

David Winning's
Storm

Montreal's World Film Festival is notorious for its nearly hysterical edge of movie madness – for its sold-out screenings, and for the long, smokey waits endured in order to see completely unknown films on the basis of a rumor of a rumor.

So it was certainly a shock to have to watch David Winning's film, *Storm*, with five people in an otherwise empty theatre. Scheduling did not help the film – late on a Tuesday night, in the least prestigious of the festival's screening halls (an enormous theatre/classroom arena on the campus of Concordia University). But, at a festival like this one, the time and the place of a screening do not usually seem to make much of a difference.

Yet one has to wonder if the simple fact that this is an unknown Canadian film was in itself enough to discourage people. While an unknown American, Bulgarian, or Australian film would have been sold out, an unknown Canadian film stands not a chance. I find this incredibly depressing. Have our expectations of the Canadian cinema really sunk that low?

For this low-budget, shoestring feature manages to be almost a casebook study of the preoccupations of the Canadian imagination, at least according to Margaret Atwood's *Survival*. *Storm* is a survivalist story, that of a modern, urban adolescent's discovery of the wilderness and the savagery within himself that has to emerge for him to be able to deal with this environment. In the process, the youth changes from a child to a man; whether, as a result of this transformation, he is better equipped to do anything other than survive or

whether he has just been reduced to the bestial level of the wild itself, is, however, never made clear. Because if *Storm* manages to be slick and stylish on some levels, the film itself is ultimately shallow. As a result, *Storm* is not the film that will singlehandedly redeem Canadian cinema in the eyes of the national public.

David Winning, who is just 24 years-old, does a pretty good job developing the technical and stylistic elements of the film. *Storm* carries an interesting, non-linear structure: the motivations of the characters are only revealed slowly in flashbacks and hallucinations. This structure keeps the plot from getting too predictable and permits some wonderful surprises and shock effects, as, in homages to *Carrie* and *Night of the Living Dead*, the victims come back to haunt the living. While there are occasional continuity problems, the editing of the film is particularly tight and effective in the action sequences. There is an extraordinary chase sequence through deserted university corridors. The cinematography is often quite beautiful.

But Winning has an unfortunate tendency to give in entirely to the easy effect: a hallucination which will shock the viewer the first time finally becomes silly if it is repeated too often. He over-relies as well on a soundtrack which absolutely insists on underlining every emotion the viewer is supposed to feel.

If Winning opted ultimately for slickness, it's because there is really a void at the film's center. The script is formulaic, and the characters are undeveloped: a trio of largely unlikeable old murderers returns to the woods to dig up money which they had hidden years before, while a couple of immature young men come to experience the wilderness. The youths and the oldtimers engage in mortal combat. While there are some nice surprises here – a villain so nasty but

so vulnerable to a heart attack that he can barely chase his victims – the only character we really get to know at all is so dumb and uninteresting that his heroic transformation from nurd to a kind of Rambo is mainly incomprehensible. The script, in short, is missing a heart. The film becomes an exercise in conflict, tension and style.

Yet *Storm* is a slick, professional-looking, low-budget film, not without tension and not without charm. It will look good on TV and is probably best viewed in that context because there is simply not enough human substance here to create in the viewer the empathy and concentration characteristic of a really successful film experience.

But I think David Winning might be going somewhere in the film business. For a director so incredibly young, *Storm* is a considerable professional accomplishment. I look forward to seeing what he accomplishes in the future.

Brian Lewis ●

STORM d./sc./p. David Winning assoc. p./a.d. Michael Kevis ed. Bill Campbell mus. Amin Bhatia cam. Tim Hollings loc. sd. Per Asplund make-up Stan Edmonds asst. cam. David Christie 2nd unit cam. Andrew Jaremko add. re-rec. James Porteous add. sd. Tim Archer cast. Larry Parrish loc. Shauna Clapp loc. crew Robert Caplette, Sandy Dickson, Paul Bailey, James Hutchison, Corinne Ruiz, Don Shank cater. Fay Winning illust. Leon Joosen trucks Nelson Thorne, Mark Arton campus loc. University of Calgary, Public Affairs Office, Ursula Wohlfarth, Fred Brannett, Cindy Murrell campus security Grant Edmonds props. Martin Winning, Dennis Kevis, James Winning, Ken Clapp truck mount des. Andrew Jaremko handgun replica Ken Hawryliw titles West Coast Optical & Graphics United Graphic Services neg. cut. Gay Black lab. Alpha Cine col. timer Bruce Whidden cam. Ariflex tax. Alberta Forest Service, Alberta Recreation & Parks, Dan Jenkins, A.J. Peter, Rod Gow, the Stolz family, Rick Garbutt, Pat & Ken Clapp, Jack Drummond, Red Cross Society, The Foto Haus, IBM of Canada, Allcopy Calgary, Ford of Canada, Fred Haeseker, Martin Morrow, Calgary Herald; Larry Day, CFAC Calgary; Marie Hohtanz, CFCN Calgary; Calgary Cable Ten North; Jean & Ludwig Splett, Doris Ostergaard, National Film Board of Canada, Heather Jaremko mix. Thunder Road Studios p.c. Groundstar Productions, Calgary, (403) 282-4906 l.p. David Palfy, Stan Kane, Tom Schioler, Harry Freedman, Lawrence Elion, James Hutchison. col., running time: 81 mins.

