

YEAR END SCREENINGS



by Jamie Gaetz

Two student film festivals were held in Montreal at the end of April and beginning of May representing the close of another university year: Concordia University's 14th Annual Year End Screening of Student Films and the University of Montreal's Retrospective 86-87. The Concordia festival was held over three nights, April 30 to May 2 in the main theatre of the university's central building downtown. This event is free and attracts all kinds of film buffs as well as most of the students in the film program who openly show their appreciation for the work of their classmates. The theatre is always packed to the ceiling with extra space made on the floor in the aisles.

The University of Montreal's show was held on one evening, May 10, at the downtown nightclub Le Spectrum. There was an entrance fee of \$5.00 with regular prices in effect for beer and drinks. In terms of atmosphere, there was much more of a feeling of an "occasion" than at the Concordia event simply because of its location; people dressed as if for the Oscars and buckets with chilled bottles of champagne were in evidence.

The Concordia program consisted of approximately 60 films of varying lengths encompassing live action, experimental, and animated films. The University of Montreal's (U. of M.) program was more rigidly structured into two sections with the first nine films representing productions by first-year stu-

dents that were generally around two minutes long. The second part of the program was comprised of eight films by second-year students that varied in length from five to 10 minutes. There was a competition in these sections and a Public's Prize was awarded to a film from each one. There were also three films of over 10 minutes presented out of competition that were produced over the summer.

It was interesting to note that any differences in film styles or narrative preoccupations were a result of the differences in the actual function of the two university departments rather than of cultural differences. The film department at the U. of M. is much smaller, operating through the Art History Department, while Concordia's is a large and separate department that encompasses all aspects of film study and offers a specific three-year degree.

Perhaps wrongly, one expects to see something different at a students' film festival — films perhaps just slightly offbeat and unlike conventional cinema. And even though you don't really expect technical excellence, you plan on seeing some stylistic variations, or at least exploration of conventions.

Neither festival program met these expectations, though Concordia's came closer to doing so. The festival is fun, the films are fun, but overall, I found that the films screened at Concordia this year were not as interesting as last year and many of them left me with the feeling that I had seen it all somewhere before.

There is a specific reason for the feeling. There was a heavy reliance upon film genres at both schools. Surprisingly, and dishearteningly, there seemed to be

a general preoccupation with the suspense / psychological-thriller / horror genres. The formulas of lighting and camera technique, and the narrative devices of those genres were adhered to as closely as any mainstream, commercial production. The films produced at the U. of M. were particularly derivative, and in some cases filled with technical faults.

Whether these genres represent a particular challenge to young filmmakers, or whether it's just fun to do, I could not help but wonder **why** it would be so predominant (is it the influence of Hollywood?), and **why**, if it is such an intriguing style, there would be so few attempts to innovate on or to subvert the formulas.

There were some differences between Concordia's program last year — in which I thought the animated films represented the best productions — and this year, when the experimental films won out.

Andrea Sadler's **The Red Shoes** and Erik Vasseur's **Mandeville Gulch** are both remarkable films in concept and technical achievement. François Miron's **Chirurgie Optique** is spectacular and has a quality of professionalism that places it beyond the realm of student productions.

Chute de neige by Simon Goulet is an experimental short done on Super 8 (the medium is used mostly by first-year production students) that is also superb. Jay Heft in his film, **60 Hertz** also accomplished some surprising and fascinating visuals.

Only four of the 60 films presented at Concordia were on Super 8. It is unfortunate, as Super 8 and first-year productions are often where you see a greater

degree of ingenuity and more experimentation but as one person affiliated with the department remarked, there seemed to be a jury preference this year for the slicker-looking 16mm productions.¹

Another change from last year was the number of films dealing with other than a university age group. Several involved middle-aged or elderly people, including Nathalie Goulet's five-minute, black-and-white **Absences ou Emile et un souvenir**, a beautifully photographed and touching portrait of an old man that ends with a nice twist to a cliché. **The Tide** by David Ostry represents another kind of portraiture, as much of a culture and a specific time of life as of an individual. **La Rivière rit** by Benoit Pilon and **Le Trio** by François Perrier are both tightly conventional films that effectively depict the worlds of a middle-aged couple in crisis and teen-aged school-boys respectively.

