

Irene Angelico
& Abbey Neidik's

Dark Lullabies

The solidly entrenched reputation of the NFB's Studio D should by now be well established enough to cope with some setbacks, and *Dark Lullabies* is one. Not a major one perhaps, but definitely a case of a film whose original idea is far superior to its execution.

A documentary that attempts to grapple with the historical past and its impact — and especially one as charged with horror and complexity as the Holocaust — carries certain assumptions about the nature of that past even before a foot of film gets shot.

In making a film about the Holocaust, or more particularly about the impact of the Holocaust on the children of survivors, how much does one assume an audience will already know about that past? Depending on how you look at it, the Holocaust is either the most significant, human fact of contemporary historical existence and has been so for 40 years now, or it's a media occasion for grim footage uncovered by historical ignoramuses thanks to recent US-TV series, highly publicized Canadian courtcases like the Keegstra or Zundel trials, or the discovery of some bones in Brazil.

The main problem with *Dark Lullabies* is that it operates from this know-nothing perspective, and this is a difficult starting-point for a film that wants to concern itself with historical remembering.

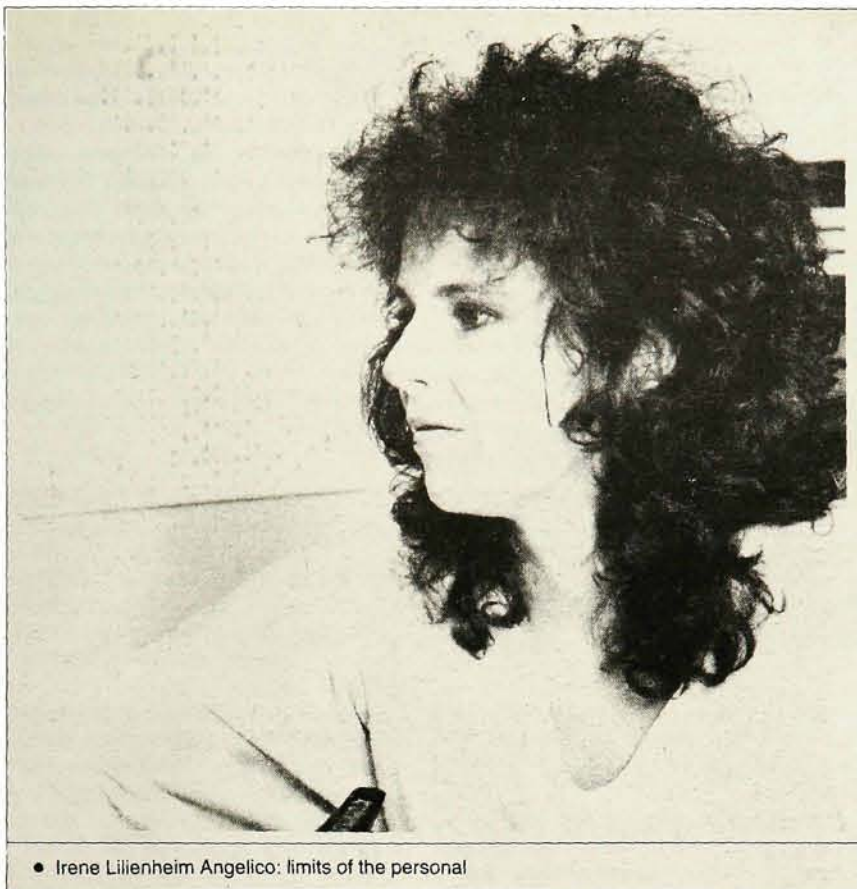
As a result, several problems develop, the most serious being — how do you show what you are attempting to understand when you haven't understood it, and when the showing is meaningless without that understanding? What do those images of skeletal survivors and bodies piled in mass-graves reveal other than the limits of cinema itself?

And yet those images, simultaneously so powerful and powerless, are at the heart of the seriousness of the idea behind *Dark Lullabies*. Like the problem faced by the children of Holocaust survivors, of which co-director Irene Lilienheim Angelico is one, the filmmaker too must attempt to come to grips with the inexpressible that her own and other parents experienced but can't or won't explain.