Sophie Bissonnette's
Quel numéro/ What Number?: The Electronic Sweatshop

"I look at my machine and feel it's treated better than I am," says one of the women workers in Sophie Bissonnette's latest documentary, *Quel numéro/What Number?* That feeling seems to be at the center of the computer revolution when seen through the eyes of those whose jobs now revolve around new computerized technologies. The film focuses on the psychological affects of machine-tending as experienced by checkers in computerized supermarkets, VDT operators, mail sorters in the computerized post-office, and telephone operators whose 'personal touch' and jobs themselves are being eliminated by the computer revolution.

"What was important to me above all," says Bissonnette, "was to return human beings and not machines to the heart of the issue of technological change and to focus the film on the human dimension of that relationship between human beings and machines, a relationship which is a highly political one to begin with." True to this intent, Bissonnette's film is a forum through which the women workers themselves articulate the daily frustration, stress and dehumanized working conditions imposed on them by the new technologies. "If you work with a machine over and over and over, you end up being a machine," says one of the supermarket checkers. "I'm plugged into the machine. That's about as exciting as it gets," says the VDT operator working the night shift. "You become a robot. You work automatically...I'm not there," says a mail sorter. And the film's long sequences shot at the workplace effectively underscore their feelings and observations.

From supermarket to computerized office to postoffice and computerized switchboard, it is clear that human beings are meant to be merely adjuncts and servants to a technological process and system geared to eventually eliminating the human dimension entirely. The women workers themselves are acutely aware of this fact, and of the irony in their situation. They accurately assess the economic conditions at the base of the technological revolution, and they graphically articulate the extent to which they are conscious of being caught up in the machine's goals. "It's not working for you, you're working for it," says a mail sorter trying to "maintain production levels" of 1800 letters per hour. "We, the employees, speed ourselves up," says a telephone operator of meeting AWT quotas (Ac-

● The villainous Jim (Stan Kane) puts Lowell (David Palfy) through a rough moment in *Storm*



tual Working Time) set by the computer. All these workers talk of the psychological stress of being monitored by a machine which "spies on you and reports everything." One woman candidly admits about her home-life that "I yell a lot these days."

But it is precisely this spark of protest that *Quel numéro/What Number?* conveys and honours. In their interviews and discussions for this film, the women workers are wonderfully alive and witty and incisive in their assessment of the technological revolution. Whether in pooling their talents to write the theme song for the film, or in acting out satirical skits that reveal the pressures of their jobs, these women consistently convey a spirited energy that resists defeat. As Bissonnette has written in her production notes for *Quel numéro/What Number?* "Where does hope reside in this film? For me, it lies in the strength, the humour and the desire for change of the women who participate in it."

Yet the very fact that this film dares to challenge the dominant ideology of computerized "progress" is in itself grounds for hope. By its point of view and structure, it does more than inform. It enrages and energizes, reminding us that (as the women's song says) "When the machine has hands/I won't be needed anymore."

The film reaches its moment of supreme irony in a sequence devoted to one of the nine new computerized machines now used to send out unemployment insurance cheques. As the technology writes out the cheque, places it in the envelope, addresses and



'licks' it, and applies proper postage, we realize that not only do machines have hands and tongues, they also increasingly have all the jobs. What's left for human beings to do seems to be epitomized in the film by the computer convention salesman who dutifully sing the praises for their new technological masters.

Joyce Nelson •

QUEL NUMÉRO/WHAT NUMBER?: THE ELECTRONIC SWEATSHOP

Sophie Bissonnette p. Jean-Roch Marcotte, Bissonnette cam. Serge Giguère ed. Liette Aubin res. Sophie Bissonnette sd. Diane Carrière, Claude Beaugrand mus. Jean Sauvageau, Denis Larochelle, Clémence Desrochers 16mm., color, **running time:** 81 minutes, 1985 **dist.** (English Version) DEC Films, 229 College, St., Toronto, (416) 964-6901, (French Version) Cinema Libre, 4872 rue Papineau, Montréal, (514) 526-0473.

