Chasing Rainbows

Michael Riley at the end of The Rainbow

Once upon a time in Canada, everybody lived either on isolated, windswept farms, or in drab, cramped apartments. Canadians were grizzled, stoical people, caught in an endless struggle. They sat around kitchen tables on frigid winter nights, worrying about the dark clouds hanging over them, planning escapes to something better, or wondering about their collective identity.

All that has changed. Today, in Canadian movie-and-TV-land, we are coke-dealing hipsters, gourmet intellectuals, jet-setters, gangsters, and practitioners of sex as amusement. We live in highrises, mansions, huge lofts decorated with motorcycles and offering surrealistic vews of the St. Lawrence River. We almost never sit around kitchen tables drinking squat-bottled beer like a bunch of losers. Fiddlers, country music, and all other such folklore are on another goddamn planet.

Our past has also changed. These days, it is no longer always somewhere in the countryside during the reign of Queen Victoria. Now the past is also the Big Town, when the 20th century was just beginning to roar. During the years following the 1918 Armistice, we – just like the rest of the western world – had bootleggers and gamblers, flappers and vamps, dance halls and bordellos. Above all, we had a young and restless generation, disillusioned by the 'War to End All Wars'. Yes, we had *our* Lost Generation, complete with its cynical repartee, non-stop boozing, and all-night parties where beautiful girls shimmied, and black men blew hot trumpets. A drunk might have joked at the time, "In Canada, the fun also rises."

In *Chasing Rainbows*, an $11 million, 14-hour CBC mini-series, the place to be during the extravagance of the Jazz Age is Montreal – although to save money, the show was shot in Toronto. Produced by Mark Blandford and written by Douglas Bowie (collaborators on the 1983 mini-series, *Empire, Inc.*), *Rainbows* tells the parallel and intertwined stories of Jake Kincaid (Paul Gross) and Christopher Blaine (Michael Riley), who begin a rocky, love-hate relationship in the mud and blood of the First World War.

Jake, whose mother seems to have been a "fifty-cent whore" in the working-class district of Pointe St. Charles, is more inspired than intimidated by his humble origins. After he returns from the war, Jake's lusty efforts to transcend the "Pointe" lead him to gambling, smuggling, and transforming a third-rate brothel into a first-class nightclub, where the Prince of Wales himself (Andrew Lewarne) plays roulette all night and picks up a jazz baby in one of the show's more preposterous, and yet perversely amusing episodes.

Christopher Blaine is the more complex character – the Scott Fitzgeraldian neurotic posed against the Hemingwayesque Jake. Whereas Kincaid is robust, cocky, and always ready for action, Blaine – an upperclass "Sherbrooke Street boy" – is sensitive, self-questioning, and reticent (among other problems, he can't make the earth move for the woman he loves). Christopher's postwar activities include a forlorn attempt to save his father's bank, a plunge into Jake's underworld milieu, and eventually, alcoholism.

The woman Christopher loves is former debutante, presently Jazz Age Vamp, Paula Ashley (Julie A. Stewart). Paula, who is one jigger of Hemingway's Lady Brett (*The Sun Also Rises*) and another of Fitzgerald's Daisy Buchanan (*The Great Gatsby*) – with some Canadian content thrown in – comes close to marrying Christopher and has a fling with Jake. A playwright who makes it to Broadway, she is given to making such comments as "I'm not the girl you left behind, Chris... I'm such a shallow, selfish bitch."

Like *Cotton Club*, Francis Coppola's musically phantasmagoric evocation of the '20s, Blandford's and Bowie's *Chasing Rainbows* cross-cuts back and forth between echoing, or contrasting, events in the lives of its two male protagonists. Usually, this structure works smoothly, although in some sequences (for example, the night Chris almost marries Paula while Jake gets beaten up by hoods), it wobbles.

Fortunately, most of the performances in the show are solid. Paul Gross, reminiscent of Jack Nicholson when he bares his teeth or cocks his head, and Michael Riley, who makes Chris's vulnerable personality tangible, have staked down their roles and climbed into them. Julie A. Stewart credibly projects alluring foxiness and intelligent bemusement in the scenes where she doesn't have to express the character's more soapy emotions.

Among the large supporting cast, Peter Boretski as Eckleberg, a ruthless and embittered Jewish don, is both scary and sympathetic – especially during his operatic "Do you think I'm a schmuck?" aria. Sophie Leger, who played a teenage whore in Mireille Dansereau's *Le Sourd dans la ville*, is again disconcerting as the angelic and wasted Gaby, a 15-year-old Jake saves from prostitution. And Wayne Robson, (Sammy, Jake's father-figure), continues to demonstrate a considerable ability to reveal the soulful humanity of scrunched-up men.

Chasing Rainbows is at its best when it breezes along, free of sentimentality and portentiousness. There's an entertaining kick to the gusto with which the show portrays the slaphappy amorality, the craftiness, or the wanton excessiveness in many of its characters. There's a wonderful moment when Paula's snob of a mother explains why Regency is a bad choice for silverware. "People will think I raised you in a barn. Regency is *plate*, dear." Even the Prince of Wales' retainer and advance man is a greedhead and something of a sleazeball. In fact, the Prince himself is not entirely kosher, a development that must be titillating and scandalizing to the country's last remaining monarchists.

Also entertaining is the show's candy-coated vision of the '20s, a vision that could be called Retro-Video like the mise-en-scène of a Janet Jackson clip. Silky, velvety colors and textures glaze our eyes in the interiors of Westmount mansions and east-end whorehouses. The exteriors, even the dread streets of Pointe St. Charles, are just as pretty. To some extent, this is a costume designer's (Suzanne Mess) and a set designer's (Armando Sprignuoli) show. In exterior establishing shots, costumes and sets blend into perfectly artificial little tableaux that are as pleasing as the illustration on your favorite Kleenex box – and just as disposable.

However, when Blandford and Bowie want to give us more than rainbows – when they are out to portray the very particular horrors of World War I, (captured so powerfully in classic films like G.W. Pabst's *Westfront, 1918* and Stanley Kubrick's *Paths of Glory*), or the pain of disillusioned love, or The Way Society Was Changing at That Time, *Rainbow*'s candy often melts down into glop.

