June by TVOntario, will have to serve as a little foretaste of that treat.

p.c. Breakthrough Films and Television Inc., in assn. with TVOntario and Poundmaker Productions. **p./d.** Ira Levy, Peter Williamson. **sc.** Levy, Williamson, Simon Johnston. **cam.** Peter Williamson. **ed.** Robert Megna. **sd.** Peter Sawade. **l.p.** Margaret Dragu, Jan Kudelka, Susan Swan, Claudia Moore, Marsha Coffey, Donna Bothen, Adah Glassbourg, Robert Nasmith. **Col.** 16mm. **running time** 29 mins. **Availability:** Breakthrough Films, 980 Yonge St., 2nd. Fl., Toronto M4W 2J4 (416) 924-3371. With assistance from The Ministry of Citizenship and Culture (Ontario).

On June 30, CBC-TV finally broadcast *Balconville*, the 90-minute 1983 TV version of David Fennario's 1978 play. Having let this production, directed by *Empire Inc.*'s Mark Blandford, sit on the shelf for quite some time, the powers-that-be ultimately decided to air it in an 11:30 p.m. time-slot, no doubt so that any viewers who might object to frequent obscenities would have long since gone to sleep.

Nevertheless, the timing was eerily appropriate. *Balconville* depicts three Montreal working-class and unemployed families living out their frustrating situations on the adjacent balconies of their apartments. Claude Paquette (Marc Gelinas), wife Cecile (Yolande Circe) and daughter Diane (Anne-Marie Gelinas) are francophone, while next-door neighbours Johnny Regan (Peter MacNeill) and wife Irene (Jayne Eastwood), and downstairs neighbours Muriel (Terry Tweed) and her son Tom (John Wildman) are anglophone. Although it becomes obvious that all seven are equally trapped in economic and socio-political factors much larger than their language-differences, it is language that bears the brunt of their hostilities, at least for feuding Claude and Johnny. The two fiercely tack up their respective flags, thereby declaring boundaries and seemingly mutually exclusive allegiances.

Twenty minutes into the broadcast, CBC News interrupted to announce the resignation of René Lévesque. It was one of those odd moments of synchronicity that TV seems

photo: Peggy Kelly



SCANLINES

by Joyce Nelson

Summer in the country

to specialize in.

But *Balconville* concerns itself with much more than the "two solitudes," though the apartment complex is surely a microcosm for Canada. It is also a revealing drama about many forms of colonialism and oppression, especially the nebulous, romanticized oppression that mass culture is geared to. Here, the male anglophones seem particularly vulnerable. Both the aging Johnny and young Tom are aspiring musicians forever dreaming about making it big - like Elvis. The production is rich in allusions to pop music: references to Elvis, snatches from 1950s and 1960s songs, posters of Elvis and The Who in Johnny's apartment, a "Sex Pistols" graffiti on a wall, recurring use of Nick Gilder's hit tune, "Hot Child in the City". Tom's media-inspired dream is to run off to New York and, after he has learned to play his guitar, be a musical success. He is clearly a younger version of Johnny, who,

while waiting for his UIC to someday come through, dreams of forming a band again.

If the men, including francophone Claude, are not dreaming of making it big, or winning Super-Loto, they are watching TV and/or getting drunk. Meanwhile, the women seem to have had all their dreams and illusions ripped away. As Eastwood's character puts it: "You know how it is - you marry a prince and he turns into a frog, eh?" They work, fix the food, and put the drunken men to bed.

In a sense, *Balconville* is a curious (unconscious?) distillation of the recurring male-female dynamic in so many English-Canadian movies. The long-suffering wife is the Rock of Gibraltar, propping up her rowdy-man husband who simply cannot get it together to make his dreams come true. What is distinctive about *Balconville*, however, is that it attempts

to actually illuminate this dynamic, rather than simply depict it as though that is just how things are.

Thus, for example, at one point Johnny tells Irene not to go into her "martyr" routine - suggesting that the long-suffering martyr wife is the necessary other side in the dynamic involving the "loser" adolescent husband. And when Irene protests: "Why do I have to be strong for the both of us?!", she is angrily voicing what so many large-screen Canadian wives never say. Johnny's answer is illuminating and wrong. "It's so easy for you," he says. "It's not easy for me." But Irene doesn't fall for it. She draws her own line, and Johnny is forced to shape up if he wants to stay with her. Unlike so many English-Canadian movies where the male-female dynamic remains fixed in the supposedly "lovable" roles of rowdy-man and Rock of Gibraltar, *Balconville* dares to suggest that there is a great deal that is both pathetic and also changeable in this peculiarly Canadian dynamic. Fennario has also subtly tied this dynamic to colonialism itself - which is something else that English-Canadian movies tend not to do.

The extent to which this production speaks to deep-seated Canadian attitudes and realities should have ensured it, despite the "strong language", a prime-time network viewing slot. But, given its honesty and clear-sightedness, perhaps it's amazing enough that *Balconville* was broadcast at all.