This particular filmmaker chooses to set off on a personal quest for understanding, hoping that her 16mm camera can explain to her what no human being will.

And along the way, there are interviews with survivors who don't understand, interviews with children of survivors who don't understand, interviews with children and grandchildren of Nazis who don't understand, and interviews with young neo-Nazis for whom it's all too simple: a Jewish conspiracy.

Lilienheim Angelico eventually reaches what remains of the Dachau



• Irene Lilienheim Angelico: limits of the personal

concentration camp where her father was a prisoner, and, against the strains of much moving music, a long slow pan of the camp bunks, and a long shot of Lilienheim Angelico herself, plunged in deep reflections, hopefully understands something there, though of what one hasn't the slightest idea, since she doesn't bother to explain it.

The problem with such a personal approach is that it's got to do something more than show the film director and other people with tears streaming down their cheeks. It's got to say something about the nature of the experience, and if it can't be done with recorded images, then it's got to be with words, and if that can't be done, then perhaps films on the Holocaust are better left to the Donald Brittain, Alain Resnais and Max Ophüls of the world who can. For, unhappily, it's a subject that calls for greater talents than those displayed in *Dark Lullabies*, despite an impressive list of consultants.

On the other hand, from the perspective of someone who knows nothing about the Holocaust, *Dark Lullabies* offers an introduction to the subject. The film would then present itself something like this:

An attractive filmmaker goes traipsing around the world trying to find some trace of her parents' wartime experience. Clearly, terrible things happened way over there on a galaxy far far away between the years 1939-1945: beatings, mass-murder, and general nastiness. Why is none too clear: Germans for some reason had something against Jews. But Germans don't like to be reminded of this, and that's traumatic for Jewish children whose parents were forced to go through the Nazi hell-on-earth, and lived. But, even if nothing's been understood, let's put it all down on film anyway, have a nice cry, and pray for a better world; surely some good must result. So here's a well-meaning movie for you to watch with no boring experts, just real sincere, plain folk,

some heavy footage to give it a serious look, fine music, occasionally brilliant editing, sly over-the-shoulder shooting and obtruding boom-mikes to add to the sincerity — just a friendly, pretentious little film for suburbanites with cosmopolitan aspirations.

Word has it that the Board is planning to get behind the film in a big way. If this kind of lightweight documentary reflects the NFB's current response to its mandate in the TV age, then it's worth pointing out that *Dark Lullabies* unwittingly offers a standard by which to measure the swamp Canadian documentary has sunk into. As the makers of *Dark Lullabies* know, since they used a clip from it, the NFB produced one of the handful of truly great films on the Holocaust, with Donald Brittain's 1965 *Memorandum*.

Ultimately, why *Memorandum* worked where *Dark Lullabies* doesn't is that Brittain had more respect for the dead than fear of the ignorance of a living audience. But, from that perspective, perhaps, even a weak film on the Holocaust is still better than none at all.

Michael Dorland •

Dark Lullabies

d./ed. Irene Lilienheim Angelico, Abbey Jack Neidik; cam. Susan Trow, loc. sd. Jean-Guy Normandin; narr./sc. Irene Lilienheim Angelico, Gloria Demers; ed.cons. Edward LeLorrain, loc. man./res. (Canada and Israel) Anne Dychtenberg, Rachel Rubenstein; a.d. & res. Harald Lüders (Germany); asst. cam. Simon Leblanc, asst.ed. & arch.res. Chantal Bowen, opt.efx. Don McWilliams; orig.mus. Lauri Conger, Michael Beinhorn; mus.rec. Louis Hone; mus.ed. Diane le Floch; sd.ed. Abbey Jack Neidik, Andre Galbrand; re.rec. Jean-Pierre Joutel, Adrian Croll; p. Irene Lilienheim Angelico, Abbey Jack Neidik, Edward LeLorrain, Bonnie Sherr Klein; exec.p. Kathleen Shannon, p.c. DLI and Studio D, National Film Board of Canada; dist. National Film Board of Canada. Color, 16mm & video-cassette, running time: 81 minutes, 17 seconds.

