

Margaret Westcott's Behind The Veil: Nuns

Half-a-dozen years ago, Diane Létourneau directed an unpretentious documentary on a congregation of Catholic nuns in Sherbrooke, Qué. A Prisma production, *Les Servantes du Bon Dieu* scored a surprise hit at the Cannes Film Festival, and subsequently was hailed far and near for its wisdom, insight, and humanity. Above all, for accomplishing something extremely difficult in documentary filmmaking. By maintaining a clear critical attitude, and reflecting what might be termed an a-religious sensibility typical of Quebec today, Létourneau left no doubt as to the what we now call sexist attitudes and mores underlying the way of life of a group of religious women, whose specific *raison d'être* is to keep house and serve as handy-men (so to speak) for the priests of their diocese. On the other hand, however, she succeeded in never once talking down to her audience nor exploiting the subjects of her film. The women, in their humour, warmth, and generosity, emerged as genuinely sympathetic and admirable human beings: one vaguely understood why they did what they did, their religious motivation, and the richness that this brought to their lives.

The film worked beautifully, scoring clear and significant points from a feminist perspective (whether that was its avowed intention or not) precisely, one could claim, because it was so fair, disciplined, and profoundly respectful of the complexities of the human situation. Its very openness lent it amazing credibility.

One might be tempted to see *Behind the Veil*, the recent Studio D production of the NFB, directed by Margaret Westcott, as a sequel of sorts. That, however, is far from the case, for though its apparent subject matter is, once again, nuns, the film is a vastly different enterprise. For one thing, *Behind the Veil* tackles an immeasurably more ambitious topic — nothing less than the whole history of nuns in the Catholic Church in a two-hour analysis from the feminist vantage point. So nuns — but also the Catholic Church itself and the entire history of Europe, with, inevitably, matters philosophical and theological thrown in. An impossibly ambitious task for one documentary.

But the possibilities are remarkable, both in terms of contemporary relevance and in terms of eliciting debate and controversy. For there is the Catholic Church, accounting for at least half of the 1,200,000,000 Christians throughout the world. And too there, are the various often vastly differing congregations of nuns — professionals who have given their lives to that Church — who are essential to its survival, and who actually outnumber their male counterparts, the priests (and brothers) two to one. Put that in the context of the radical changes that swept through vast areas of the Catholic Church in the '60s and '70s (did any other world-institution evolve as much?), and in that other evolving social context, a few years later, the breakthrough in acceptance (at least partially) of feminist insights and the

consequent shifts in women's roles — and you have a very complex situation indeed, especially given the fact that the two evolutions never quite meshed. A divided Church is hesitant; and its official hierarchy is at times even hostile to the new role of women, even to the discussion of the possibility of ordaining women, etc.

From these perspectives at least, a documentary on nuns promises much. Heady stuff, to be sure, and guaranteed to elicit a response anything but uniform and serene, given the divergent convictions of many in the audience.

Like the majority of those I know who saw the film (most of them women who are not nuns), I came to *Behind the Veil* with a sense of enthusiasm. But, like most of them, sadly, I went gradually from sympathy to disenchantment and, finally, to frustration. *Behind the Veil* had succeeded in partially alienating even one prejudiced in favour of its general aims. Slowly, as I sat there, my mind began to boggle: was I being asked, in the name of a cause I consider worthy, to abandon all critical ability? There I was, torn between admiration for the women shown on the screen (and for their cause), and the dictates of my own mind, trained to demand a certain adherence to historical (and other) fairness and to logical analysis.

Behind the Veil possesses a certain unquestionable fascination; and some of its constitutive elements resonate with human beauty and power. Its major contribution comes from four or five nuns who are interviewed at length. Humble cinema, this — straightforward, with few cinematic embellishments, as none are needed. The camera merely serves as functional witness as, for a few moments, we observe two of the nuns at work in American urban sprawl. Far more time is spent with these two, and two other American nuns, in straight talking-head situations. An Irish nun — a delightful schol-

ar on women in Irish Church history completes the talking heads; and she just about steals the show. In spite of the extreme simplicity of the direct approach all of this is remarkable stuff. The women spell out personal convictions that are nothing short of radical; their honesty, intelligence, dedication, courage, and beauty fairly leap from the screen and from a sound-track rich in their splendidly articulated statements about their faith, problems, and attempts at coping with love/chastity and a lumberingly male-dominated Church.