The show hits glop bottom when Jake says things like "We can pull ourselves out of the mud if we try. I have got to believe it!" or when he spends time with the grieving parents of a frightened, sensitive boy the army shot for desertion. Suddenly, we are back on that apparently inescapable, wind-swept Canadian farm. In a series of clumsy, absurd shots, Jake, harnessed to a team of horses, plows the good

earth with obscene enthusiasm, looking like a happy ox. The dead boy's father watches joyfully; the two men grin at each other under the pristine blue sky. We expect to hear a voice-off commissar exhorting a crowd to meet the quotas called for in the present five-year plan.

Chasing Rainbows has attracted a great deal of attention, not only because it is one of the most expensive, time-consuming television shows ever made in Canada, but also because it is – as all the entertainment media have trumpeted – the first TV series in the world shot with HDTV (High Definition Television) production equipment. (A recent American feature, *Julia and Julia* was made with HDTV and transferred to 35 mm.)

Even video haters, who have watched HDTV tape played back on big high-definition monitors, rave about the brilliance and resolution of the image. Naturally, the home audience that followed *Chasing Rainbows* wasn't seeing the show in HDTV, because a few years will pass before home equipment is available, and longer until networks like the CBC broadcast with the new technology.

The home audience saw a video production shot movie-style with $5 million-worth of Sony equipment. The series (photographed by John Galt, sometimes directed by William Fruet, who made the legendary *Wedding in White*, is more fluid and cinematic than ordinary commercial video work. The camera moves and shifts into relatively interesting angles; the lighting isn't department store garish. At the same time, however, you often feel traces of the over-immediacy, the rawness characteristic of video – especially when real grass looks as if it's been painted with day-glo paint.

Chasing Rainbows is no masterpiece about the Jazz Age – like the long version of Sergio Leone's lyrical, brutal, haunting *Once Upon a Time in America* – but it was a smart idea to look back at that period while experimenting with a money-saving high technology that will be very important in the future.

Maurice Alioff ●

CHASING RAINBOWS *exec. p.* Mark Blandford *sc.* Douglas Bowie *p.* Louise Turcotte-Gerlache *co-p./d. o. p.* John Galt *prod. des.* David Moe *co-p. HDTV Systems* Charles Pantuso *d.* Mark Blandford, William Fruet, Susan Martin, Bruce Pittman *m. d. / comp.* Neil Chotem *casting* Dorothy Gardner, Claire Hewitt *art d.* Roy Kellar, Peter Baran *cost.* Suzanne Mess *set dec.* Armando Sgrigunuoli *props master* Ron Ror *make-up* Daisy Bijac *hair* Anita Miles *assoc. p. / post-prod.* Brooks Field *sup. ed.* Tony Lower *l. p.* Paul Goss, Michael Riley, Julie A. Stewart, Booth Savage, Lewis Gordon, Louise Lapare, Sophie Leger, Andrew Lewarne, Hal Eisen, Peter Boretski, Lisa Bunting, Wayne Robson, Thomas Peacock, Jill Frappier, Tony Van Bridge, Maida Rogerson, Alison, MacLeod, Kim Cayer, Malika Mendez, Christopher Earle, Mark Cleverley, Barry Stevens, David Matheson, Joseph Shaw, Gillie Fenwick, Gene DiNovi, Lesleh Donaldson, Patricia Hamilton, Diane Gordon, Dan MacDonald. Produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in association with Northernlight and Picture Corporation. HDTV *running time* 14 hours.

Suzanne Guy's

Les Bleus au coeur

Les Bleus au coeur is Suzanne Guy's latest feature-length documentary. Ostensibly it attempts an explanation of women and crime through interviews with several inmates of Tanguay, a prison for women on the northern outskirts of Montreal. To complete the picture, Guy also interviews one woman who is struggling to make it "on the outside," two children of two of the women, a guard, and some of the nurse / social workers employed at the prison.

The film left me with a lot of questions – not about women and how they arrive at a criminal lifestyle – but about the inherent honesty of the film. I was left wondering if Guy also wanted to get at a larger issue, and if the film was trying to say something about the prison that patriarchal society represents for women, how the male-determined definitions we live within become internalized so that women, in effect, become prisoners within those very definitions. This is a tall order, and if *Les Bleus au coeur* intended to fill it, it does not succeed. But I can find no other explanation for some of the elements Guy has incorporated into the film, and how she seems to try and translate the prisoner image into other situations.

Dramatized vignettes are intercut with the interviews and other scenes of various activities that comprise prison life. These vignettes seem to be included more to evoke certain emotions than to illustrate any specific point made in the women's narratives.

One particular sequence consists of a series of shots of a young girl, dressed in white, dreamily walking alone on a bridge in a country-like setting. The camera remains in a medium long shot then pulls away to an extreme long shot as the girl reaches the rail and peers through it. From this angle we see that the bridge crosses a body of turbulent water and a series of rapids.

These are traditional symbolic images that connote specific ideas, in filmic and literary terms. Female innocence is visually framed behind the bars that at the same time protect from the turbulence below (life?), and imprison her. Why is this sequence here, and what subliminal connections does Guy want us to make?

In addition, although a documentary, the film opens with a dramatized sequence. A young woman rides alone in the back of a police van to Tanguay, where we follow her through the various induction procedures: registration, stripping and showering while guards examine her clothing, and then the walk down a long hallway to the 'cell', which in this case is a small, dormitory-like room. The sequence ends with a shot of the anonymous young woman as she sits on the edge of her bed and despondently lights a cigarette.

This is a clever way of getting us 'inside' so that we get a feel for what becoming a prisoner means, i.e. depersonalization, removal of privacy, etc. But then this woman disappears, and when the film closes with a woman leaving Tanguay, it is another woman, a real prisoner, who leaves. I can't but feel that *Les Bleus au coeur* would ultimately have been more convincing, and more honest, had it stayed on the fictional narrative track.

