

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. Shirlly (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, Geogfrey 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