William Fruet's

The Killer Instinct

What we have here is a particularly vicious case of a social custom that's been warping commercial Canadian cinema into some of the most bizarrely crippled postures you can find outside of Chinese foot-binding; that is, the practice of taking a Canadian production and doing everything you can to prevent it looking like a Canadian movie.

Ever since *Deliverance* and all the rest, everybody knows that backwoods America is overrun with genocidal crazies and that, if you take a quartet of college-age boozers and bimboes and pack them off for a nature weekend, they will fall afoul of those crazies and spend the rest of the picture running and dying until they discover depths of brutality in themselves that the crazies just can't match. Everybody knows that, so it's no big surprise when it happens in *The Killer Instinct* and it's no big thrill either. How can it not be when the filmmakers are faking it all the way and, in the process, denying their own deepest instincts?

Now, I don't know about writer John Beard and producer Herb Abramson, but Beard sure writes like a Canadian and, since the film was eligible for Genie nominations it's a fair guess that Abramson is one, too. But I do know about director William Fruet and cameraman Mark Irwin — they are both Canadian and it shows in their work and always has. So, to imagine them trying to make an effective action movie set in rural, southern U.S.A. is to imagine them wrapping their brains in the vinegar-soaked cheesecloth the Chinese used to use and squeezing hard — a doomed and desperate attempt to inhabit an alien consciousness (and if you need to be convinced that Americans are fundamentally different than us, check out the introductory chapter to June Callwood's *Portrait of Canada* where it's laid out with clarity, precision and wit). If they'd given up that attempt and set their movie in northern Quebec or the hoser hinterland of Ontario, they might have had something, not a pseudo-American flick at war with itself on all fronts, but an action movie with roots deeply embedded in our culture and the richer for it.

The Canadian sensibility already informs most of the movie and even comes to the surface here and there, as if Beard, try as he might, just couldn't quite strangle his national character. The opening scene, with the vigorous middle-aged man screwing the Lolita-type in the woods while a pair of idiots watch and giggle so hard they fall off a log, is purest Canadian. In a real American movie, those idiots woulda been just a-droolin' and a-jackin' and a-workin' out ways to get a taste for themselves. Hell, they probably woulda killed the guy and taken their pleasure right there on his steaming guts — it's the American way. But our idiots just run away and keep on laughing, even when the guy comes after them with his shotgun blazing. Only in Canada.

Of course, in other ways, the attempted Americanization succeeds — not so well that you'd ever mistake the product for a



• **The Killer Instinct:** doomed by fake Dixie accents

real one, but well enough to hide the Canadian and create an ambience that no country on earth would recognize as its own. Near the beginning, there's a scene in which the head bozo tells his law professor that he can envision no circumstance which would justify the taking of a human life. There's just no way a real American would ever say that and no way a Canadian would ever have to. A real Canadian movie would probably have skipped the scene altogether to strengthen the alleged theme (bozos can be as brutal as bumpkins) by letting us ferret it out ourselves and to win for the actor (Nicholas Campbell, I think — as usual, I'm doing this without benefit of press kit) our loyalty and gratitude by sparing us all the pain of the speech.

On the whole, though, it may be the plot that suffers most by Americanization, for it is quintessentially Canadian in its foundations and makes little sense in a foreign land. What happens is that, when bozos and bimboes stumble into the isolated village, its religious and secular leader, Henry Chatwell, tips over into a fundamentalist frenzy of I-am-the-law and launches a campaign of torture, murder and driving his pick-up truck through walls. *And the whole village goes along with it.* No way, Jack. Not in the States. In the States, the local Woodward and Bernstein would have been on his ass in minutes. The widow-woman would have staged a sit-in. Half the town would have picked up signs and started marching. Americans are the people with the "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" constitution. Ours says, "peace, order and good government" and, up here, it all would have made perfect sense. We're the people who, when polled, endorsed the War Measures Act by 80%. We love authoritarian leaders, just love 'em.