From this opening sequence we move to the woman who provides the 'outside' perspective. She states her ideas about why women commit crimes and end up in prison. She says that in every case there is a man behind it; she doesn't know why, but it seems that a man is always the reason. What the women say prove this to be mostly true, whether he was a pimp, a pusher, a deserting husband, a boyfriend who turned rat fink, or whatever. It is a provocative statement, and a pivotal one, in unwittingly alluding to the idea that these women are victims. In the end, that is what Guy wants us to understand, and to feel sympathy for them. It is a strong thematic opener, however, the rest of the questions the women respond to, or the things they talk about

Joining hearts in jail

only brush against this issue. Had this idea been more deeply explored, illuminating the perceptions these women have of men, of themselves relating to men, and finally of themselves in society (that is male-defined / dominated), a much stronger statement would have come out of *Les Bleus au coeur*.

On the other hand, when the film comes to dealing with the sexuality, and the lesbianism, of the women in Tanguay, it reverts to something bordering on sensationalism. The topic is avoided in the first half to two-thirds of the film – we don't see women holding hands, brushing against one another, any kind of intimate contact whatever. Then a woman tells us that her love for another of the women began as a good friendship, but then they fell in love. We see her next in the arts studio, making something with their two names enclosed in a heart. From there we jump right to a scene where they are necking and caressing one another on a dance floor. The camera follows them intently and moves to a closeup as her hand slides around the other's ass and up into her crotch. Without any warning, and without any emotional context, these scenes provide shock value only, especially as one woman has continuously spoken of her boyfriend on the outside, and whom we have seen visiting her at Tanguay.

Aside from its clichéd character, another sequence I mistrusted, and ultimately did not *believe* was where the prisoners have a baseball game. No matter what context, inside prison or out, if you put a lot of aggressive women on a playing field, you're bound to see much different behaviour than was exhibited here. The camaraderie, the giggles and good-natured banter all seem to me a performance for the camera. It is too unlikely, particularly in view of the fact of the inherent tensions of prison life, and, as one woman admits, when tensions rise, they fight. But we never see any of that tension in *Les Bleus au coeur*, whether Guy chose not to show it, or because the inmates chose not to display it for the camera.

All of these questions I have about *Les Bleus au Coeur* lead me to the basic question that must be asked about every documentary film comprised of interviews. That question is: if you put lights on someone, and a camera before him / her recording his / her voice and actions, just *how* honest will that person be? I think the fact that I couldn't stop asking myself this question while watching *Les Bleus au coeur* is, in itself, a comment on the film's failure to persuade, and its lack of believability.

When I noted in the final credits that the crew was mostly male, however, I felt that I had at least a partial explanation for my discomfort with the film. As far as I'm concerned, first of all if you put a camera in front of women in a restrictive, depersonalizing society, one that is barred from male company, and second of all, have a man *behind* that camera, what you get will obviously be less than honest and true.

Combining that thought with the visual tone and texture of the film, and the seemingly incongruous dramatic vignettes, it seems understandable why I mistrust what *Les Bleus au coeur* is telling me. There is an intrinsic discord between the way the film looks and what it has to say.

Tanguay comes off looking like a dormitory. Many scenes left me with the impression of a warm, harmonious glow. When I remember women in decorated bedrooms with filmy curtains at the windows, or exercising in warmly lit, wide hallways, I completely lose the sense of confinement and restriction, of guards and locked doors.

Several interviews are conducted in front of windows made of squares of opaque glass which refract the natural light and soften the image. One woman is even interviewed against a wall in the chapel, with a bunch of fresh lilacs on her left and a statue of the Virgin and Child on her right. This woman has responded to a life of violence with violent acts, but in *Les Bleus au coeur* we see

her in this religious context, bathed in the softest, warmest light imaginable. Would Guy have us perceive her as a martyr? It would seem so.

Reminders are inserted about where these women are in the form of shots from outside the gates and fences. These can be jarring, but eventually become ineffective, because of where they come in, and simply because of overuse. And here again, Guy pushes interpretation upon us, continuously framing things within the wire fence so we have the effect of bars, and at one point even includes a shot of a robin landing on the top of the fence and then flying away.

At one level Guy has effectively created a picture of a particular kind of female society, one that functions, in a sense, outside of normal society. Yet that society has all the trappings of 'normality'; we see the women at the hairdressers, in an arts studio, taking a yoga / relaxation class, playing ball, at a dance, and so on. But this normalcy is only appearance: the society is a forced, and enforced, one, defined by the bars, concrete walls, guards, locked doors and wire fences that *are* prison. It is when these images are projected toward a broader perspective that the film loses its meaning.

What these women have to say is interesting, often disturbing, and at times, even terrifying. But in her concern, perhaps to make the subject more palatable, or to make a 'different' kind of prison film, Guy softens the impact of their statements to the point of invalidating them. And I think my confusion about the intent of *Les Bleus au coeur* results from its own inherent confusion. In an attempt to make several statements, it makes none very strongly. There is no room in documentary film for subtle inference of the kind it employs, particularly in one that is attempting to deal with such indistinct issues. It is unfortunate, but I think that in her attempt to subvert or destroy preconceptions of women in prison, and to pose more profound questions about women as victims, and as prisoners, of society, Guy ultimately misrepresents prison life, and in the end, gives us nothing much at all.

Jamie Gaetz ●

LES BLEUS AU COEUR *d.* Suzanne Guy *idea/research* Michèle Robert, Louise Roy *mus.* Martin Fournier *d.o.p.* Rénald Bellemarre *cam.* Mathieur Décary *sd.* Michel Charron, Yvon Benoit *ed.* André Corriveau *gaff.* Jean-Marc Hébert *asst. gaff.* Jean Berthiaume, René Guillard, Roch Plante *key grip* Jean-Maurice de Ernsted *cont.* Martine Gagné *p.a.* Alain Labrosse *p. dir.* Dominique Parent *postprod.* Daniel Arieé, Anne-Marie Leduc *mix.* Michel Descombes *lab.* Bellevue Pathé *titles* Film Docteur *graphics* Robert Gaboury *del. p.* Danièle Bussy *ex.p.* Aimée Danis *adj. to p.* François Reid *appearing* Carole, Brigitte, Linda, Claudie, Madeleine, Brigitte, Josée, Nicole, Chantal *participation* Elsa Lessonnini, Emilie Paul, Pierre Huet, Gerry Boulet, Breen Leboeuf *p.c.* Les Productions du Verseau Inc. *with* Société Radio-Canada, Telefilm Canada, SGCQ *running time* 81 min.