MINI - REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson



• The camera just loves Linda Griffiths in *Passion*

This month, films from two recent festivals. The first two were at Toronto's Festival of Festivals, and the third one at the Montreal World Film Festival.

PASSION: A LETTER IN 16MM

Anna, filmmaker, delivers a cinematic message to a departed lover. Her monologue to the camera, intercut with flashbacks as she recalls the "obsession, passion and ecstasy," exposes some of the problems and dilemmas of today's woman. Full of energy and talent, wanting to make a mark in her profession - yet striving to preserve a private, intimate personal life - Anna struggles and suffers.

The camera loves Linda Griffiths (the *Maggie and Pierre* actress) and, without her, one's attention would flag. This good-looking debut film from Patricia Rozema falls down on its script. Such florid phrases as "an exquisite ache," "the sublime madness," and "perhaps what it is all about is my being able to say to you without fear or blame, it is over," at the finish, serve to emphasize that the writing leaves much to be desired.

Griffiths' shining performance is the mainstay here - a lesser actress would have foundered in the words. It's to be hoped that the interpretation was decided upon between this talented player and the director. However, it's fair to say that this ambitious first film, with good production values squeezed out of (one guesses) a small budget, certainly engenders an anticipatory feeling for the next one.

d./ed./sc. Patricia Rozema, cam. Peter Mettler, lighting/asst.cam. Doug Koch, art.d. Barbara Tranter, cast. Maria Armstrong, l.p. Linda Griffiths, 16mm, col., **running time:** 26 mins. **Availability:** Vos Productions/Toronto (416) 461-8874. Produced with assistance from the Ontario Arts Council/National Film Board/The Canada Council.

THE AGE OF INVENTION

A short sharp overview of the transition from The Age of Innocence to The Age of Invention. The fascination of this piece is the skillful editing of archival material - a wide variety of still photographs plus early film - into a smoothly cohesive and interesting whole. The soundtrack is particularly artful, utilizing to great effect old phonograph records, voices from the past, and the wonderful clackings, rumblings, ringings and hissings of machinery.

Covering the steam engine, the typewriter, and up to the movie camera, peewriter, and up to the movie camera, radio and the aeroplane, with the final horrors of the machine-gun and tank in World War I, this snappy, evocative presentation manages to impart a lot of information (coupled with a dash of social comment) in an engrossing and lyrical vein.

Note: The NFB have prepared an attractive little illustrated information folder on this film, giving a few details and dates relating to the inventions, which is worth reading.

p./d./ed. Albert Kish, exec.p. Adam Symansky/Barrie Howells, cam. Andy Kitzenuk, loc.sd. Bev Davidson/Hans Oomes, mus. Ben Low, **running time:** 10 mins. 45 secs., col. 16mm/videotape. p.c. & dist. National Film Board.

THE BIG SNIT

In the city, an odd married couple play Scrabble. She keeps taking off her eyeballs (rather like pince-nez!) and shaking them during the game. He shuffles his letters endlessly and, since he's dithering about, she goes off to vacuum. With great glee, the husband turns on the TV to his favourite program, *Sawing for Teens*. With saw in hand, he watches in utter delight. Falling asleep in front of the screen, he misses the emergency announcement of a worldwide nuclear war!

The husband awakes and ignores the noise of panic in the streets, and the noise of his wife vacuuming the bathroom, including tub and taps, and the inside of a large cupboard. She returns to the Scrabble game, and accuses her husband of looking at her letters. He counters with yells of, "You're always shaking your eyes!" She bellows, "Stop sawing the table," while the husband attempts to conceal his pet saw.

The shooting match peaks, the wife rushes out in tears. Attempting a reconciliation, the husband goes into the hall and plays his concertina to soothe and serenade her. Overcome with loving emotion, they make up and, unaware of the disintegrating world, open the door to go outside...

Another winner from Richard Condie, the talented animator who gave us the procrastinating teenager in *Getting Started*, and the prolific bugs smuggled through Customs in *Pigbird*. The wonderfully detailed drawing and bizarre characters serve to heighten and punch across the idea of what really constitutes *The Big Snit*. The human emotions displayed, though small in comparison, are every bit as earth-shattering as shattering the earth. That's one easy interpretation, but there are many others to be deduced from this little animated film, which may even lead to a new national diversion - sawing!

d./sc./anim. Richard Condie, p. Michael Scott, Condie, anim.cam. Gordon Manson, inker: Sharon Condie, sd.ed. Ken Rodeck, mus. Patrick Godfrey, voices: Jay Brazeau, Ida Osler, Randy Woods, Bill Guest, **running time:** 9 mins. 49 secs., col. 35mm/16mm/videotape. p.c. and dist.: National Film Board.



• The wife with the removable eyes in *The Big Snit*