But there are other nuns, too, as we are shown. These are in the province of Quebec; they are cloistered contemplatives in the old style; and we see them go through some of their liturgical functions, generally in inferior positions to prelates of one kind or another. At times, the documentary segments on real nuns is supplemented by similar, but more gothic shots of movie nuns taken (presumably) from old Quebec film. *Behind the Veil* feels no need to inform its viewers that these shots are staged.

Since this documentary delves into history, naturally many old photographs and paintings form a major visual component. By far the most striking of these is a long, lyrical re-creation of the times of St. Bridget of Kildare, around 500 AD. The camera moves slowly over enchanting pastel paintings — created especially for the film by Montreal artist Char Davies — of scenes of Bridget's world, her renowned monastery, the landscape of Kildare, Ireland, and other wondrous things.

Other people who appear in sketches and paintings do not fare so well, especially the bishops from the Latin South. Indeed, *Behind the Veil* could partially be described as a roguer's gallery of male clerical pigs, systematically represented as such.

Which leads to the commentary narra-

tion, which, one assumes, brings the filmmaker's understanding explicitly to the fore. The critic listens, stunned, wondering, "Is this for real?" I immediately thought of Donald Brittain, celebrated master of the Canadian documentary and the dry, perceptive, witty, often devastating commentary he is noted for, both in the writing and in the delivery. Well, writer/narrator Gloria Demers does a Brittain for us, consciously or unconsciously, except for the fact that Brittain she is not: deft wit is replaced by sledgehammer overstatement, symptomatic accuracy by sweeping half-truths — and all of it to a vaguely Brittainesque cadence. A point is being made, and there is surely something important underlying the words; but the tone verges on the reckless and the irresponsible.

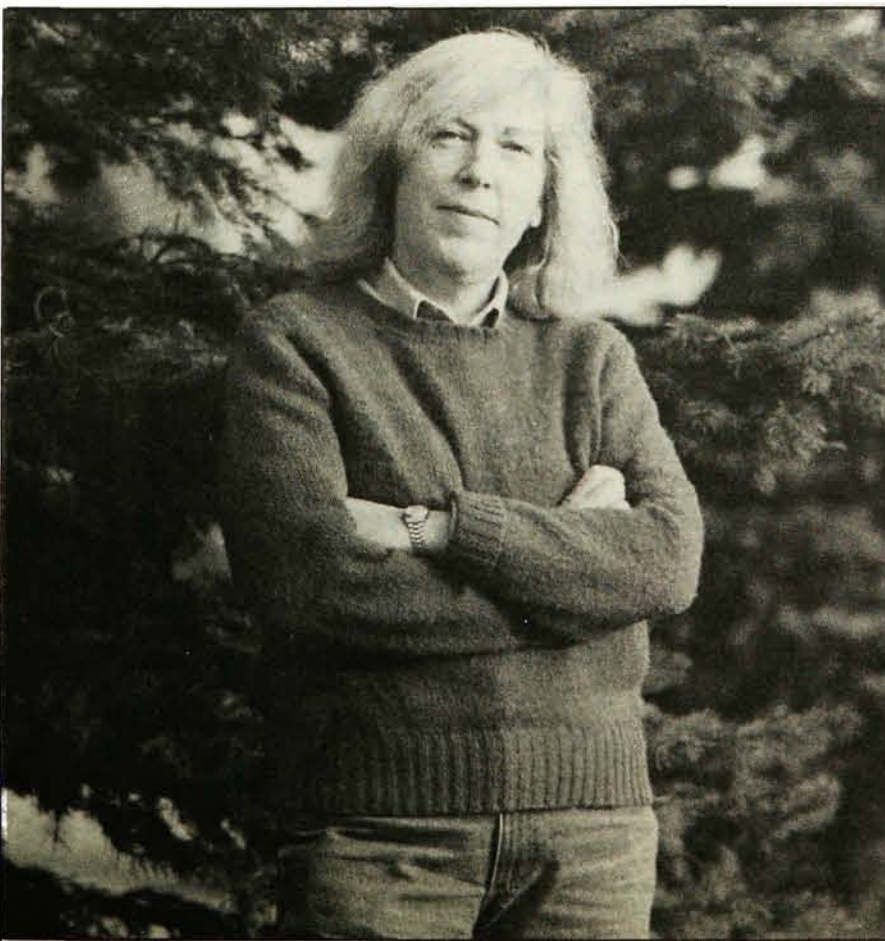
The mind goes on boggling at the facile one-liners that do away with historical complexity, nuance and centuries of research. The *partial* truth takes over, imposed by a pre-ordained one (the filmmakers', that is): forget any attempts at capturing anything like a complex reality. Nothing, no one is spared: Aristotle, Augustine, St. Thomas? The poor, dull chaps are delivered of their most assinine statements, out of context; and this proves their male chauvinist loudness. So much for the culture of Western civilization.