A home setting would have helped the subplot, too — they could have dropped it entirely. Chatwell's younger brother is the local law and he's completely under Chatwell's thumb, which explains why Chatwell gets away with all that stuff, and that's all it does — no development, no climax, no relation to the rest of the action. But up here, we all know we've got thousand-mile stretches, and lots of them, policed by nothing but the Mountie and his dog. One line about him being at the other end of his circuit and they'd have freed up 15 more minutes for Fruet to demonstrate

the same fine hand with action he's already shown in *Bedroom Eyes* and *Cries In The Night*.

Canadianization would also have spared us the sight of Henry Silva playing Henry Chatwell. Now, there's nothing wrong with Silva as an actor, but he's an American with an American's view of fundamentalist cranks and, so he plays Chatwell at a bellow from word one, with nothing left in reserve for the high points. A Canadian actor, say, for instance, John Vernon, would never have done that. Can you imagine Vernon playing anything at a roar all the way through? Never. No more so can you imagine him suddenly lapsing into the rhythms of soul music halfway through a speech and then visibly struggling to keep a straight face through the rest of it. John Vernon never has trouble keeping a straight face. Never! And he can sound Canadian. Those Chatwell diatribes could have benefited from the odd "ch?" or "tabernac." They'd have benefited even more if they'd been composed of the superstitious Catholicism you can still find in corners of Quebec or the corpse-rigid Calvinist offshoots that thrive in the Niagara fruit-belt. Anything would have been better than the bland thee-and-thou bullshit that suggest Beaird never even made it all the way through an episode of *100 Huntley Street*.

It wouldn't have hurt the rest of the cast, either, if they'd been freed from the doomed battle with Dixie accents that takes all their energy.

For the most part, though, Americanization just means that we lose those rich and meaningful details that give a movie life and colour and come easiest from local knowledge. You can see them being set up and struggling to come out in some places, but they're always killed off. It's very Canadian to have a travelling welfare worker caught screwing the underage-slut-wife (real Americans would have stuck with the traditional travelling salesman), but they refused to do the joke about the welfare state screwing the citizens — the one you can find in every daily paper in the country every day of the week — that's utterly foreign to Americans. They missed out, too, on the Canadian humour of having him run away through the snow clad only in his Stanfields and his snowshoes and, if they'd set it here, they would have done it, I know they would. In contrast, how much more

horrifying his capture and torture would have been if, instead of tarring-and-feathering him, they'd maple-syruped-and-feathered him, with that relentless, tooth-stabbing sweetness and well-known delicate bouquet providing a chilling counterpoint to his anguished screams. I know it sounds grotesque on paper but it would've fit perfectly.

By the same token, the death of Jeb, the number-two heavy, is a piece of standard-brand Americana: he's impaled by a falling TV antenna. But how much more meaningful it would have been if we'd known it was the CBC signal sticking into his wobbly little gut. It would only have taken a line: A villager sticks his head out a window and yells, "Hey! What happened to Knowlton?" and, bingo! an instant comment on the destruction of rural life and values by 20th-century technology, all neatly embedded in the action. It would have helped of Jeb, too. He's out there dying all alone and he's a mighty long time about it. He groans. He staggers. He rolls his eyes. He clutches his belly. He falls. He rises. He does it all again... and again... and again... and, after a while, it gets sorta hard to stay focussed on the drama of the moment.

Now, all this might sound fanciful, but it isn't. Remember, those of us who like to watch things blow up don't care where it happens, just so long as it happens *good!* and, if our filmmakers can get those vinegar-soaked bandages off their heads, they might find the strength to make things blow up good. And that has certain implications, both at home and abroad. For the foreign viewer, the United States is an overfamiliar locale and Canada an exotic one. If we do something interesting with our exotic settings, we can't help but do better with foreign sales. And, if we do, then we'll need somebody to make more

THE KILLER INSTINCT d.

