

Mort Ransen's **Bayo**

Part of the pleasure of a good film comes from those tiny verbal and visual clues that knit it together to form one seamless unit. To some extent *Bayo* has this quality, and for that reason it is an enjoyable and involving film to watch. But there are times when, unfortunately, these small clues are made too large, destroying that subtlety so crucial when dealing with the huge themes *Bayo* attempts to.

Much of the film's appeal is in its very "real" story, and its "real" people. There is a universal truthfulness to the comedies and tragedies played out in this film that draw us into it. And this story is so much more than just that of Bayo, a 10-year-old boy who finally gets close to his seafaring grandfather before the old man takes to the sea for the last time. *Bayo* tells of expectations and disappointments, humiliations and triumphs, personal discoveries and losses; those things that make up "real" life. The film does it with insight and compassion. One feels these characters are not just movie images, they are truly human, exposing their ugly sides as often as the beautiful, their weaknesses as well their strengths. This is handled in such a way that the viewer cannot help but identify with, and so the film

has the power to touch us the way it does.

Undoubtedly, one of *Bayo's* strongest qualities is the community of Tickle Cove. The people of the community add that quality of truth and believability which lie at the heart of this film. Using non-professionals well on film is difficult, but *Bayo* pulls it off, for several reasons. The most important is that they are allowed to be themselves. The camera and script make no tremendous demands on any one individual. The camera flows easily, never lingering too long where it may become obvious that these people are not professionals. It was a heartwarming change from the overly-done and ultimately unbelievable communities portrayed by Hollywood. But, as with others in *Bayo*, this quality also proves in certain instances to be a shortfall. There are moments when the naturalness is pushed and overplayed so the "quaintness" of the community becomes too much.

At the centre of the story is the trio of Bayo, his mother Sharon, and her father, Philip Longlan - "Grampa," who returns to Tickle Cove after 60 years at sea. From the opening shots of pounding waves as they beat against the prow of a boat (from what would be Grampa's point of view) to the final shot of Grampa as he walks into the ocean while Bayo "takes a picture," the viewer is pushed to identify with his character; to understand his life, and his fantasy.

As the story unfolds, the ocean becomes a stronger and stronger point of reference. It is *always there*. Its relentless, indomitable quality permeates. We can feel how it controls the lives of the

people who live by it and forms their moral codes and standards. References abound to the men who went to sea but never came back, like Bayo's father and Grampa's younger brother. At the party, an old man tells Sharon how difficult it is for a man like her father to come home, where the people have made him more than a man with their legends. Yet that man has confronted the fact and frailty of his humanity every day at sea.

These are the kinds of clues that link the story together, developing Grampa's character as well as the ocean's, so his fantasy of walking on the water like God becomes believable and understandable. He is a man driven by a need to overcome his human limitations and gain power over that which has ruled his life. When he dons the white robe and walks into the ocean at the end, one feels the inevitability and the correctness of his action.

Yet for all the careful development of Grampa's character, it is with Bayo that most viewers must become involved. Caught between the fantasies and delusions of his mother and his grandfather, Bayo is like a tiny piece of driftwood bounced about on the waves. His need for the closeness of his grandfather reaches out and clutches our sentiments. Much credit must be given to Stephen McGrath who captures the essence of Bayo so beautifully and honestly. Such a relief from the Hollywood style of kid, where precocity is admirable.