But back to Bridget, that marvelous human being, one of Ireland's fabled heroes. *Behind the Veil* builds on scraps of history and almost fifteen hundred years of legend without the slightest hesitation or acknowledgement that a lot of what is being put forward is rather uncertain. But never mind: Bridget is Ireland when Ireland was nothing if not a Celtic Utopia, truly "a little bit of heaven fallen from out the sky one day." Ireland of the Dark Ages was ruled by monasteries, and Bridget was the abbess of her monastery, ruling over both women and men. And Ireland was *happy*, because a woman ruled the Church... until, of course, those porcine Latin Bishops ran over the Celtic paradise, imposing male dominance there as elsewhere. So the thesis goes, and it is that simple.

The naïveté is overwhelming, scarcely exaggerated by my disreputable attempt at tongue-in-cheek: the film's demands on credulity are stretched beyond the limit. And yet, the point is a marvelous one, of extreme importance: the story of Bridget needs to be told, and the feminist perspective on history should be articulated. St. Bridget deserves treatment worthy of her achievements, subject to the same criteria and standards of research that are applied to any other major historical figure.

Behind the Veil uses the Bridget story to touch on another crucial question, this one more directly theological/anthropological: the Christian anthropomorphic attribution, through language use, of maleness to God. Bridget, we are told in the film, is the reincarnation, sort of, of Brigid, the Celtic pagan goddess of fertility. Through her (them), the Irish validated the female principle, counteracting the Latin/Roman Church's phallogocentric bias. Very interesting considerations these, and demanding exploration and nuanced articulation, instead of the one-liners and comic-book, fairytale treatment afforded by the film.

No wonder, then, that *Behind the Veil* risks losing all but the most militant of its sympathizers. As one experiences the film, one becomes ever more critical, tempted



• Don Brittain plus dogma: *Behind The Veil* director Margaret Westcott

to doubt every statement made by the narrator. Inevitably, certain other worrisome considerations begin the surface.

For example, what about the nuns? The film is Canadian, put out by that very bastion of Canadian cultural affirmation, the NFB. Now, nuns do exist in Canada (half of whose population is Roman Catholic). Why are there no Canadians among the women interviewed, but only Americans, and the one Irish scholar? There are some marvelously knowledgeable, "liberated", even media-well-known nuns in Canada, yet none was found for this film. Could it be, the by-now-antagonistic critic suspects, that no Canadian could be found who suited the demands of the pre-ordained thesis/idea of the filmmakers; or even that certain exemplary spokespersons from within this country were deliberately ignored?