William Fruet p. Herb Abramson sc. John Beaird p. con. Gene Slott assoc. p. Patrick Doyle mus. Eric Robertson d.o.p. Mark Irwin, csc ed. Ralph Brunjes, cfe art d. Fred Allen p.man. Patrick Doyle stunt coord. Everett Creach p.r. Blowitz & Canton Co. post. p. sup. Ralph Brunjes, cfe sd. cfx ed. Brian French dist. (Cdn) Pan-Canadian Ip. Henry Silva, Nicholas Campbell, Barbara Gordon, Gina Dick, Joy Thompson, Ralph Benmergui, Alan Royal, Sam Malkin, Stuart Culpepper, John Rutter, Danone Camden, Jeff Toole, Jere Beery, Ervin Melton, Wallace Wilkinson, Lloyd Semlar, Randall Deal, Leonard Flory.

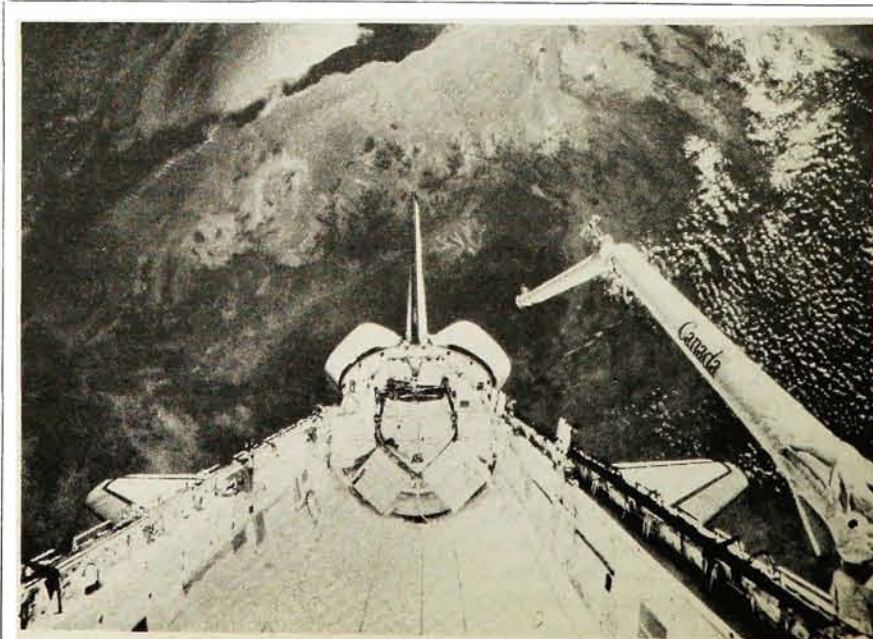
and that could point to a new commercial life for the moribund Ontario realism. More importantly, though, we could instill a certain pride and consciousness in those of our moviegoers who display little interest in the national cinema as it stands. Remember, the United States didn't become the nation it is by neglecting the patrons of even its seediest drive-ins.

Andrew Dowler •

Graeme Ferguson's
The Dream Is Alive

The latest and truly spectacular IMAX film received its Canadian premiere on Aug. 7 in the Cinesphere at Ontario Place, Toronto, with a whole lot of hoopla and an eclectic audience mix of politicians, astronauts and film people. Of course, there were speeches, mercifully short, and some containing little nuggets of interest. Graeme Ferguson, producer/director, and one of the developers of the IMAX system, commented on the "terrible experience of not being able to go where the film was made." Astronaut John McBride ("I'm the first West Virginian in space") was proud of the fact that there is more of the footage he shot in the film than that of any other person. His mission was eight and a half days in space, and went around the world 133 times. Our own Canadian astronaut, Marc Garneau, said that, apart from the weightlessness, the film really conveyed the feeling of actually being there on a space-flight.

The giant screen — six storeys high and 80 feet wide — is flooded with the light of dawn, the outline of the launching pad is visible, and the birds twitter and sing. Ironically, the Kennedy Space Centre is in the middle of a Florida wildlife reserve. The space shuttle is coming home at any moment. From this almost serene beginning, the audience is propelled into 37 minutes of overpowering images, experiences and emotions, which are literally out of this world in



• **The dream is alive:** Challenger passes over the African coast

scope and understanding.