Vojta Jasny's

The Great Land of Small

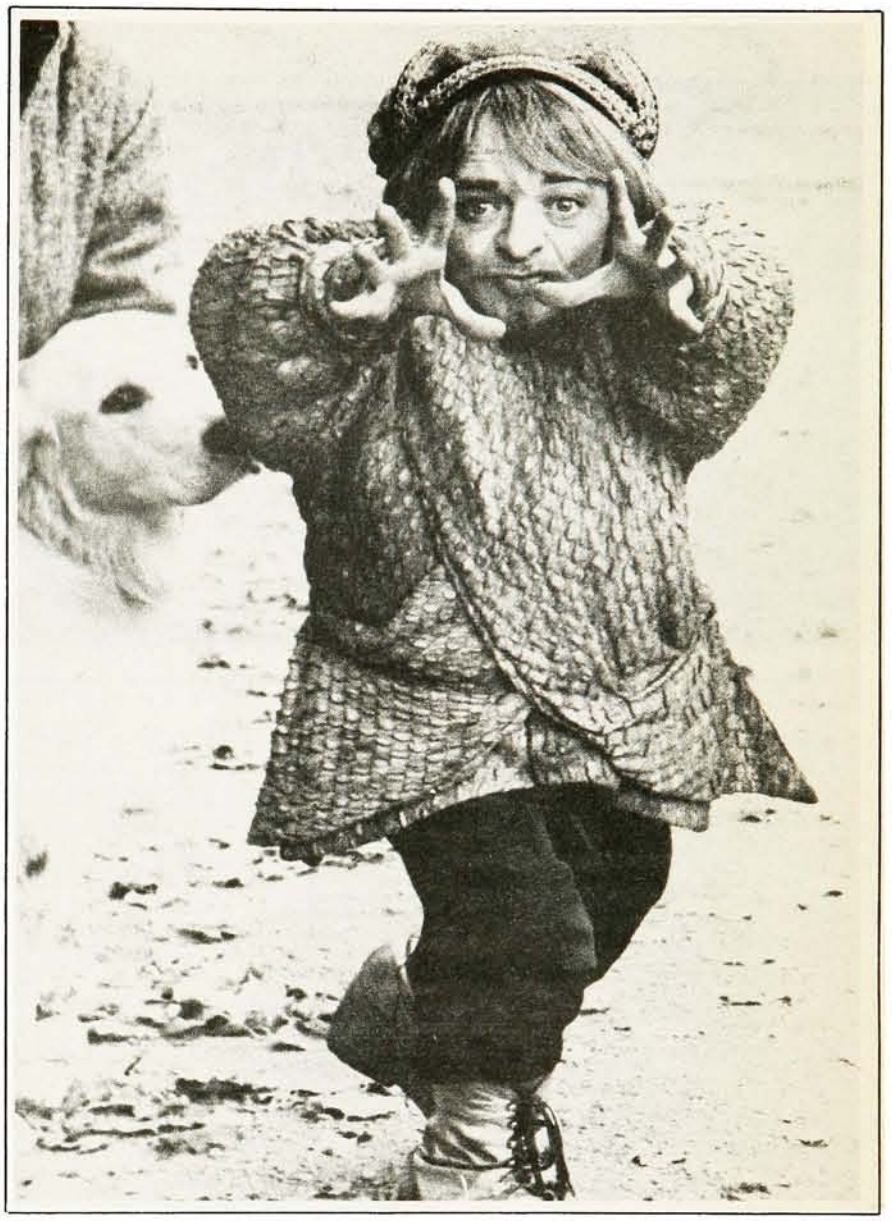
The spell is cast. A ground-level tracking shot catches a glimpse of the invisible and makes it suddenly visible. Fritz the elf is nestled in the leaves. He opens a pouch. Freed from the confines of the bag, sparkles of gold soar in the air, lighting Fritz's face. The director, Czechoslovakia's Vojta Jasny, leads us into the realm of the unknown. What better agent for this exploration than children? Jenny and David, two New Yorkers, come to Quebec's Eastern Townships to visit their grandparents. Full of the stories their grandfather tells them, the children discover an unsuspected world. Together with Fritz, they attempt to recuperate the pouch of gold powder which inadvertently falls into the hands of Flanigan, a bar owner. Born from the "Tales for All" series, *The Great Land of Small* is Rock Demers' fifth effort following films like *Bach and Broccoli* and *The Peanut Butter Solution*. The film leaves everyday life situations behind to capture the world of elves, white horses, and breathtaking rainbows.

Demers unites two different traditions of storytelling. He combines the skills of director Vojta Jasny and cinematographer Michel Brault. A pioneer in Québécois cinema, Brault, known for *Les Raquetteurs* (1958) and *Les Ordres* (1976), lends to *The Great Land of Small* his long history of creative endeavours. Coming from direct cinema, Brault makes the poetic sensibility of Jasny materialize into a tale which escapes the obvious.

The magic inherent in the images springs from the constant attention directed to "the small". High up, perched on a branch, an owl observes the woods. A caribou witnesses Flanigan's illegal hunting. Not moving, it knows it will be killed. But will it? Merlin the horse appears, dreamlike, its white robe glowing like silver. The grandfather's cat watches Jenny and David arrive. Fairy tales command such images.

With a preference for the camera placed close to the ground, Jasny communicates the invisible dimension foreign to our grown-up eyes. It is the cat's point-of-view which leads us into the cozy living room. Crawling underneath the dining room table the camera slowly intrudes on the trio. Jenny and David listen – ears wide open – as the grandfather reveals the secrets of invisible creatures.

Jasny and Brault capture the forest at dusk. This quality of light – rarely seen in films – makes Flanigan and his men appear as undefinable shapes lost in the darkening forest. The blue tinge together with the mystical synthesizer music adds to the bewitching feel that the



Small fantasy figure in *Great Land*

Jasny-Brault duo creates. Colour and texture blend into the images. They outline the schism between our reality and *The Great Land of Small's* domain. The bridge where both worlds meet takes the shape of the rainbow. Dedicated to those who kept their eyes open, *The Great Land of Small* finds its significance in the initial meeting between the children and the elf. Jenny and David enter enthusiastically the green, white, and pink prism of the rainbow. The elf is seated between two trees within the diffused yellow hue. David and Fritz's eyes meet instantly. But Jenny cannot see. Only when she repeats to herself that she believes in invisible creatures is she able to discern the elf. Oscillating from childhood to adolescence, Jenny slowly loses the innocence of youth. Only faith in the powers of imagination restores her ability to view beyond the visible.

