

E A S T E R N W A V E

by Chris Majka

The snow has come and gone in the Atlantic Provinces twice now (at least the parts of New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia which I've seen) and according to an old proverb from the Carpathian Mountains, "The third time the snow comes it will stay." The lakes however are starting to freeze over and I've just pulled my skates out from beneath the bed - looks like there's a bit of an edge on them yet!

A few days ago (while the second snow was still on the ground) I spent a brisk couple of days in Charlottetown (had to take the ferry - no 'fixed-link' yet) and while there I stopped in to see the people at Island Media Arts Cooperative where the welcome was anything but brisk. Unwrapping my muffler, I spoke with Kathy Arbing, the newly hired coordinator of the co-op.

Kathy has just joined the co-op after having spent some time working in administration at the Confederation Centre of the Arts (home of Anne of Green Gables, just down the street. While having no background in film she is nevertheless excited by the medium and is busy putting her administrative experience to good use, catching up on the many tasks and bills which had been left unattended during the era when the co-op had no paid coordinator but was staffed exclusively by volunteers. She is just now emerging from under the backlog and from the prodigious task of having completed the annual Canada Council application and turning her attention to an equally taxing task.

The co-op is preparing an application for a Job Development Grant under which it hopes to procure funding to train three people in production and production management. The Atlantic Filmmaker's Co-op in Halifax has employed this strategy very successfully in recent years and has given valuable job training to a number of people in a spectrum of production-related disciplines and Island Media Arts is hoping to profit from their trail-blazing path. Uncertain yet is where such production trainees would go to train since there are, at the moment, a very limited

number of organizations on the island which could provide on-the-job training. They are considering the possibility of sending the people to Halifax.

A number of productions have recently emerged from this group. At the Atlantic Festival Atlantique this year, David Ward's new film *Betrieval* was shown. According to the Festival catalogue: "A sculptor returns to P.E.I. after an absence of five years and attempts to finish a piece which he had left in the woods. After his work progresses, the mutability of people, time and place are revealed until, in the end, we are left with a mystery."

Another film from Prince Edward Island was Pamela Galant's *The Morning After*. Again, quoting from the catalogue: "It was a big party! He, a fortyish poor-philosopher-type, is the first to rise - he washes his face and enters the kitchen. She, a young unemployed-type, is sleeping in a chair. He opens a bottle of wine for breakfast. He wants to listen to some soft music but mistakenly puts on the radio full blast. She awakens with a scream. Thus begins their morning-after."

In addition, a number of other productions are nearing completion in the co-op. Rick Gibbs is in the final stages of production of a film called *Cows* and Tim Woolner is also nearing completion of a film which is temporarily without name (I'm told that it had the working title of *The Disappearing Chicken*; however as editing progressed all references to the chicken ended up on the cutting-room floor and so the chicken, in fact, disappeared from the film leaving this awkward problem about the name...). In addition Bob Stanley is also working on a production called *Juvenile Pursuit* which has largely finished shooting and is about to move into post-production.

The new kid on the block is Dave Ward's film (with the working title of *Montage*?) about the Montage Building in Charlottetown which recently fell victim to the anonymous arsonist who has been roaming Prince Edward Island for the past year. Home of Ragweed Press and Montage Dance Theatre amongst others, it was a kind of ex-officio counter-cul-

ture arts centre in Charlottetown and its burning and subsequent demolition has left a literal gap in the city. On my way to the co-op I passed the dark pit in the ground still inhabited by a bulldozer and a backhoe. It is difficult to imagine how it will be filled in Charlottetown, with its few available 'funky' buildings.

While there I had a chance to look around the premises and, poking my head into the editing room, found P.E.I. filmmaker Brian Pollard bent over the Steenbeck. He told me he was expecting an answer print of his film, *Farmers Helping Farmers*, "perhaps this very afternoon." It is a documentary about a group of farmers in Prince Edward Island who have become involved in an interna-

tional aid program assisting farmers in Kenya and Tanzania. Following his interests in Third World aid and the African continent, Pollard is returning, this time to Ethiopia, in the new year to begin research on a film project which he plans to shoot there.

On a very different note, the film he was in the final stages of fine-cutting when I entered the room was *Milton Acorn's Wake*, a documentary shot in Toronto last year about the wake which was held for well-known P.E.I. poet, character and eccentric, Milton Acorn. Pollard was kind enough to screen the cutting copy for me and I was thoroughly entranced. The wake's master of ceremonies was musician and folk bard Cedric Smith, known

to me through his *Perth County Conspiracy* connections, and a masterful singer and reciter of Acorn's powerful verse. Although the film is about Acorn and his legacy, it is equally illuminating in its portrayal of Smith who is, perhaps, the musical equivalent of Acorn as a "people's poet". Making appearances are Acorn's old friend and poetic muse Al Purdy, his ex-wife, poet Gwendolyn MacEwan, and Acorn's brother and sister-in-law. Pollard, who is a great admirer of Acorn's work, said that this film was quite a departure for him. His past work has focused on bread-and-butter development and aid issues. If *Milton Acorn's Wake* is any indication, he has as much talent in this area as he has in his more "prosaic" work.

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