The majestic curve of the earth sweeps across the screen; Italy is laid out below and Christopher Columbus's name is invoked. Later, another procession passes by – the Hawaiian island, the Andes mountains, Cape Canaveral and the Galapagos islands.

Earthbound, ordinary mortals are treated to fascinating details of training, and then the actual work and experiments being performed in space by the crews of three different shuttles. Two astronauts, James (Ox) van Hoften and George (Pinky) Nelson, train in an underwater tank that simulates weightlessness. For a whole year they rehearse the capture and repair of the ailing "Solar Max" satellite. Then there's the real rescue of Max in orbit using the Canadian arm and, when all does not go according to plan, Ox and Pinky improvise and dramatically bring off the operation successfully.

Visuals and tactile memories abound: the Cinesphere vibrating as an overwhelming night launch and liftoff take place; the stomach-churning "rescue basket" drill pushing all the air out of collective audience lungs; the astronauts, tackling meals and floating shrimp, and an eerie glimpse of them fast asleep, zipped into bags, but with hands and hair gently floating. Then there's Kathy Sullivan, the first woman walking in space and, with David Leestma, looking in through the spacecraft windows.

These missions also carry commercial ventures and experiments – among them the launch of a communications satellite and "bees in space" provided by students in the hope of producing zero-gravity honey!

The jumbo screen, filled with wonderful images, has to be a real filmic 'high', with wide popular appeal. However, the narration is heavyhanded and Walter Cronkite recites it in a ponderous, stuffy manner, so it's best to blank him out. But the music is a real problem. In attempting to suck up to the 'masses' who see the film, Mickey Erbe and Maribeth Solomon have composed trite middle-of-the-road treacle, including a choir of "heavenly voices" trilling around out there in space. An opportunity missed for some spare, evocative chords and themes, backed up by intellect – Harry Freedman, where are you? Luckily the fabulous images triumph every time over this wallpaper stuff.

The Dream Is Alive is at Cinesphere/Toronto until September 2, returning there later in 1985, and in 1986, and will be at the Edmonton Space Sciences Centre in September. By the end of the year the film will have played extensively in the USA, and The Netherlands, England, Australia, Hong Kong and France.

THE DREAM IS ALIVE

p./d. Graeme Ferguson, assoc.p. Phyllis Wilson, sc./ed. Toni Myers, training man. David Douglas, tech.sup. William Shaw, sd.designer Ben Burt, mus. Micky Erbe/Maribeth Solomon. running time: 37 mins., Col. Co-operating Institutions: National Aeronautics and Space Administration/Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum/Lockheed Corporation/IMAX Systems Corporation.

Pat Thompson •

MINI - REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

OFRA HARNOY: THE MUSIC INSIDE

Ofra Harnoy, the Canadian cellist, started playing at six years old and now, at nineteen, has most successfully shaken off the "child prodigy" label. This film quickly establishes the talent inherited from her mother who plays the piano, and from her violinist father. He was her first teacher, and soon realized that "she was going over my head."

Harnoy gave a public performance two weeks after her first music lesson, and we see snatches of home movies of a recital with her parents when she was eight. She then went on to win many competitions, grants and awards.

"Playing the cello is my love... it releases emotions and feelings," says Harnoy, "... it can do anything...it's just an extension of me." She rehearses three hours a day when at home – just enough to keep her performance spontaneous. "It has been something that has come naturally to me...I almost feel guilty that it has come so easily to me."

However, Harnoy's touring is arduous. Ninety-hour concerts in a season; a schedule booked two years in advance; extensive travel; plus a recording career which began when she was fifteen. In the last five years 10 albums have been released internationally and, since the repertoire for cello is limited, her adaptations of popular music (including a very successful Beatles album) have shown her capable of living in both the classical and pop music worlds.