Correction. There are Canadian nuns visible, the French-Canadian contemplatives from near Montreal. The images chosen of them are devastating, given the context created by the commentary. One feels these women have been abused, as we see "them" — is it "real" or is it one of the unidentified movie-clips? — prostrate themselves before bishops, etc., to illustrate the film's thesis of Church male domination. Here indeed (if I may digress) is a perfect example of one of the film's tactics: it scores a point, but the reality factor is not quite what it is made out to be. In this instance, what should be pointed out is that we are watching a centuries-old Catholic ritual, mostly discarded now, but which still exists in scattered enclaves, in which both females and males prostrate themselves as a sign of life consecration to Christ, represented here

by the Bishop; or in which nuns prostrate themselves before another woman, their Superior, representing Christ. None of this kind of nuanced explanation surfaces in *Behind the Veil*. The thesis must be served, and who cares about the reality, or the people whose trust has been abused?!

And even those contemporary nuns with the "radical views" who come across so winningly; are their views not being ever so subtly denatured? For, progressively, almost unnoticeably, what they say so intelligently begins to be confused with what the commentary says so blatantly and recklessly. One wonders, finally, if they, too, have not been used/abused; that the deepest meaning behind the "talking of the veil" for them — their religious motivation — has been lost, sacrificed to the needs of the idea of the film.

In other words, *Behind the Veil* is not really a film about nuns then and now, here and there; but a film that uses partial aspects of nuns' lives to make its own statement concerning male domination.

What ultimately comes across instead of reasoned exploration is an angry, at times petulant, almost personal, settling of accounts. It is as if the filmmakers were more interested in the intensity of their own feelings, and in the power to hit back that they now possess through the film. The danger of miscalculation, of course, is great: how will audiences react? Will they accept the inaccuracies and over-simplifications, will they indeed turn off their critical faculties, or will they experience frustration and alienation, even to the point of feeling insulted by the process?

Which leads to the saddest of ironies: the filmmakers have made it easy for those who are against its views to dismiss the

film with impunity.

Behind the Veil brings into clear focus the problem that is central to the practice of the media and the ethical imperatives that should govern that practice. On one side, there are those who will use the media at the expense of "reality": Eisenstein tried to do just that quite systematically, but he got away with it in the eyes of aesthetic film history because he was also a poet. The Nazis excelled at it. Every country has used film in that fashion, witness our own wartime NFB, or Frank Capra in the U.S. Add all those war movies to glorify "our" side (whichever, no matter), but at least they openly proclaimed themselves as fiction. Above all, include the whole advertising enterprise: partial truths often covering the big lie.

Others use the media very differently. Rossellini and Renoir had their own definite ideas, but these ideas tended to become more and more nuanced, emerging as they did from the complex reality their cameras captured. The human condition, its contradictions and messy lack of precision, comes first in their work: people have more value than the Idea. Canada's direct cinema is rich in this tradition. And Diane Létourneau's *Les Servantes du Bon Dieu* serves as a marvelous example of a film whose director respected, and, yes, loved the people (nuns) she studied. It is worth repeating that only made the critical attitude to the film that much more reliable and convincing.

Studio D is to be congratulated for tackling an important issue with the making of *Behind the Veil*. Certain considerations raised (and blessed St. Bridget among them!) make many of us read history with

a different eye. And the question (be it of women's status in general or of women in the Church in particular) has been brought to the fore in a different context. In all of this, the movie has served its purpose, and that is no small achievement.

But the final critical assessment is far less enthusiastic. Is the use of the media in the fashion outlined above tolerable in our society? Had *Behind the Veil* yielded less to the manipulative media temptation and better respected the complexity of the human situation, it would have served its purpose far more effectively. Both the subject matter of this movie, and really, the documentary film medium as a whole, deserve different treatment.