Coincident with this movement towards using different age groups is also a trend towards a professional level of acting. All of the films named in the preceding paragraph qualify in that category. As well, a high percentage seemed to have original music, a characteristic of student films that seems new to me, and adds to their professional quality.

Much to his credit, it seems that Arto Paragamian used a lot of family members in his film, **The Fish Story**. He handled the scripting and direction so well it's

¹ At Concordia, films are chosen for the Year End Screening by a Selection Committee made up of two teachers and approximately five students. U of M screens all films.

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hard to believe his family aren't all actors and actresses.

Clochard dans l'âme by Jean-François Pothier is a difficult film to categorize. It is one of the longer films included on the program as well as one of the most interesting with a visual and thematic flow that could carry it longer than its 17 minutes.

One predominant and disturbing element of both programs was the complete lack of documentary films. Are they being made but just were not chosen to be screened? Or are Canada's young filmmakers concentrating on honing their skills for entry into a Hollywood determined market? Whatever the answer to these questions, documentary films were conspicuously absent at these two festivals.

Not only were there no documentary films, but there also seemed to be no cognizance of larger social issues; almost as if most of the ideas were conceived in a social vacuum. Public concerns are scaled down to become immediate personal issues, or transformed into science-fiction.

One film made at the U. of M., Carole Viens' and Ayse Bilgen's **Carte de Visite**, touches upon the issue of the "boubou macoutes" (a nickname given to the squad of Quebec Welfare inspectors who have carte-blanche to visit the homes of welfare recipients without notice to discover evidence of fraud). But it is used as the basis of a woman's nightmare and the real issues are obscured by the pseudo-suspense style of the film that does not even effectively differentiate between the woman's nightmare and reality.



Two U. of M. productions stood out as more interesting and technically accomplished. **Fossoyeurs** by Pierre Dalpé is a psychological thriller that uses a terrific location and has some fascinating visuals achieved through lighting effects and eerie camera angles. **Perrier Citron** by José Torrealba is a first-year production, and therefore a TV-style short, or "clip" that is visually pleasing and has some particularly nice effects for that kind of production.

Of the animated films made at Concordia, several were memorable, though overall not as impressive as those of last year. **Le Joueur de pipeau** by Cilia Sawadogo, **S'aggrave l'agréable** by Pierre-Paul Clermont and **From Friedrich to Rothko** by Marc Dubuc were the most intriguing.

A discussion of the Concordia festival

AWARDS

CONCORDIA FILM PRODUCTION AWARDS

1. **Oppenheim Award** – Lynne Stopkovitch
2. **Dean of Fine Arts (Dean Parker) Award** for outstanding third year student majoring in Film Production – Mark Nugent
3. **Kodak Scholarship** for outstanding work in each year of film production
1st year – Simon Goulet
2nd year – Ellyse Deblois
3rd year – Benoit Pilon
4. **Jean Vigo Award** for outstanding and creative use of the film form – Benoit Pilon
5. **Demarara Award** for idea, concept and execution of the Filmmaking 3rd year Class Project – David Ballard, Martine Leclerc, Pierre Gill, David Ostry
6. **Sonolab Award** – Jean François Pothier
7. **W.F. White Award** for 2nd year student's special achievement in

- cinematography – Pierre Guérin, André Turpin
8. **Hallis Media Inc. Award** for outstanding work in first year Film Production – Denis-Noel Mostert
 9. **Optimage Award** – Craig Mastermann
 10. **Sloth Productions Award** – François Miron

Animation

1. **Norman McLaren Award** – Sophie Clenfs
2. **Bellevue Pathé Awards** – Pierre Paul Clermont, Louise Johnson, Jean-Pierre Morin
3. **Merit Awards** – Evelyn Dyck, Lawrence Sparks, Sylvie Bosher, Patricia Schutz, Helene D'Allaire

UNIVERSITY OF MONTREAL AWARDS

- Prix Jury*
Eclipse, Perrier Citron
Vote du Public
Perrier Citron
Chasseur des Robots

would not be complete without mentioning the two shorts made as opening trailers: **Kino Encore** by Pierre Gill (who is also responsible for the photography on at least half of the films) and **Rejet** by Éric Canuel. Both are examples of very well-made 'film fun'. **Rejet**, in particular, has some striking effects and creates the darkest, murkiest, seediest kind of underworld imaginable.

