

types most likely to applaud its ambitious, homemade modernism. And frankly, it is too long. Given the slight and ultimately vague nature of *Savannah Electric's* political campaign (the assertion of individual will making for pretty thin manifesto material), not even Stratyckuk's formidable formal talents justify the film's 80-odd minute running time. (It would have made one amazing short).

At this moment, *Savannah Electric* is most richly regarded as a fascinating footnote to the search for cultural specificity that has faced English-Canadian filmmakers since foreign films first found a home on our domestic screens. Principally and most successfully, it is a generic exercise which rather audaciously borrows a more or less alien cultural form – and scales it to suit the domestic sensibility. For now, that is, it is of primary interest in terms of its position within the ongoing project of developing indigenously Canadian forms of popular culture. In the future, I hope it will be that and something more. I hope it will be remembered as the first feature made by an extraordinary intelligent and innovative Canadian filmmaker.

Geoff Pevere ●

**SAVANNAH ELECTRIC** p./d./d.o.p./ed. Perry Mark Stratyckuk orig. m. comp. and perf. by Tom Paterson add. m. Perry Stratyckuk rerec. Chris McPherson ward. Catherine Stratyckuk mattes and miniatures Destiné Films animated titles and post prod. fx. Audience West pyrotechnics Shawn Wilson, Dave Peter, Steve Hegyi video fx Keith McKenzie, Visual Marketing Systems prod. asst. Peter McDonald, Donald Stratyckuk m. rec. Chris McPherson, Wayne Finucan Productions credits Steven Rosenberg lab services Mid-Can Labs Inc. neg. cutting Dawna Dobbs l.p. Dean Beckman, Jack Urbanski, Peter McDonald, Donald Stratyckuk, Jack Salzberg, Dave Hologrosky, Armand Baptist, Christopher Sigurdson, Ann Hodges. **The Producer wishes to thank:** The National Film Board of Canada, J. D. "Del" Martin, Coleen Ryan, CP Rail, William Kachur, Keith Gans. Produced with the assistance of The Manitoba Arts Council. **running time** 78min **colour** 16mm **distrib** North American Releasing Inc. (604) 925-2565.

## Paul Lynch's *Blindside*

Paul Lynch has spent the last decade directing genre exercises. In *Blindside* he attempts to return to the low-key style that characterized his early films, *The Hard Part Begins* and *Blood and Guts*. Unfortunately for Lynch and his debuting writer Richard Beattie, it takes more than a complex story line, stark cinematography and morally ambiguous characters to make a film noir.

This is one of those stories in which a professional voyeur sees too much and becomes involved in a conspiracy. It specifically descends from *Rear Win-*

dow by way of *Blow-Up* and *The Conversation*. It borrows rather too much from the latter, but shows little of the brilliance of Hitchcock, Antonioni or Coppola.

Penfield Gruber (Harvey Keitel) was once a leading behavioral scientist and an expert in surveillance techniques. Then his wife Janine killed herself, and he dropped out. Now he owns a run-down motel on the Toronto lakeshore. His clients consist of aspiring exotic dancers, deadbeat musicians, Elvis Presley impersonators and would-be gigolos. Then, a pair of hoods knock on his door.

Peters (Sam Malkin) wants Gruber to spy on a recent arrival at the motel, William Freelong (Michael Rudder). To convince Gruber, Peters' muscleman, Collinson (Kenneth McGregor), threatens to smash his face and torch the motel. Gruber is already suspicious of Freelong, and reluctantly agrees.

While planting listening devices in the room next to Freelong's, Gruber hears something from the apartment on the other side, which he also decides to bug. He soon discovers a connection between Gilchrist (Durango Coy), his girlfriend Julie (Lori Hallier), and the shipment of heroin Freelong and his gang ripped-off Peters' boss, Hawk.

By this point the audience should be thoroughly involved with the film, but *Blindside* remains curiously remote in tone. Lynch seems to be unsure of how to handle his main character; unlike the undone voyeurs played by James Stewart, David Hemmings or Gene Hackman, Gruber is just not interesting as a person.

Harvey Keitel has always been at his best as an actor when called upon to play men who desperately try to control their natural propensity to violence, but who eventually blow up. This slow burn is quite different from the more flashy explosions of Robert De Niro, (which may explain why Keitel has not achieved his friend's stardom), but Keitel's style works well for guilt-obsessed figures he played in Martin Scorsese's *Mean Streets*, James Toback's *Fingers* and his role as the censorious detective in Nicholas Roeg's *Bad Timing*. In *Blindside*, however, Keitel holds himself in to such a degree that he becomes colourless.