Marc Gervais •

BEHIND THE VEIL d. Margaret Wescott cam. Susan Trow ed. Rosemarie Shapley sc./nar. Gloria Demers asst. cam. Bonnie Andrukaitis loc. sd. Ingrid M. Cusieli elect. Roger Martin, Walter Klymkiw loc. man. (St. Eustache, Quebec) Saverio Grana (Italy), Ewa Zebrowski (Chicago) Holly Dressel (Republic of Ireland) Claire Stevens res. Holly Dressel add. res. Rosemarie Shapley, Margaret Wescott, Signe Johansson vis. res. Elizabeth Schwartzbaum, Ewa Zebrowski, Ginny Stikeman, Micheline LeGuillou Irish cons. Part II Ann Dooley paintings of St. Bridget. Part II Char David anim. cam. Pierre Landry graphic cons. Wolf Koenig add. ed. Margaret Wescott, Donna Read p. & ed. assit. Donna Dudinsky orig. mus. Maribeth Solomon, Micky Erbe mus. ed. Diane Le Floch sd. ed. Jacqueline Newell re-rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel mus. mix Hayward Parrott unit admin. Gisèle Guibault sect'y Linda Paris Quillinan p. Signe Johansson exec. p. Kathleen Shannon p. National Film Board of Canada, Studio D dist. by National Film Board of Canada 16 mm, colour running time: 64 mins. (Part I), 66 mins. (Part II).

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John Gray
& Andrew Gosling's
**The King
Of Friday Night**



• A taste of another generation: Andrew Rhodes and Sheree Jeacocke in a quantum leap for TV, the King of Friday Night



Consider this another rave review for Canamedia's *The King Of Friday Night*, which recently won the "Best Performance Special" Award at the Banff Television Festival. The production is so universally fine that it's hard to know where to begin.

"Culture!" deapans one of the characters, "that's something found in your fridge every couple of months." In this spirit, *The King Of Friday Night* blasts its way past colonial cultural hang-ups and elitist taboos to revel in and fuse the two most popular art forms of a generation: TV and rock 'n roll. Like the best rock music, its energy seems barely containable in its framework. Like the best television, it takes us right to the edge of what the medium can do. And like the best rock videos, it intelligently plays with surreality in order to illuminate rather than obscure. The result is a fine TV-rush that sets a new standard for creative work in North-American television.

It's rare enough to find an original stage-play ably translated into another medium, especially in ways that fully honour the capabilities of the new medium. But here, John Gray's stage musical, "Rock and Roll" has become innovative television of the most exciting kind. *The King Of Friday Night* is the first TV-feature shot in Betacam 1/2" video format, the first TV-feature to use colorization (a computerization process that turns black-and-white video into colour), and the most extensive use of multiple-layer chromakey ever seen in North-American television. Co-director Andrew Gosling and chromakey-designer Graham McCallum developed these video techniques at the BBC and have won numerous international awards for their efforts.

But what's fascinating about *The King Of Friday Night* is the astonishing degree to which the techniques are so completely

right for the tone and spirit of John Gray's music and script. The basis plot-line is so familiar as to be archetypal - which is precisely why the chromakey sequences work so well. Set in the small, fictitious Canadian town of Mushaboom, the story begins in the present, but quickly does an extended flashback to 1961 to follow the rise the glory of The Monarch - a local rock band inspired by Screamin' John (Eric Peterson), a burnt-out rocker who instills them with the Spirit of Rock 'n Roll. After four years of wild success, the band breaks up when Parker (Frank Mackay), the lead singer, decides to go solo. After this crisis, the story resumes in the present with a reunion concert bringing together the ageing musicians who have each gone their separate, "normal" ways.

Gray has infused this plot-line with an intricate blend of witty irony, self-parodying nostalgia, sincere emotion and a mythologizing ethos that is matched visually, moment by moment, with such painstaking care that the whole work seems charged with a transcendent honesty. Through the magic of multiple-layered chromakey, the band can appear to be singing from within the confines of a bubblegum card, or atop a car. Shirley (Sheree Jeacocke) can bemoan her fate - "Girls don't sing rock 'n roll!" - while wandering like a tiny doll among the clutter of combs, shaving materials, etc. on a guy's bureau. In such sequences, the chromakey techniques are not gratuitous but instead convey a strange edge of mixed emotion - as though the image captures some potent psychological layers of experience.

At the same time, *The King Of Friday Night* is exuberantly playful in the fullest sense. It feels loose and spontaneous, rolling across the screen like a seemingly effortless guitar riff. Almost casually, it takes up the archetypal moments of a gen-

eration's life: teenaged dreams, first romance, rebellion, leaving home, the taste of success, and then the end of youth and the apparent death of youthful dreams. The witty, ironic tone covers an underlying empathy in which there is no sense of detachment. Rather, the spirit of the work is that of a shared vitality, a pop heritage held in common.