From the autumn countryside with its gradation of ochre and amber tones, Jasny projects us into the land of "the small". The futuristic structure of Montreal's Olympic Stadium successfully composes the realm of the invisible. The population is made of the very tall and the very small alike. They sway in their robes tinted by the whole spectrum of the rainbow's colours. Amazed at what they see, Jenny and David, tailed by their dog Willy, follow Fritz into this world of flying butterflies and skillful jugglers. At the end of a corridor formed by the enthusiastic crowd, the Queen advances solemnly. A colourful procession of acrobats accompanies Her Majesty who looks a lot like the children's mother. With ease, the Queen even executes a trapeze number. But every nice dream has an end. The little group leaves Fritz's land in the company of the keeper Cerber and the half-dog half-human Munch.

The Great Land of Small escapes Disney's simplistic division between good and evil. Jasny portrays Flanigan as a regular kind of bar owner who becomes greedy as soon as he takes possession of Fritz's gold powder. The film reaches its peak at the moment Flanigan is closest to dominating the world. At night, the bar owner climbs The Black Mountain. Once he reaches the top he opens the magical pouch. Streams of light swirl around his body as if a malevolent spirit is discharged, Mephisto-like, Flanigan invites the evil forces upon himself. In a flash, a blue electrifying current outlines his figure against the dark sky. Meanwhile, Sarah tries to reach out to her father, but in vain. The rotund fishlike shape of Slimo – the gold powder-maker – appears like a menace in rear projection. Too close to the scene, Sarah, struck by the light, rolls down the mountain. In shock,

Flanigan finally comes to his senses. He runs to his daughter and seeks forgiveness.

Despite the qualities inherent in the images, *The Great Land of Small* is flawed. As the film unfolds, the motivation behind the dangers of the gold powder remain unfocused. The metaphorical implication of the gold powder as instrument of power are self-evident. Still, flashes of light and rattling objects are just not enough to convince the audience of Flanigan's abuse. The young actors Karen Elkin (Jenny) and Michael Blouin (David) lack the freshness and spontaneity of Mahée Paiement in *Bach and Broccoli* and the group of children in *The Dog Who Stopped the War*. To show them crying when their friends leave is a hazardous venture which detracts from the film. *The Great Land of Small* is the first film of the series shot with Dolby Stereo. But what good does this advanced sound technology do if the French-dubbed version constantly attracts attention to its stiff dialogue? Still, the spirit of the film outweighs its weaknesses. The desire to capture the inner life of the characters makes *The Great Land of Small* a film in which both children and adults find meaning. Rock Demers, the soul behind the "Tales for All" series, manages to blend international ingredients together creating a dynamic melting pot. Vojta Jasny and Michel Brault make it possible for us to believe that on one stroll in the woods we might actually stumble over Fritz.

Marika Csano ●

THE GREAT LAND OF SMALL / C'EST PAS PARCE QU'ON EST PETIT QU'ON PEUT PAS ETRE GRAND *p.* Rock Demers *d.* Vojta Jasny *scl prod sup.* David Sigmund *sc. consult* Vojta Jasny, Rock Demers *d.o.p.* Michel Brault *line p.* Lorraine du Hamel *assoc. p.* Pierre David *1st. a.d.* Jim Kaufman *art d.* Violette Daneau *ed.* Helene Girard *m.* Guy Trepanier, Normand Dube *asst. p.* Louise Belanger *prod. d.* Suzanne Roy *regie* Renee Leclerc *2nd. a.d.* Blair Roth *3rd a.d.* Tin Analytis *prod. co-ord* Danielle Boucher *acc.* Marie-Claude Hebert *asst acc.* Suzanne Poirier *p.a.* Pierre Paquette, Jean-Guy Chevrette, Denise Langis *trainee* Sandy McGiffert *tutor* Françoise Tessier *cont.* Marie Theberge *casting* Lucie Robitaille *architect* Martin Mainguy *set dec.* Réal Ouellette *props* Daniel Huysmans *animal trainer* Jean Cardinal, Ciné Zoo *spfx* Louis Craig *asst.* Antonia Vidosa, Réal Baril, Pierre Rivard *animation and spfx (optical)* Les Productions Pascal Blais Inc. *spfx o.* Bernard Lajoie, Pascal Blais *spfx d.* Peter Bromley *head anim.* Joseph Gilland *assts* Jean Desrosiers, Luc Chamberland *cost. des.* Michele Hamel *head dresser* Hughette Gagne *asst.* Murielle Blouin *dresser* John Stone *make-up* Diane Simard, Line Desmarais *head hairdresser* Constant Natale *cam.* Sylvain Brault *1st asst. cam.* Christian Racine *2nd asst cam.* Pierre Pelletier *stills* Jean Demers *grip* Yves Charbonneau *elec.* Marcel Breton *gaffer* Emmanuel Lepine *carp.* Piere Charpentier *gen. op.* Jean-Paul Auclair *sd.* Serge Beauchemin *sd. concept* Claude Langlois *boom* Thierry Hoffman *Asst.* Patricia Tassinari *stunts.* Jerome Tiberghien *sp. sc. co-ord* Gilles St. Croix *Slimo creator* Karen Langshaw *pub. rel.* Kevin Tierney, David Novek Assoc. *l.p.* Karen Elkin, Michael Blouin, Michael J. Anderson, Rodrigue Tremblay, Ken Roberts, Lorraine Desmarais, Gilles Pelletier, Françoise Graton, André Mélancon, Michelle Elaine Turmel, Michael J. Anderson, Lorraine Desmarais, Jack Langedijk, Gilles Ste-Croix, Nicolas Doclin, Eddie Roy, Michael Gagne, Bayou, Inconnu, Le Chat du producteur, un curieux cheval blanc, Une Chevre, Hoot, Ungrand, Rond, étrange et rustique poissson ballon qui joue son propre role, Ken Roberts *running time* 93 min.