Lynch also fudges other aspects of the film. Though considerable attention is paid to the technology of Gruber's surveillance equipment, his video cameras are seen to pan, when they have been explicitly shown earlier to be stationary. What is more surprising is the director's decision to downplay any exploitation of the Toronto atmosphere, in contrast to the attention to detail he used to show.

Because the audience doesn't care about Gruber as a person, there is no interest in his guilt feelings. Guilt is why he involves himself with Julie, who reminds him of Janine, his wife – the tryst between them in an apartment over a bookstore, brought groans and guffaws

from the sparse audience I saw the film with. Gruber's other relationship, with Adele (Lolita David), the aspiring exotic dancer, is handled better, but fails to convince, although their big scene together, huddling in a car while a gunfight takes place some 50 feet away, is the one place where the *noir* atmosphere is successfully achieved.

Michael Rudder's portrayal of the wired Freelong is the only really lively character in the film, with his continuing rap about the need for more "ordinance", bizarre non sequiturs ("they're used to gun control in this country"), and delight in shootouts. These are shot in clichéd Peckinpah slow motion – one's main reaction to this is to observe how nicely Dwayne McLean's stunt team takes its falls. What can one say, though, about the would-be Great Canadian Gangster, whose greatest ambition is to throw a brick off the Eiffel Tower?

If *Blindside* fails, it is clearly because Paul Lynch does not manage the busy plots into a coherent whole; at one point Gruber has to write the connecting threads down, so as to make sense. Later, Gruber visits a former colleague who is conducting a sleep study on a patient that looks remarkably like torture. The scene is a piece of scientific black humor worthy of Cronenberg; it is unnerving and it has energy. It also has little to do with the rest of *Blindside*.

J. Paul Costabile ●

**BLINDSIDE** d. Paul Lynch p. Peter Simpson co-p. Ray Sager assoc. p. Ilana Frank asst. d. David Robertson (1st), Sam Mahony (2nd), Martha Bean (3rd) prod. man. Robert Wertheimer prod. co-ord Fran Solomon asst. to p. Jane Schmelzer sc. Richard Beattie sc. sup. Diane Parsons d.o.p. Rene Ohashi focus puller John Hobson 2nd asst. cam. David Parkins cam. trainee Cudah Andarawewa stills Ben Mark Buchanan sd. ed. Nick Rotundo assts Alastair Gray, Stephen Lawrence asst ed. Alastair Gray app. ed. Kerry Simpson sd. mix. John McGill boom Jack Buchanan sd. ed. Nick Rotundo assts Alastair Gray, Anthony D'Andrea, Shan Barr Foley Peter McBurnie re-rec Film House Group mix. Tony van den Akker, Marvin Burns art d. rick Roberts assts Catherine Basaraba art dept. co-ord. Sandy Kybartas set dec. Alan Fellows set dresser Chery Junkin, Linda Del Rosario asst set dresser Bob Cross set construct. Hot Sets construct. Man. John Bankson prop mast. Emil Glassbourg asst. Woody Stewart, Paul Haigh, Kim Stitt carp. Ted Samuels cost des. Nada Healy assts Alan St. Germain, Aline gilmore make-up Nancy Howe hair Debi Drennan art dept. trainee Ken Watkins story board artist Robert Ballentine gaffer Maris Hansons best boy Cactus gen. Eldie Beson ele. Dave Moxness key grip Brian Kuchera grip Dee Embree asst. Mike Pendola, Mike Corrigan, Blake Ballentine m. Paul J. Zaza choreography Kelly Robinson spfx Tedd Ross min. and explosions William Lishman and Assoc. Ltd. Video Unit co-ord Karen Pidgurski segment co-ord Paul French op. Terry Gallie cam. op. Jan Zuchlinski playback Video Options stunt. co-ord Dwayne McLean stunt performers Anton Tyukodi, Larry McLean, Randy Kamula, Larry Hoson, John Stoneham loc. scout John Board loc. asst. Woody Sidarous, Lillit "Hank" Williams, Michael Curran, David Flaherty post. prod. sup. Suzanne Colvin prod. acc. Joyce Caveen bookkeeper Susan Stewart prod. assts. Paul Smith, Andrea McCabe prod. office assts. Paul Persofsky prod. receipt. Robin Wardop craft service Debra Earhardt, Michelle Milner, Tonby Robinson transport co-ord Dan Dunlop drivers Bill Hoddinott, Allan P. Mestel, James Am Smith, Mark Moore, Steve LaFleur unit pub. Karen Pidgurski cast d. Media Casting/Lucinda Sill, C. D. C. extra casting Film Extras Services/Peter Lavender equip. rental Lightsource Inc. lab. Film House titles and opt Film Opticals Prod Co. Norstar Entertainment in association with Telefilm Canada, CFCN Communications Ltd., British Columbia Television, TBA Films S. A. colour 35mm running time 102 min. dist. Norstar Releasing.