In this sense, *The King Of Friday Night* is clearly the opposite of nostalgia. Through its deceptively simple structure, it re-vitalizes the present with the energy of the music. The re-united Monarchs haven't lost their touch. Neither has their ageing audience which, on-screen and off, still contains the spirit of Screamin' John deep in their souls. The staid portrait of the Queen overlooking the dancehall turns into the rebel trickster rocker laughing with devilish glee. As the music says: "When the situation's outta control, you better rock, you better roll."

Gosling, Gray and McCallum have truly fused every aspect of performance in this work: the tremendous acting and singing of Eric Peterson, Frank Mackay, Sheree Jeacocke, Geoffrey Bowes, Andrew Rhodes and Alec Willows; the 24-track recording of Gray's fine rock lyrics; the location-shooting and the extraordinary visual "performance" of the in-studio chromakey all come together to create a production that's as tight you could want. Don't miss the repeat on CBC-TV.

Joyce Nelson •

THE KING OF FRIDAY NIGHT

d. John Gray, Andrew Gosling exec. p. Jane Harris p. Les Harris chromakey-des. Graham McCallum sc./mus. comp. John Gray l.p. Eric Peterson, Geogrey Bowes, Andrew Rhodes, Sheree Jeacocke, Frank Mackay, Alec Willows, running time: 88 mins., colour, 1" video p.c. & disc. Canamedia Productions Ltd., Toronto

Giles Walker's
90 Days

Twice the National Film Board has had its feature-filmmaking vocation quashed: the first time with the government's 1968 decision to create a private film industry; the second time, also by government order, in the shot-gun marriage of forced feature-film collaboration with that same private sector. So it's truly something of a miracle to see that the Board has, for the third time in its history, managed to generate its own distinctive kind of genuinely Canadian feature. Yet *90 Days* is not just miraculous; more importantly, perhaps, it's a film that works.

Hilariously funny, brilliantly done, impeccably acted, Walker's sequel to the problematic *Masculine Mystique* cuts through the stylistic and thematic ambiguities of that first skewed attempt at contemporary social comedy and fearlessly leaps into the fictional terrain to produce an authentic, unembarrassed Canadian soap-opera that deserves the widest possible distribution. It's as if, out of the limbo of perdition into which the Board has been cast, Giles Walker has stumbled upon the elixir of an antidote to the Canadian feature film problem. And happily, the solution consists of a massive dose of laughter.

It's a truism that Canadian humor naturally gravitates to the self-deprecating. Canadian humor that doesn't harbor at least a germ of self-satire is rare, or, as TV

comedies like *Hangin' In* or *Snow Job* or movies like *Porky's* indicate, at best puerile. What Canada has never had is mature humor — humor for adults — and that's the most distinctive aspect of *90 Days*: it speaks directly to, and affectionately from, the bewilderment of contemporary adult experience.

Walker clearly loves his characters but the original fumbling foursome of today's male muddle who first surfaced in *Masculine Mystique* have here been cut to the two strongest: the endearingly blue-eyed Blue (played by Stefan Wodoslawsky with all the disarming confidence of knowing he's a heartthrob) and the wonderfully, painfully dead-pan Alex (Sam Grana). The inability to make cuts is probably the single, most over-riding problem of Canadian cinema. Yet *90 Days*' ability to do just that and its visible improvement as a result confidently testifies to this film's belief in itself. And the comedic power displayed by both leading men that results from exactly the right combination of acting talent, strong direction, and a well-written story is simply something to behold.

The counterpoints to Blue and Alex are two antinomial women — the brilliantly all-business Laura (Fernanda Tavares) and the delicately dependent Hyang-Sook (Christine Pak). Between these four poles of the human condition — Alex thrown out of his home by a wife who'll no longer stand his infidelities; Blue having decided he wants to marry a mail-order bride from Korea; Hyang-Sook who, despite the pre-

cariousness of her position, manages to maintain an impressive dignity; and Laura, as the attractive businesswoman with the proposition that just can't be refused — the plot unravels with flawless naturalism. There's little point giving away the story here: suffice it to say it all revolves around everybody's favorite topic — sex and its discontents.