Moze Mossanen's

Dance for Modern Times

Last year Moze Mossanen directed *The Dancemakers*, a series of six half-hours for television and, at the same time, had a second unit shooting everything that was going on. And this feature, *Dance for Modern Times*, was made from this "everything".

The opening of *Dance for Modern Times* combines crew, clapper board, background voices, and the images of dancers, giving an immediate feeling of how the two arts – modern dance and film – will intertwine. Moze Mossanen's voice from time to time punctuates this personal exploration of four leading dance groups. Five dancers in front of an orange background; the camera pulls back from the stage where they stand, and the square of light seems to resemble a TV screen. Four modern dance groups are presented. Choreographers speak of their creations, rehearsals are observed, and fair-sized excerpts from a major work of each company are seen on-screen.

Christopher House, choreographer for the Toronto Dance Theatre, talks of his concern with structure and craftsmanship, and is at the edge of the stage (here again the TV screen motif) as the five dancers seen in the opening shots of the film form an intricate moving frieze to spare piano accompaniment.

The Danny Grossman Dance Company is next. Grossman's solo – shivering and shaking, rolling and acrobatic, his mobile face and hair extensions of the body movement – is to Bach-ish music. He discusses his choreography for "Endangered Species" and observes, "I am quite good at social commentary," going on to recall family influences, the makeup, and the "horrible images." A lengthy portion of "Endangered Species" conjures up the aftermath of, perhaps, a nuclear war with worn-out survivors pushed around by a military figure. Oppression and misery are heightened by expressionistic music.

James Kudelka, choreographer of "In Paradisum," a 22-minute work for Les Grands Ballets Canadiens, gained inspiration from artist Kathe Kollwitz – also cited by Danny Grossman in relation to "Endangered Species". Kudelka's piece chronicles five stages of dying, and he remarks that it "seems to have a lot of Christian images in it." Designed to sometimes have three men in the leads (whole company wear long flowing skirts), the roles are, however, interchangeable. As the troupe dances and whirls to insistent music, David Crone is seen weaving in and out of their movements shooting with his Steadicam and, on screen, appears to blend into the dance.

O Vertigo dance modern

O'Vertigo Danse's choreographer, Ginette Laurin, rehearses an athletic couple, wearing running shoes, in a work in progress. "Full House," says Laurin, is about the '50s when everything was flashy and people were very naive. One of her dancers remarks that, "She is seeking a line between kitsch and art." "Full House" is staged in a swimming pool set (rather like a David Hockney California painting). Three beauties in red bathing suits frolic in about six inches of water. Couples 'dive' into the water and skim the length of the pool. The bright primary colours are reminders of old 20th Century-Fox musicals.

Finally David Earle, of the Toronto Dance Theatre, talks about the company and the "necessity for linking ourselves up with the most urgent impulses to dance... dancing from one's emotional centre." Earle rehearses his piece set to Mozart's Requiem, "Sacra Conversazione." A grieving crowd views three hanging figures and the emotion, intricate patterns and beautiful movement fuse together, aided considerably by the noble choral work. Here again, there is an overlap as the film crew, choreographer and company discuss their involvement during a rest period.

As in most dance films, the glimpses of repertoire are fleeting, but enough to whet the appetite (or not, depending upon a liking and appreciation of modern dance). But Moze Mossanen has been very cunning in showing, not only the wheels going round from the point of view of choreography, but has also involved the viewer in the "choreography" of filming. This intriguing device appeals to two audiences – dance and film – and in addition involves the "general public" by giving them an interesting and painless introduction to both media.

Dance for Modern Times serves its subject well, with good camerawork, ravishing colour, and editing that flows from one dance company to the next. The only complaint of this reviewer is that director Moze Mossanen's voice-over contribution – giving the shooting date and introducing each company segment – seems a bit stilted and stiff in contrast to the visual ebb and flow of the dancers. But no doubt budget considerations dictated this economy? It does not detract from the film as a whole, which is an excellent contribution to knowledge of the current modern dance scene.

Pat Thompson ●

p./d./sc. Moze Mossanen. *asst.d.* Rick Thompson. *cam.* Norman Allin csc. *sd.* Bobby Jones. *orig.mus.* Glenn Morley, Lawrence Shragge. Withe the participation of Telefilm Canada/Ontario Film Development Corporation/ TVOntario/Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *running time:* 76 mins. *col.* 16mm/VHS/3/4" *dist.* : Creative Exposure, 2236 Queen St. E., Toronto M4E 1G2 (416) 690-0775.

Oliver Hockenhull's

Determinations

Oliver Hockenhull is a young filmmaker connected with Clineworks (British Columbia's independent film co-op). He has just finished his first feature-length film, in which he deals with the problem of conveying a somewhat apocalyptic political message.

Determinations is described in its publicity material as a "radical filmwork on the Vancouver Direct-Action anarchist group and on the question of justice in Canada." While it's not necessary to know this to get the film's message, it probably helps organize the almost 80 minutes of image, statement and nihilist sentiment that comes at the viewer as rapid-fire as promised.

Hockenhull proposes his film is an essay, but as such it is deficient. Rather than developing an argument, the emphasis is on suggestion and a litany of statistics; *Determinations* is perhaps more of a rant than an essay. The film centres on the concerns, actions, arrests and sentencing of the "Squamish 5" in 1982-83, and on the resulting coverage of these events in the popular media. But it also condemns the world-wide build-up of, and massive expenditure on, military armaments (particularly in the U.S. and the Soviet Union).

Hockenhull produces a sense of uneasiness and bleakness by the use of assorted visual, textural and textual strategies. He often uses traditional methods of documentary presentation (for example, voice-over and overlaying film) but seems consious of this, and resists fulfilling expectations created by the standard notion of the documentary film. He also employs animation, shadow dance performance, broadcast news footage and other television imagery, along with dramatic sequences, to establish an impression of the human condition in crisis.

