

The 1987 Festival of Festivals again programmed a number of short films in September, and here's a quick guide to some of them, rounded up from Toronto sources.

JUJU MUSIC

A single performer hammers out a steady rhythm on a cylindrical "talking drum", held under the arm and beaten with a curved stick, and leads into the opening set of a juju music concert in Nigeria by one of its top celebrities, King Sunny Adé; "In the world of juju he comes close to royalty."

Juju music, performed by the Yoruba tribe of Western Nigeria, springs from the urban life and is a strange mixture of European ballroom (!) and Latin-American alongside traditional songs, cadences and instruments, with lyrics incorporating social commentary. The enormously popular Adé sells 250,000 copies of each album he produces, and says that his music spreads "love, peace and joy". It's also pointed out in the film that, at performances — whether small groups playing at funerals and house-warmings, in local bars, or at the superstar concerts — "money is the currency of gratitude." Wherever and whatever the audience may be, they wander onto the stage and stick money on sweaty singing faces, a custom known as "spraying". In a village bar on Saturday night, the band manager goes around collecting names which the performer will incorporate into his lyrics, thus inducing more tokens of appreciation from the audience — one woman calls it "spraying with happiness."

The film closes with extensive footage from an all-night concert in Lagos given by the two reigning juju giants, King Sunny Adé and Chief Commander Ebenezer Obey (who describes himself as a hereditary chief). It's here that one observes the contrast between them. Adé, a real showman in bright-coloured sequined costume, singing and undulating fast and then slowly to the music, plays the electric guitar, and enchants his audience. Obey is a more straightforward personality, older, swaying gently, and perhaps closer to the origins of juju. But make no mistake, they take their music very seriously and the audience loves them both — the camera pulls back from a stage littered with paper money, while drummers, band members and audience sway and gyrate to the irresistible beat.

A fascinating glimpse of juju music in the land of its origin. The film's content is perhaps somewhat restricted due to horrendous difficulties with government officials and a long list of what could *not* be shown. But the pulsing, palpitating rhythm of juju cannot be denied and comes through strongly.

p./d. Jacques Holender/Nemesis Productions cam. Rodney Charters second cam. Doug McLelland sd. Comfort Sound/Ao Loo running time 51 mins. col. 16mm/1" videotape Distributor: Films Transit, 402 est. rue Notre-Dame, Montreal H2Y 1C8 (514) 844-3358

THE ROCK AND ROLL RABBI

A grabber title for a cunning little film. The filmmaker interviews a young, progressive rabbi who talks persuasively about starting to get the kids turned on to Jewish history. He says teenagers are bored with conventional religious teaching, and advocates rock and roll as

MINI REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

one way of breaching the inevitable gap of 10-15 years from the time they leave the synagogue, until they return when their own children need instruction. There's a rousing rendition of 'Moses Save Us' in the synagogue, with the young audience swaying and clapping to the chorus "Go, Moses, Go!"

Then the filmmaker interviews an older rabbi who roundly condemns these newfangled notions, "The content of the songs is secondary to the melody...these kids are retaining the melody and not the scripture..." He finally walks off-screen in a huff — but hold on a minute, what's going on here? When the credits roll, there's a screenplay, and actors playing the two religious men — this is one smart movie! It looks good, uses professional actors, has some original, swaying to-and-fro music, and the kids rounded up to help are unself-conscious. But, best of all, it has such a convincing air!

p./d./sc./ed. Carl Alexander Goldstein asst.d. Dave McLennen cam. Terry Malone sd. Don Armstrong. I.p. Rabbi Akiva (Danny Matalon), Rabbi Lowitz (Jack Zimmerman) running time 10 mins. col. 16mm/VHS/3/4". Availability: Mount Reel Productions/Toronto (416) 699-6633

STOP DARLINGTON

Filmmaker Ron Mann encouraged his assistant, Robert Kennedy, to make this first film — so he did it in 48 hours for \$100, and cut the original negative himself because of lack of money. Then he took reel-to-reel tape and glued it on to the film... want to hear more or is this too painful?

Anyway, Kennedy manipulated the negative on a Steenbeck and filmed the process — this reviewer can't claim to be a technical whiz, but a viewing of the film should make this weird explanation somewhat clearer.

The film is admirably short and strangely watchable — the footage of protesters at the Darlington nuclear

facility is manipulated to a strange man-made popping, snapping, growling, soundtrack — but the real fascination is working out how it's been put together.

A film by Robert Kennedy col.16mm running time 4 mins Availability: Robert Kennedy (Toronto (416) 971-9131

The rest of the shorts were screened at the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 67-A Portland St., Toronto, Ont. M5Y 2M9 (416) 593-1808

3:48

Six intertitles punctuate the various episodes assembled from news and other footage relating to Ontario life from 1967 to early 1970. The images are grainy, the events mundane — soccer games, Girl Guides in procession, fire-fighting, garbage collection, watching TV in the rec. room, hordes of graduating nurses, boring politicians, and so on. They add up to a jumbled, personal, sometimes sad, but ultimately numbing image of life in Ontario. A far too long and indulgent exercise that needs careful programming.

A film by Blaine Allan 25 mins. col. 16mm.

THE ICONOGRAPHY OF VENUS

Women depicted in private and in public — their bodies in statuary, their faces in paintings, their place in society — to an operatic-style soundtrack for unaccompanied voice, written by the filmmaker, and performed by Suzanne Palmer.

Nothing too deep, the voice is not very restful, and the message of the film is undercut by the somewhat murky old footage.