As in *Masculine Mystique*, various NFBers get in for the cameo-roles: Daisy de Bellefeuille as Blue's mother is so good you can just smell the clouds of perfume she gives off, and executive producer Andy Thomson has a nice, brief part as a male nurse. Diane Le Floch's music editing highlights a concern with sound which is another of the unsung glories of Canadian film tradition. But unlike *The Masculine Mystique*, *90 Days* has entirely stepped aside the problem of the docudrama. This film is clearly fiction and in a landscape as parched as ours for Canadian fiction that isn't didactic (or stupid or flawed), it's a wondrous sight indeed.

For *90 Days*' Canadianisms are there (as they should be), but they're unassuming, just part of a particular landscape. For one, it's Anglo-Montreal, a small corner of the Canadian film universe that doesn't appear enough onscreen; it's winter (of course!); and it's the omnipresent state, with its police and its bureaucrats, as always prying its unwelcome nose into the citizenry's private business.

But, above all, *90 Days* is simply a very fine piece of work. Festival-goers can

catch the film at the Montreal and Toronto fests, and since there's more turnout for those two events than Canadian film in this country gets in a decade, this is a film you don't want to miss. So move over all the Petes, Joeys, Duddys, and other losers of Canadian cinema, 'cause here comes a winner. *90 Days* is a film you emerge from with just one question: when's the sequel?

Michael Dorland •



• *90 Days*' brilliant foursome: Stefan Wodoslawsky, Christine Pak, Sam Grana and Fernanda Tavares

MINI - REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

Rhombus Media Inc. is Niv Fichman, Barbara Willis Sweete, Larry Weinstein, and its main output is sponsored films. With a leaning towards music, this group produces what Canada is internationally known for — the polished, civilized documentary. Rhombus films are crisp in execution, good to look at, and have a great feeling for people. The following trio premiered individually on TV during the past year.

A SENSE OF MUSIC

A visual demonstration of the value of a good music program in schools. No blatant preaching, just a number of very involved and sincere people getting the point across in an entertaining but emphatic manner.

The various ways and methods of music teaching and appreciation are well demonstrated. A visiting music teacher works with the classroom teacher to continue a co-operative project, while another painlessly imparts both music and movement to a gaggle of young kids, busily singing soft and loud with lots of flailing action. The joy of creating musical instruments from familiar articles ranges from students organizing a steel drum band, to a bunch of tiny tots banging and clanging anything they can get their little paws on.

The upper end of the scale is the school show band, and a choir for which there are no auditions and anyone can get in and sing away. These two elements combine in an on-camera performance given with great verve, and to which the audience responds with a standing ovation.

This is a film designed for a specific purpose, but the message is easily and persuasively presented. A student compares music to sports — in both, a

commitment is made to practice and to improve. A teacher says simply, "I go out there — having fun and making music."

Awards: National Educational Film Festival, Oakland, CA (1st place, Teacher Education) and 1984 American Film Festival (Red Ribbon, Teacher Education cat.)

d./ed. Niv Fichman, **p.** Barbara Sweete, **Babs Church, cam.** John Walker, **sd.** Brian Avery, **p.man.** Larry Weinstein; **Running time:** 28 mins., **Col.** 16mm, **Availability:** McNabb Films (416) 226-3060. Produced in association with TVOntario and Ontario Music Educators Assn

COWBOYS DON'T CRY

A portrait of the filmmaker's grandfather, Gurney Willis. Barbara Sweete hasn't seen her childhood "western movie hero" for 20 years. She comes from the city to his ranch in Alberta to recapture her memories and to update them.

She interviews him, and follows him with a camera — he's 85 years old, semi-retired, and "a stranger to me." There's a charming collage of Gurney Willis's life — snapshots at youthful rodeos and with his cowboy cronies; memories of the Fraser Valley flood of '94; and he even met Bill Miner, the first Canadian train robber (shades of *The Grey Fox*...). Friends reminisce — "the toughest guy I ever seen," "full of jokes," "a real old true horseman."