Stavros C. Stravides'

## God Rides a Harley

Stavros C. Stravides's excellent independent documentary, *God Rides a Harley* (launched at Montreal's World Film Festival), rolls us into a world of ex-motorcycle outlaws who, by some miracle, met with God on the highway of the damned – and were transformed by the encounter. The bikers in the film believe they have been saved, and they embrace their saviour.

However the people who appear in *God Rides a Harley* don't come across as intolerably smug, self-congratulatory convertoids.

These people are not country singers whose careers went on the skids, or failed fast-food entrepreneurs, taken to hitting the bottle. The bikers have been around. They have seen much dirt – in the world, in other people, in themselves. Their experience of – and admission to – real heavy-duty sinfulness ironically gives them a certain moral authority. They seem to have a right to talk about their salvation, because they lived for years on the edge of hell.

For instance, one of the bikers describes a flaming night when an enemy pulled a knife, lurched toward him, and stabbed him in the groin. The biker didn't feel anything. He stood up, and like a super-maniac in a slasher movie, he kept going, loaded with energy, ready to kill his assailant. His 24-hour-a-day "bloodlust," the biker tells us, could render him oblivious to terror and pain.

Another motorcyclist jokes that wanting another round of violence was like wanting "another cookie." Drugged and drunken bar fights were commonplace. Vendettas were frequent. We hear one biker confess that if he had been with his pretty, blonde wife in the days when she had sex, as she tells the camera, "with a lot of men," he would have castrated some of them. Another guy admits that he once actually hired someone to murder his wife – although he cancelled the contract before it was fulfilled. The outlaw level of morality was exemplified by one biker's favorite way of grossing-out his buddies. He would stick his face into a toilet and drink all the water.

Then something came riding toward each of the motorcyclists. One biker saw a vision of "God's Death Angel" about to kill him. All of them experienced themselves as loathsome creatures wallowing in the devil's pit. They hungered to drag themselves out, and they felt the lightning bolts of grace. These days, having renounced drugs, rumbles, bestial sex, and all other ultra-cheap thrills, they ride their motorcycles to spread the "beauty of The Word" to others like them. Theirs



• Riding to heaven on a Harley

is an evangelical movement for bikers. The characters in the movie are a subculture within a subculture.

Stavrvides, who once made a film about Inuit teenagers, approaches his subject like an ethnographic documentarian. He records a tribe – the Christian Riders Motorcycle Club – as the band members go about their daily business, attend their rituals, and talk about their lives. Stavrides keeps a certain distance, framing his subjects (the cinematographer was James Crowe) in cool, uncluttered shots that allow us to observe and evaluate – or simply observe out of interest, and not even bother with judgments. The movie has no narrator, and most of it is not cut in a way that makes editorial points, or turns your head with biting ironies.

However, the picture often induces you to sympathize with the Christian Riders. Not only does their thirst for salvation seem genuine and reasonably unsentimental, they display eccentric individuality and a sense of irony. At a revival meeting, one of them grins and describes the way he sees Jesus's face. The Lord's long hair is crowned by a motorcycle helmet, and he's wearing shades. God is motorcyclist. And naturally, he rides a Harley.

The ex-outlaws in the film have cast off all their former ways, except for one: they haven't stopped being bikers. Images you expect to see in any motorcycle movie, whether it is called *The Wild One*, *The Wild Angels*, *Easy Rider*, or *Satan's Choice* (the first Canadian biker picture, which was, not surprisingly, also a documentary), appear in *God Rides a Harley*. Stavrides gives us the close-ups of boots, buckles, and chains; he pans across icons stitched into jean jackets and leather vests. The images are familiar, even though crosses and 'Jesus is Lord' have replaced skulls and 'Born To Lose'.