It cannot be denied that Concordia is

producing some first-rate filmmakers, even though I was personally disappointed at some of the tendencies that seemed prevalent on this year's program. That may have been as much a result of the selection process as of the production. Its best films are in no way matched by the best films from the U. of M. Maybe next year's program will hold a few more surprises and some of the gaps will be filled in.

BOOKSHELF

A lucid and erudite survey of the U.S. motion picture industry from 1917 to 1960 is undertaken by James Bordwell, Janet Steiger and Kristin Thompson in **The Classical Hollywood Cinema**. It views the totality of the Hollywood phenomenon as a distinct artistic and economic entity whose component parts are linked in an ongoing dialectic process. Cogent references to specific films, stylistic goals, technological advances and production modes assure this book an eminent place in the crowded field of cinematic studies (*Columbia U. Press, NYC, \$24*).

A colorful and discerning portrait of Hollywood during the '40s, Otto Friedrich's **City of Nets** artfully encompasses both the socially significant and the seemingly trivial. It assigns to each event the proper place in an often ironic and incongruous tapestry of the film capital

in mid-passage (*Harper & Row, NYC, \$22.95*).

An informative probe of the British motion picture industry by Amanda Harcourt et al, **The Independent Producer: Film and Television** examines the financial and legal aspects of production. It covers contracts, copyright, budgets, funding and distribution, providing a practical basis for comparison with the U.S. and Canadian film industries (*Faber & Faber, Winchester, MA, \$16.95*).

Compiled by seasoned video pros Jane Blankenstein and Avi Odeni, **TV: Careers Behind the Screen** is a methodical, well-organized survey of jobs available in the various areas of TV production. It describes the specific training and education required, and offers useful tips on résumé writing and interviews (*Wiley, NYC, \$12.95*).

Listing over 12,000 films with full cre-

dit, plot synopses, press review quotes, and Leslie Halliwell's own expert ratings, **Halliwell's Film Guide** (5th edition paperback) is a standard reference work, highly praised for its value to TV watchers, cassette buyers, and movie scholars and buffs (*Scribner's, NYC, \$19.95*).

Films generally omitted from more circumspect surveys appear in the revised and updated edition of Robert H. Rimmer's **The X-Rated Videotape Guide**. It reviews and rates 1300 adult films available on cassette, with a supplementary list of some 3000 other sex videos. Cast and credits, plot summaries, appraisals, and distribution sources are included (*Crown, NYC, \$16.95*).

An annotated bibliography, **World War I Aviation Books in English** by James Philip Noffsinger, provides a broad coverage of close to 2000 books

dealing with numerous areas of this literary genre. Such famous films as **Wings**, **Hell's Angels** and **The Dawn Patrol** are listed and described (*Scarecrow Press, Metuchen, NJ, \$29.50*).

Anthony Slide presents **Fifty Classic French Films** of the 1912-1982 period, a superb collection of some 200 rare stills chronicling the rich Gallic film tradition (*Dover, NYC, \$11.95*).

George L. George •

Note: In our review of Ferne Cristall's and Barbara Emmanuel's **Images in Action: A Guide to Using Women's Films**, we neglected to mention the book is published by *Between the Lines Press*.

Sure, but what have you done for me lately...?

...I've Heard the Mermaids Singing, Un Zoo la nuit, Crazy Boys, Le Sourd dans la ville, L'Homme renversé, Les Fous de Bassan, Dancing in the Dark, Le Déclin de l'empire américain, Henri, Anne Trister, Le Film d'Ariane, Pouvoir intime, La Ligne de chaleur, Kalamazoo, Mario, Sonatine, Return to Dresden, Haïti Québec, Le Crime d'Ovide Plouffe, Le Dernier glacier, Post Scriptum, Zarico, La Fiction nucléaire, Les Années de rêve, Le Jour 'S...', Le Règne du jour, La Femme de l'hôtel, Beyrouth! À défaut d'être mort, Duplessis, Journal inachevé, Maria Chapdelaine, Debout sur leur terre, Un Monologue nord-sud, Lucien Brouillard, Quel numéro What Number?, Les Gossipeuses, Les Fleurs sauvages, Les Traces d'un homme, Les Yeux rouges, Mon Amie Pierrette, Les Beaux souvenirs...

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