At the time of filming, Gurney Willis had been asked to lead the annual cowboy parade through his town of Keremeos. So he bought a new and frisky horse which threw him, right on-camera. Four months later he'd reco-

vered from a punctured lung and broken ribs and was out of hospital and telling stories again. At the end of the film Sweete asks, "Did we miss anything about you?" and her grandfather replies, "An awful lot, but I can't explain it."

This very personal tribute started with a shoot in the late '70s, with another after a two-year interval, and was finally edited and finished in 1984. It's a sturdily sentimental look at a real live pioneer who, by no stretch of the imagination, fits the 'senior citizen' mould. And Gurney is still here — 92 years old now.

d. Barbara Willis Sweete, **Nov Fichman, Larry Weinstein, sd.ed.** Tony Sloan, **orig. mus.** Bill Skolnik; **Running time:** 28 mins., **Col.** 16mm, **Availability:** Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (416) 593-1808 and West (Vancouver) (604) 684-3014. Produced with assistance from the Canada Council/The National Film Board of Canada

MAKING OVERTURES

The story of a community orchestra, the Northumberland Symphony Orchestra (together with the Northumberland Philharmonic Choir), and all the elements that go into its enduring popularity and survival.

From auditions for musicians and singers, to rehearsals, to fund-raising projects, including a "Bach-Yard Sale" and "An Evening in London," a black-tie affair with roast-beef dinner and a Gilbert & Sullivan sing-along — the drive and enthusiasm of everyone involved is evident.

The orchestra members and a legion of supporters are firmly convinced that it is absolutely essential for a communi-

90 DAYS **l.p.** Stefan Wodoslawsky, Christine Pak, Sam Grana, Fernanda Tavares **d.** Giles Walker **p.** David Wilson, Giles Walker **sc.** Walker, Wilson **d.o.p.** Andrew Kitkanuk **ed.** David Wilson **orig. mus.** Richard Gresko **sd. ed.** Bill Graziadei **mus. ed.** Diane Le Floch **mus. record.** Louis Hone **re-rec.** Jean-Pierre Joutel **exec. p.** Andy Thompson **p.c. and dist.** National Film Board of Canada **Color.,** 16mm, 3/4", **VHS.** Beta **running time:** 99 mins.

ty to have an orchestra, just as it should also have a swimming pool or a hockey arena.

The mixture of young and old within the orchestra works well, and they talk with much feeling of the pleasure and relaxation, the exposure to experience, and of "coming home refreshed" after playing. "It's something I can do on my own without my husband or kids," adds a young housewife.

There's a particular charming visual touch while the orchestra plays. The camera roams over its members and dissolves to their everyday occupations — feeding the pigs, woodworking, the housewife tuning her piano with the kids around.

The enormous rapport within the orchestra and choir is nurtured and encouraged by conductor Philip Schaus, an ebullient, lively and expressive man who obviously loves what he is doing. Whether meeting guest soloist (violinist Barry Shiffman) at the train-station and giving him a swift and funny background of the orchestra members on the drive to his home; urging choir and orchestra to greater heights during rehearsal; or scuttering through a Gilbert & Sullivan patter song in white tie and tails, his effervescent enthusiasm bubbles from the screen.

(An interesting aside: Seagrams, one of the patrons of *Making Overtures*, made a contribution to the Ontario Federation of Symphony Orchestras, and paid for fifteen prints of the film which were distributed free to public libraries in Ontario.)

d. Larry Weinstein, **p.** Barbara Willis Sweete, **Babs Church, cam.** John Walker, **esc.** Douglas Kiefer, **esc. sd.** Brian Avery, **ed.** Anthony Sloan, **Running time:** 28 mins., **Col.** 16mm **Availability:** McNabb Films (416) 226-3060. Produced in association with TVOntario, with support from The Samuel and Saydie Bronfman Family Foundation, Floyd S. Chalmers, Woodlawn Arts Foundation, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, Ltd

C'EST UN GRAND HONNEUR
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