The Riders are still bikers, not self-righteous prudes who have renounced all their pleasures. Stavrides cuts regularly to liquidly edited shots of the club enjoying the feel of their big choppers on the roads of southern Ontario. How-

ever, they don't swarm aggressively. Accompanied by gospel rock on the soundtrack, they float peacefully past autumnal trees, through dark tunnels, and back into the light. A run is both a sensual and a religious experience. When the Riders approach us, a filter on the cameraman's lens turns the beams of their headlights into rows of spectral yellow crosses.

The Christian Riders Motorcycle Club is compelling because its members convince you they have gone through real turmoil and because they are a striking cross-breed of born-again and biker. However, near the end of the film, you might worry a little about them. A preacher who only borrows bikes now, and who would not be out of place on a TV evangelist's show, delivers a real fire – and – brimstone sermon. It is the first time in the picture that we hear so much disturbingly violent religious rhetoric. And some of the Riders – dressed straight, no colors – don't look like bikers anymore.

The fact that *God Rides a Harley* rolls toward this scene suggests that Stavrides is implying the film's characters could become something other than what they are now. But then he cuts away from the revival meeting and back to the highway, to the Riders on their bikes. He repeats a travelling close-up of a female biker in a black leather jacket. In profile, she smiles serenely, taking pleasure in the sensation of being up there on that motorcycle which is carrying her toward Heaven's gate.

Maurie Alioff •

**GOD RIDES A HARLEY** d. Stavros C. Stavrides p. Andreas Erne, Stavros C. Stavrides assoc. p. Michael Wainwright story consult. Spencer Frazer liaison Janet McCreddie d.o.p. James Crowe film ed. Steve Stephenson sd. Peter Sawade add. m. by. Carlos Lopes, Adian Mason m. "Are You Ready" (Charlie Allen and John Hill), performed and arranged by Ben McPeek and Jerome McPeek, synthesizer programming by Don Baird; "Questions" (Justin Hayward) performed and arranged by Ben McPeek and Jerome McPeek, synthesizer programming by Don Baird, "Gospel Plow" (Bob Dylan), performed by Paul James. colour 16mm running time 81 min An Arto-Pelli Motion Pictures Production distributed by Creative Exposure (416) 690-0667.

## Jacques Godbout's **En Dernier Recours**

When Quebec labour minister Pierre Laporte was kidnapped and murdered in 1970, news spread quickly across the country. Overnight, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) and the issue of Quebec's independence were thrust to the forefront. Newspapers labeled FLQ members terrorists and the public branded them murderers.

But was it really murder and terrorism? Was the FLQ not fighting, perhaps, for a legitimate cause? Quebec filmmaker Jacques Godbout grapples with these questions in his latest documentary *En Dernier recours*. In it, he explores terrorism in Canadian society, analyzing events like the FLQ years, the Denis Lortie assault on Quebec's National Assembly and the actions of the 'Vancouver Five'.

In choosing Canadian terrorism as a subject, Godbout opens the door on a

complex issue. He rises to the challenge by presenting views from a wide range of personalities: former FLQ activist François Schirm, Quebec writer Pierre Vallières, an ex-Red Brigade militant and a Montreal police officer. Throughout the 70-minute documentary, Godbout deftly juxtaposes their views to present the film's main themes.

The on-camera interviews form the structure of *En Dernier recours*. To complement them, Godbout relies on archival footage of the 1970 October crisis, the Denis Lortie affair, the Brigham bomb aimed at Pope John Paul II and the Cruise missile tests in Northern Alberta. In fact, there are very few scenes in the film shot by Godbout (the opening and closing scenes in which a bomb explodes on a barren airstrip are probably the best examples).

In the interviews Vallières and Schirm draw distinctions about terrorism. Schirm claims violence is justifiable if used for a popular cause. "Terrorism," he says, "becomes more than just an attack on innocent victims." Vallières adds to this view, asserting that armed struggles in South Africa, Northern Ireland or Central America are not terrorism, although opposing governments and the media label them as such.

In defining terrorism, Godbout fails to distinguish between democratic and

• Terrorism can blow your mind