The stresses of success are always present. Ofra Harnoy talks particularly about the unpleasant "meat market" aspects of selling her talents

in the record business – the ugly competition, and the hatred of other musicians which is "sometimes not very nice." She tries to counteract all this by striving for a normal family life – when she has the chance. She rehearses at home in her small bedroom, and enjoys cooking a meal for her parents. Narrator Hana Gartner lets us know that the cellist likes old movies, romantic novels, reading poetry – and going out for junk food.

Ofra Harnoy is a charming, outgoing, and extremely talented performer, and Bruce Griffin gives us a nice clean impeccable documentary, which serves its subject admirably. Hana Gartner, as writer/narrator, adds just enough information to the visuals without going overboard.

d./ed. Bruce Griffin, writer/narr. Hana Gartner, cam. Henri Fiks, Jim Aquila, Colin Allison, sd. Ross Redfern, Ingrid Cusiel. Running time: 26 mins., Col. 16mm/vid-eotape. Assistance from Ontario Arts Council/The National Film Board. Special thanks to Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra/St.Lawrence Centre staff (Toronto). Availability: Kinetic Film Enterprises, 781 Gerrard St.East, Toronto M4M 1Y5 (416) 469-4155

NOTE: Ofra Harnoy: The Music Inside had the dubious honour of being shown on the first program of CBC's *Canadian Reflection* on Monday, July 8 at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. The telecine transfer was atrocious, with focus and light change problems, and it was buried (as will be all other films) in this series. How can CBC allege to "showcase" short films at 4 p.m. on Monday afternoons in summer? Who's glued to the TV set when the sun is burning brightly, the lake sparkles, and outside diversions definitely have priority? It appears these shorts are only

OK enough to fill the "Canadian content" in an abysmal off-peak slot. These little films, often a spawning ground for the feature film talents of tomorrow, would be infinitely better served if an appreciative audience could snuggle up to them, say, on a wintry *Sunday* afternoon at 4 p.m.

D.P. BROWN: BEYOND REALISM

Dan Brown lives and paints in Colingwood, Ontario, and combines a studio and home in the country in order to portray the daily life around him. The film starts by focussing on Brown out in the fields and, on returning home, he throws his jacket and other items on a chair. We then see that this artful arrangement is the inspiration for a painting now on screen. (This reviewer's heart sinks.)

The artist talks a great deal too much during this film – about his "Old Master" technique; of the social, 'bitter' and 'sarcastic' comments embodied in his canvases; and his partiality for egg tempera, "the finish of the work has a quality all its own – the whole textural concept..." His blandly banal and excessively conservative canvases belie what he is telling us. There is a smidgen of unconscious humour, though.

Brown's full-length self-portrait is painted nude, from the rear, and his children call it "Daddy's Bum." Shortly after this piece of information, the artist declares, "I like the idea that what I have to say can be understood by the viewer."

The 'hook' for this film was a retrospective at the Hamilton (Ontario) Gallery of Art, covering 20 years of Brown's work, which subsequently travelled across Canada. The camera zooms in and out on many of the paintings, including "The Auction", "The Wedding tray", and "The Twirler", and Brown is also seen preparing serigraphs – accompanied by narration, or the artist (again) giving explanations of his intent.

Even if one admired Brown's commonplace work, the artist himself is enough to put off self-respecting art lovers at any level. He natters on and on about his paintings in a simplistic and unctuous manner – a sort of mundane schoolmaster trying to stir up feelings for his work that are just not there.

The filmmaker *had* to love Brown and his paintings, for what other reason is there to inflict upon an unsuspecting audience such an overdone, technically ordinary, tribute to this artist?

d./sc. Athos Katsos, exec.p. Don Haig/Film Arts, cam. Dennis Rindsem, sd. Ross Redfern, Dan Latour, ed. Barry Backus, M.C. Manne, video seq. Bill Goddard/Alndon Group, opticals: Film Effects, narr. Chris Skene, running time: 27 mins. Col., 16mm. Availability: Kinetic Films, 781 Gerrard St.E., Toronto M4M 1Y5 (416) 469-4155.

• Ofra Harnoy: "Playing cello is my love"