Sharon is one of those women of which at least one is found in every small community. Patricia Philips is excellent as the lusty, angry and disap-

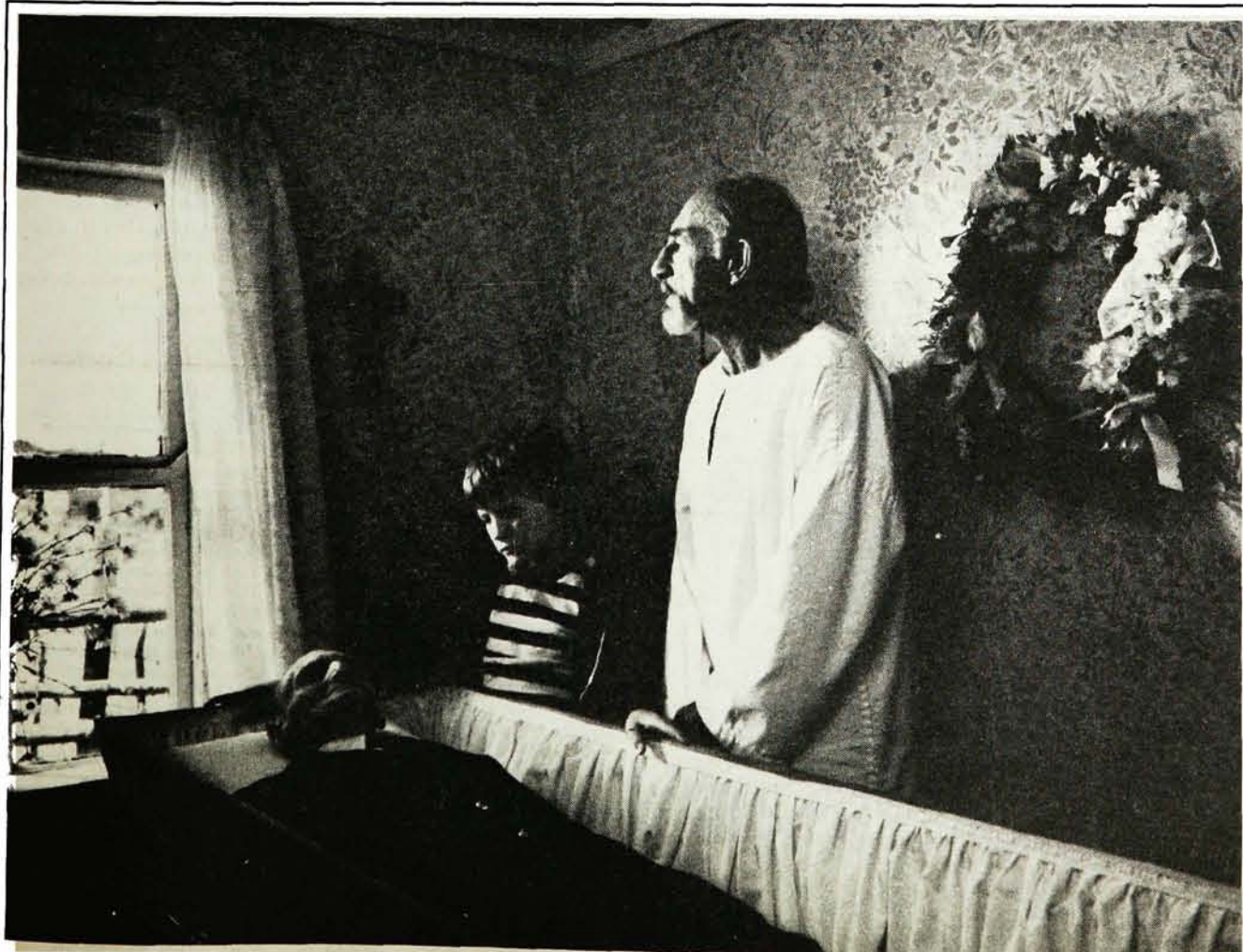
pointed woman who has spent her life waiting for something that never comes. The outcast, the unwed mother, the village whore; she turns a brittle and haughty face to everyone. Yet when the moment comes for that veneer to fall, Philips does it with grace. One would wish for more filmic moments like the one where she holds Bayo tenderly and he mumbles "You just don't know how fine you are." So much can be said with so little.

Perhaps the weakest scene is the storm at sea. Technically difficult to pull off, this scene represents a courageous attempt at creating tension and suspense. But it just doesn't work. It is not believable and erases so many of the magical and believable scenes that preceded it.