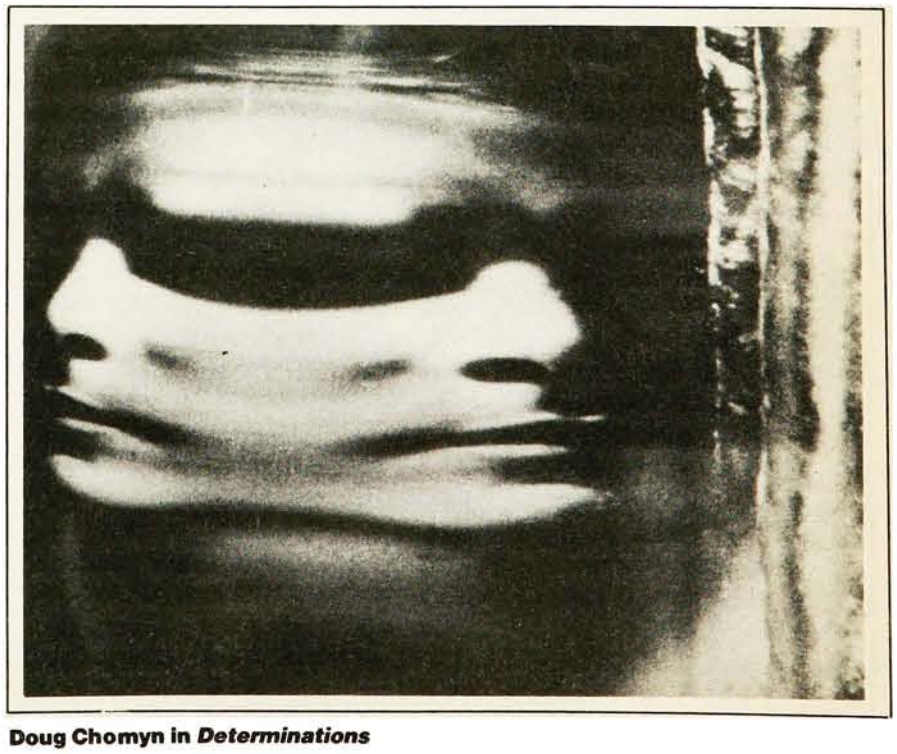
Although the film repeatedly insists its essential doctrine: "all violence is abhorrent," the message is actually undercut at times by several presumably ironic anecdotes in which the solution to various problems always comes down to more violence. An insomniac kills himself; a young prostitute, sexually molested as a child, avenges herself by stabbing her abuser "in his privates"; if an armoured-car guard causes trouble, kick him in the head or shoot him. Irony is a fine device, so long as it is apparent or has an obvious intentionality.

One of the film's strongest moments is a television rap poem, read by Vancouver performance poet, Judy Radul, over a series of quick-cut, accelerated TV images. This is one of a few instances in which the visual, verbal and contextual elements mesh remarkably well (which brings to mind the poet Louis Zukofsky's test or poetry – "the range of pleasure it affords as sight, sound and intellection").

In another memorable scene, a young man delivers an anti-military monologue while a car drives wildly and pointlessly around him. This sequence is the pinnacle of humour in the film, and a rare moment.

Overall, *Determinations* would benefit from a more developed sense of humour. The tone seldom strays from its single-minded bleakness. Possibly, the filmmaker feels his aim is too serious (or takes himself too seriously), but the balance is off.

The gloomy emotional atmosphere is further compounded by what Hockenhull calls



Doug Chomyn in *Determinations*

"Brechtian dramatic sequences." In these, actors perform highly-stylized scenes in which the dialogue – discussions of morality, possible actions and their consequences – provides most of the drama.

The film is certainly not about production values (as Hockenhull admits), although it is not completely devoid of effective film technique. Unfortunately, there is too much of the raw, hand-held camera approach, and the sound is often poor – hard to hear (or hear clearly) what's being said.

But many of the production problems can be forgiven as this is a very low-budget film (made for less than $25,000 Hockenhull says). He also says the film is aimed more toward an intellectual audience than to those just interested in entertainment. "I'm not glorifying the actions of these individuals (the Squamish 5) so much as trying to point out some basic blind spots in the Canadian psyche, for example, about arms manufacture," he says. "I tend to believe there is no real political movement since the death of history on August 9, 1945."

Determinations strives for an articulate confusion in its effect. Hockenhull achieves this state at times throughout the film, but can't sustain it. Perhaps his mere presentation of images and ideas is not enough; he never really connects all of the film's various constituents. Still, I admire his boldness and his concerns.

Calvin Wharton ●

DETERMINATIONS *d.* Oliver Hockenhull *ass. d.* Doug Chomyn *m.* Dennis Burke *other m.* D.O.A., The Subhumans *musical perf.* Carmen Reittich, Scott McLeod, Pat Chird, Gerry Hannah *with the asst. of* Al Razutis, Hadwijich, Erik Sven-Erikson, Rim Wilson, Patricia Gruben, *crew* Juergen Beerwald, Jeff Carter, Scott Haynes, Bill Evans, Craig Condy-Berggold, Cynthia Wong, Glenn Anderson, Mary Daniels, Ileana Pietrobruno, Keith Groat, *l. p.* Louise Ross, Doug Chomyn, Judy Radul, Fumiko Kiyooka, Karen Zawasky, Derek Neen, Jackie Dionne, Zoltan Lipics, Andrew McEllroy, Jamie Parker, Lisa Adams, Carolyn McLuskie. Assisted by The Canada Council, The National Film Board of Canada (Pacific Region), and Cineworks.

Two animated films from the National Film Board, which are nominated in the Best Short Film category of the Academy of the Academy of Canadian Film and Television (Genie) Awards. In addition, George and Rosemary *gives the NFB its 53rd Academy Award (Oscar) nomination.*