A film by Annette Manguard 5 mins. col. 16mm.

ELEPHANT DREAMS

Five people tell stories, supposedly from a taking-off point of a physical characteristic of an elephant...but it doesn't work. There's intrepid explorer Norman

Elder with an anaconda coiled about his neck; a girl wittering on about a dream of her grandfather in a tree and a tiny dragon; and what's Sully Corth doing waving a fan around in a phoney setting and talking about swimming with turtles in the Galapagos?

All these tales are intercut with elephant images, leading this reviewer to slight hysteria and inward jokes about not feeling able to trumpet this film abroad...

A film by Martha Davis. 17 mins. col. 16mm.

OF LINES AND MEN

Scenes of conflict between the right and left hand of the filmmaker, as he animates fine silver chains. First, the sweet flowers with petals tinted by added coloured sand, then the chains form a heap, become sulky, and start popping about at random. The disorder rapidly turns into lines reforming into fingers pointing accusingly, brawny arms flexing muscles, angry faces baring teeth, while the soundtrack is equally aggressive.

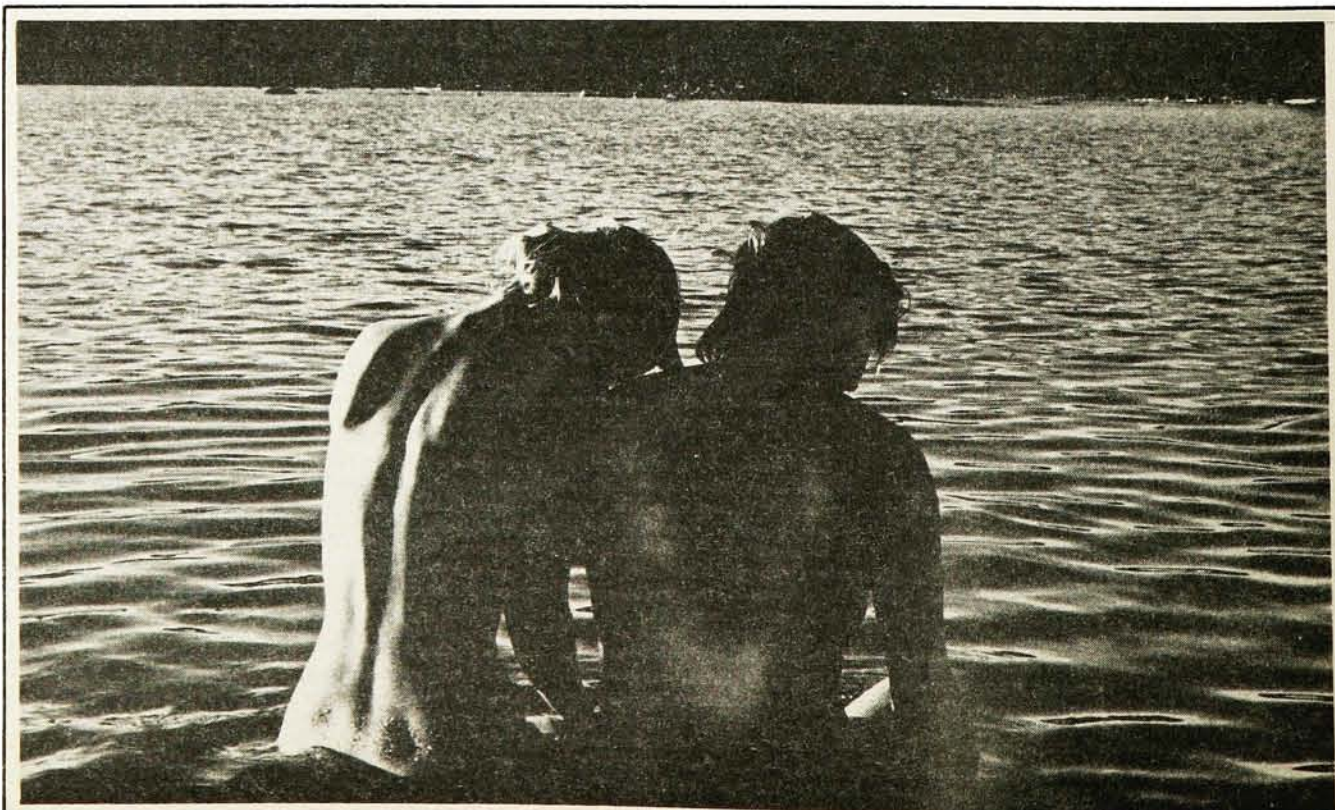
Amitay's specialty of animated chains is well-sustained in this piece, with a number of interesting variations. The track, while obviously expressing the animator's feelings of revulsion and despair, is a little *too* overpowering and strident.

An animated film by Jonathan Amitay. 5:50 mins. col. 16mm.

PRIMITI TOO TAA

A tribute to the Dadaist poet Kurt Schwitters and to Norman McLaren, that is playful, charming and funny. The typed letters are animated into delightfully new and peculiar words voiced on the track. SSSSSSSSSSSSS...Grim Glim Gnim...bim bim... fo... bowo...fummsbo... booro...funsbowo...Juu Kaa?.. to name but a few. One's mouth wants to join in, and it is rumoured that at the Festival screening, a 'word sheet' was provided for just this purpose!

A film by Ed Ackerman and Colin Morton. 2 1/2 mins. col. 16mm. Adapted from the Kurt Schwitters poem "Ur-sonate".



• Turning their backs on the iconographers of Venus