Most of *Bayo's* strengths are also the source of its weaknesses. Its truth, sincerity and universality come from an honest perception and portrayal of those small everyday events and the emotions that make up life. When they are left small and subtle, the film is very good. But there are times when it seems as though the filmmakers became too wound-up in what is so clearly a good idea, trying to make it more and only creating excess. It's regretful that honest sentiment is so easily turned to schmaltz.

Nevertheless, *Bayo* is a special film. For the most part, it has shied away from the Hollywood gloss that would have destroyed it and has achieved an uncommon ability to make the viewer both joyfully and painfully conscious of his own *humanity*, that element which is the only true "universal."

Jan Teag •



• *Bayo*: last of the old-timers, Ed McNamara (in white) confronts the inevitable outcome, while young Bayo (Stephen McGrath) looks on

BAYO CBC prod. exec. David Pears assoc.p. Dorothy Courtois Lecour co.-p. Arnie Gelbart, Wendy Grean exec.p. Andy Thomson, Robert Verrall p. Harry Gulkin d. Mort Ransen sc. Ransen, Terry Ryan, Arnie Gelbart, based on the novel by Chipman Hall d.o.p. Georges Dufaux ed. François Gill, Yves Langlois mus. Loreena McKennitt mus.arr. Loreena McKennitt, Cedric Smith art d. John Meighen, Hazel Appleton cost. Paul-André Guérin cast. Diane Polley sc.sup. Monique Champagne a.d. David Hood loc.sd. Richard Besse sc.cons. Ted Allan asst.to p. Kate Jansen NFB adv. Stefan Wodoslawsky dia.cons. Chesley Yetman p.man. Josette Perrotta 2nd a.d. Anne Murphy unit man. Denis Normandeau p.acct. Yvette Duguet p.coord. Jacky Lavoie loc.man. Terry Ryan NFB p.cood. Denise Beaudoin post-p.coord. Grace Avrith studio admin. Marie Tonto-Donati make-up Tom Booth props.master Gilles Aird asst.props Marc Corriveau ward.asst. Laval Guy const.man. Peter Hopkins art d.trainee Jim Maunder focus puller Michel Girard clapper loader Michel Bernier boom Yvon Benoit gaffer Don Saari best boy Chuck Hughes elect. John Lewin key grip Jacob Rolling grip Michel St-Pierre p.assts. Eileen Pittman, Lorna Simmons, Anne Miriel chief sd.ed. André Galbrand sd.ed. Danuta Klis asst.sd.ed. André Chaput asst. pict. eds Rita Roy, Alice Wright, Hélène Crépeau foley artists Andy Malcolm, Peter McBurnie mus.rec. Louis Hone re-rec. Hans Peter Strobl, Adrian Croll titles Serge Bouthillier neg.cut. Claude Cardinal timing Denis Cantin stills Fred Smith add.stills Antonia McGrath, Algis Kemezys legal counsel Stephen I. Selznick film audit. Morton A. Katz M.B.A.C.A. tech.cons.water shoot Movie Marine & Sons editing Telepoint Inc. lab. + studios National Film Board of Cda. cam. Panavision (Canada) Ltée make-up lab. Dr. Renaud p.c. Jape Film Services Inc., in collaboration with the National Film Board of Canada, in association with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation with the participation of Telefilm Canada. cdn.dist. Col., 35mm, running time: 98 min., 5 sec l.p. Ed McNamara, Patricia Phillips, Stephen McGrath, Hugh Webster, Cedric Smith, Patrick Lane, Maisie Rillie, Nellie Ludlow, Jane Dingle, Griffith Brewer, Gordon Ralph, Richard Edwards, Fred Smith, Lloyd Olford, Harris Lodge, Philip Donovan, Hayward Dobbin, Thomas Legge, William Tremblett, Gerald Quinton.