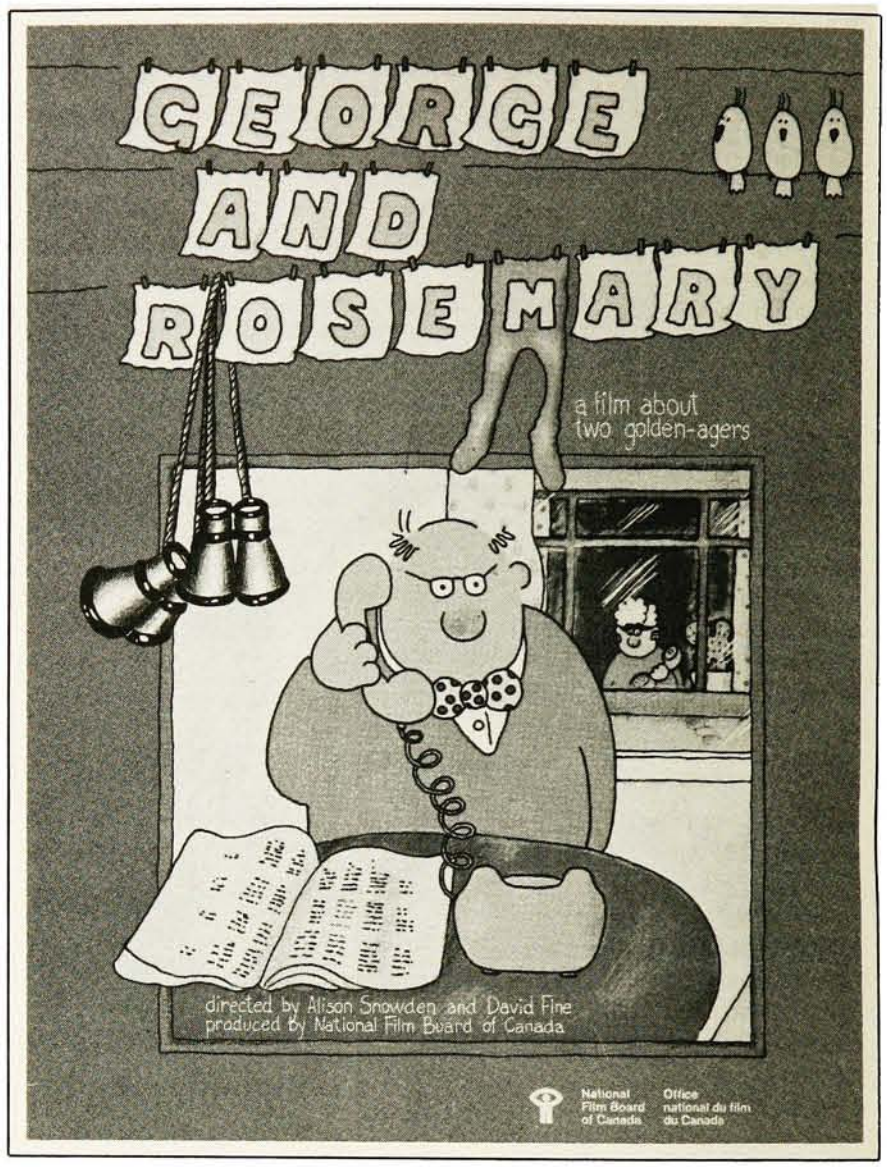
GEORGE AND ROSEMARY

Yellow birds twitter on the clothesline, and it is slowly pulled across the screen to announce the film's title inscribed on the pegged-out laundry. The soft-voiced narrator tells us that George plays checkers with his cat, puts ships into jars and, when the weather is nice, sits on his front porch. The last mentioned hobby allows him to watch the house opposite – "He had a passion for the lady across the street..."

As the widow Rosemary comes out, puts her goldfish in their bowl on the porch, and waves to George, he indulges in a little bit of fantasy... a fast passionate tango, followed by sips of champagne. That night, gazing from his bedroom window, in his mind's eye, George is in the operatic mode, singing his heart out and climbing up to the widow's window for a stolen embrace.

Finally one morning, the would-be suitor decides that this is *the* day. Clad in his best suit and bow tie, with garden flowers in hand, George gathers his courage – but then sees a carload of Rosemary's family descend upon her. When George finally does knock on Rosemary's door, he is in for a wonderful surprise – to the tune of "Yellow Bird"...!

This delightfully whimsical "film about two golder-agers," is the first in a series of animated films called *65 Plus*, initiated by producer Eunice Macaulay. Hitting just the right note, it shows in a wry, subtle, and charming manner that, even though the facade may crumble, underneath the ruin many of us remain young at heart, sexy, and fascinatingly delectable. The animation is softly persuasive, the atmosphere cosy and inviting, and there are some hilarious touches.



And Cec Linder is just right in his reading of the first-rate narration. Keep the fingers crossed. This is surely an all-round winner.

d./sc./sd./design/animation Allison Snowden, David Fine. *orig. mus.* Patrick Godfrey *p.* Eunice Macaulay *exec. p.* Douglas MacDonald. *assoc. p.* David Fine. *narr.* Cec Linder *running time:* 8½ mins. *col.* 35mm/16mm/VHS/Beta/3/4" *awards 1987:* Prix du jury, Festival des films du monde, Montreal; Gold Plaque, 23rd International Film Festival, Chicago.

FUTURE BLOCK

Nelson is an ordinary sort of a guy, nothing special. He keeps a modest account at the Harmony Bank, and looks forward to joshing his favourite teller, Edna Beasley. He suspects all is not well when the bank entrance is blocked by a huge video-arcade-game-type money machine. Nelson negotiates several electronic hazards before reaching the counter and, horrors – no Edna! A video-face screen confronts him with impossible requests for his card number and his code word (he enters "hunk", as that's what Edna teasingly calls him!). He thinks Miss Beasley comes to explain the new system to him; he panics; everything mechanical contrives to trip him up; it is all too much. Staggering into a bar for a Harvey Wallbanger, Nelson confides in the barman, and Edna is also there drowning her frustrations with the "new" system – but the nightmare is not finished and technology has even invaded their leisure moments...

An amusing idea, and well-conveyed by combining cel animation with computer-animated images. According to the NFB, "The computer images were animated separately on the screen of a standard office computer and were integrated using an animation camera equipped with an aerial image projector." But, however interesting the technique may be, it cannot overcome a shrill and overloaded cascade of words, which should have been heavily edited. The bright, very jazzy images, combined with the flow of language, which includes a lot of boring, one-note "robot" voices, becomes soporific in a very short space of time. If a 10-minute film *can* sag in the middle, this one does, but perks up to a good ending with a twist in its tail. But definitely full marks for technique.

d. Kevin McCracken. *computer prog.* John Weldon. *aerial image camera* Raymond Dumas. *mus./elec. efx* Normand Roger. *p.* David Verrall. *exec. p.* Douglas MacDonald *running time:* 10 mins. *col.* 35mm/16mm/VHS/Beta/3/4"