The Great Land of Small is the first film of the series shot with Dolby Stereo. But what 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 Jasný and Michel Brault make it possible for us to believe that on one stroll in the woods we might actually stumble over Fritz.

Matika Czano


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, clapboard, background voices, and the images of dancers, giving an immediate feeling of how the two arts — modern dance and film — will interweave. Moze Mossanen's voice from time to time punctuates this personal exploration of four leading dance groups. Five dancers from each group 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 accomplishment.

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's 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 reference 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 (who company wear long flowing skirts), the roles are, however, interchangeable. As the troupe dances and whistles to insistant music, David Cronen is seen wearing in and out of their movements shooting with his Steadican and, on screen, appears to blend into the dance.
Oliver Hockenhull's Determinations

Oliver Hockenhull is a young filmmaker connected with Cineworks (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.

Determination is described in its publicity material as a "radical work 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 nihilistic 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; Determination is perhaps more of a rant than an essay. The film centres on the concerns, actions, arrests and sentencing of the "squatters" in 1985-86, 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 conscious 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 intellecton").

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, Determination would benefit from a more developed sense of humour. The tone seldom stays 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...