Night Magic might have been a great film and musical, were it not for its music. Curiously it was directed by the same man who wrote the music, Lewis Furey, and his work behind the camera is flawless and fascinating. But in the end, Furey's score defeats him and an audacious attempt at a rock-opera fantasy filmed on Montreal's most famed strip of decadence, St. Lawrence Blvd., succeeds only as a showcase for Cohen's lyrics make up the bulk of the script. A plex.

Nick Mancuso deserves kudos for his role as the leading, if heavily tormented, light of a travelling musical that has just hit Montreal. His screen presence as a man tortured by desire and doubt is impressive. In a role where words are few, he has pulled off a powerful and emotional performance. Carole Laure as his angel-wife, woman of his dreams and mother of his child, fares less well. She spends a lot of time skulking behind staircases and chimneys. Her dancing is seductive but as the riveting ingenue, a role she perfected in earlier films, she is not quite up to scratch. Here, Laure comes off immensely less memorable than her leading man.

Mancuso's Michael is on the prowl for fulfillment, happiness, peace of mind. Neither the show nor its unexpected success is enough to dampen the turmoil. Visited by three angels and granted anything he wants simply for the asking, he succeeds only in bringing about greater destruction. If there's an answer to the question does the showman's life provide too little or does the showman demand too much, Night Magic points toward the latter.

Eddie Toussaint's choreography is well-matched to the film. Stark, well-paced and evocative, it fits beautifully with the sets — the rooftops and sidewalks of St. Lawrence. The dancing of Frank Augustyn is similarly impressive — carefully controlled and understated, yet beautiful.

Night Magic is an interesting and original film and will best be remembered not as a curious musical but for Mancuso's performance and Cohen's lyrics. It should be seen loud.

David Sherman


Night Magic: Nick Mancuso is simply outstanding, while Carole Laure plays the angel-wife.

Night Magic is a relatively rare commodity, but Night Magic is especially noteworthy for the forum it gives two of the country's most intriguing artists, Cohen and Furey. And although Night Magic is a simple tale, Cohen's lyrics and Furey's direction serve to make it refreshing and sufficiently complex.

The story is told in song, with only slight narration and dialogue. Cohen's lyrics carry up the bulk of the script. A mine of wit, irreverence, candor, Cohen's words long to be savoured. But opera fantasy filmed on Montreal's most famed strip of decadence, St. Lawrence Blvd., succeeds only as a showcase for Cohen's lyrics make up the bulk of the script. A plex.

As a director, Furey's performance is more stimulating. The film is a fantasy that flits from scene to scene, playfully crossing and recrossing the thread of reality. Here Furey displays a keenly light touch and it works surprisingly well.

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W hat with that recent American court case upholding a 1983 U.S. Justice Department ruling that the National Film Board's If You Love This Planet was "foreign propaganda," here's this year's documentary contest winner: Night Magic, for Nicaragua, for the Foreign Propaganda award.

A charmingly simple documentary of the old school (handheld camera, grainy footage), Bread and Puppet Theatre: A Song for Nicaragua is the best chance we've had to absorb the metaphorical account of a Vermont-based radical theatre troupe's tour of Nicaragua in January 1985.

Since the 1960s, Bread and Puppet Theatre, then based in New York City, has been at the forefront of alternative culture. Inspired by the rise of liberation theology throughout Latin America in the '60s and '70s, Bread and Puppet, now based in Glover, Vt., evolved a mystico-political update of the medieval miracle play through an extraordinary use of tree-sized puppets.

The troupe's tour of a modern miracle play about the nativity, crucifixion and resurrection of assassinated Salvadoran archbishop Oscar Romero informs the bulk of Montreal photographers Ron Levine and Rene DeCarufel's hour-long documentary, "Puppetry," explains Bread and Puppet founder Peter Schumann, 52, "is a simplification device. So, one might add, is cinema. And so too is revolution. A Song for Nicaragua thus becomes an ingenious meditation upon the triple system of simplification of the politics of revolutionary culture.

Nicaragua, whatever its particular reality (and an interview within the film with Padre Uriel Molina, one of many Catholic priests who have rallied to the revolutionary régime, is insightful as to that reality). Nicaragua has become a leading current site for the deployment of symbolic power, and so the power of symbols. And this whether one views Nicaragua as a revolutionary David against the Goliath of U.S. imperialism, as an underdeveloped and impoverished nation struggling out from under continued subjection by a militant consumer empire, or as a social laboratory for new popular cultural models of expression. Nicaragua today poses