

40,000 at a time!) and is shot in blue-grey mists that would do credit to any Jack the Ripper mystery.

Actually, what's most noteworthy about this film is the style rather than the content. Most docu-dramas, particularly those made on a relatively low-budget, tend to be strong on docu- and a little limp in -drama. *Close to Home* is the opposite.

Tobias Schliessler is not a TV news cameraman and, since the purple thread holding the docu- and the -drama together is the research of a television journalist (Anne Petrie), this is a slight shame. However, whatever is lacking in the "journalism" segments is more than compensated for by fictional vignettes like the one mentioned above.

Likewise the pseudo-real dialogue (several scenes involve streetworkers, lawyers and so on playing themselves) is informative but a little short of gripping. Beirsto and Crossland's scripted scenes are consistently good and often brilliant. They're not afraid of minimal writing, best in a scene between Flynn and his mother (Micki Maunsell). She can barely talk while trying to stuff \$200 in the boy's pocket; he responds with a highly articulate tearing-up of the cash.

As a study of a contemporary social problem *Close to Home* is a worthwhile film which, unbeknownst to anyone but the filmmakers, broke some ground two or three years ago. Watch it for that reason alone or, rather, with your kids.

As contribution to the CBC's prime-time schedule it's a major achievement. One suspects there are dozens of good films lying around the country which were too fictional for the network's Current Affairs department and too factual for Drama. If Fecan's decision to broadcast *Close to Home* is a sign of things to come, then filmmakers such as Ric Beirsto and Harvey Crossland will have a market for more innovative projects.

Mark O'Neill •

CLOSE TO HOME d. Ric Beirsto p. led. Harvey Crossland assoc. p. Jon Stoddart sc. Ric Beirsto, Harvey Crossland cam. Tobias Schliessler art. dir. Annie O'Donoghue Assoc. ed. Jill Haras orig. score Ken Hemmerick, Richard Baker research Ann Petrie l. p. Daniel Allman, Micki Maunsell. Produced by Hy Perspectives Media Group with the financial assistance of Telefilm Canada. running time 57 min.

Randy Bradshaw's

Ramona

Two recent Canadian-made series for children recently debuted. One shows the problems facing Kidvid, and one shows its potential. *Captain Power* has proven controversial, because of its tie-in with Mattel Toys, who made the "interactive"

devices that are used with the program, and for the violent nature of its *Star Wars*-inspired scenario. Atlantis Films' *Ramona*, on the other hand, will likely be held up as a positive example of

what programming for children can achieve.

Beverly Cleary was for many years reluctant to allow her stories about eight-year-old Ramona Quimby and her family to be adapted, in spite of

the popularity of her books. She was perhaps concerned that her tales of the mischievous third-grader would be turned into a sort of distaff *Leave it To Beaver*, or would be otherwise slicked

16 of this year's Academy Awards were won on pictures filmed with ARRI cameras.

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Since 1973, in fact, *two-thirds* of the Academy Awards for Cinematography have been won by cameramen shooting with Arriflex 35BL sync-sound cameras. This year the winner is Vittorio Storaro. We salute him and the other nominees.

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up with sitcom formulae. It was no doubt the track record of Atlantis Films, which shows its commitment to making children's programs that respects the child's viewpoint and the audience,

that convinced her they would be true to the spirit of her books.

Producer Kim Todd and story editor Ellis Weiner have achieved this goal by filming only 10

episodes. This has enabled them to choose from the five books that Cleary wrote about Ramona. They have also kept the most important aspect of successful children's programming in mind - cla-

rity and directness. The absence of punchlines and laugh tracks is a welcome relief.

Randy Bradshaw directs the programs in keeping with the low-key nature of the stories. Ramona Quimby lives an ordinary life, but the genius of Beverly Cleary lies in the way in which she makes these ordinary events of a child resonate. Whether it is dealing with the problems of being a grade-school student, getting along with her sister, or trying to figure out her parents, Ramona is always believable.

The key to this believability lies in the casting of Sarah Polley in the title role. Kim Todd deliberately set out to find a girl who was not the model-pretty type so common among child actresses. Sarah Polley, with her high energy level, fits this role perfectly. Like Megan Follows, she has a family background in the business - her brother Mark will be remembered from *A Gift To Last* - and she may indeed have the same bright future.

Supporting roles in *Ramona* are also well done. Lori Chodos handles herself well as Ramona's put-upon older sister Beatrice, who is always called Beezus. Lynda Mason Green and Barry Flatman are Dory and Bob Quimby, and if the parental roles tend to be more stereotyped, they are well played and never become the caricatures that sitcom parents often are. Jayne Eastwood makes occasional appearances as Ramona's teacher.

With its international financing - Canadian, French, West German and American - the series is nationally neutral, but only Americans will likely quibble about the lack of patriotic paraphernalia in the school, for example. As with *The Kids of DeGrassi Street*, there may also be some comment about the politeness of the children in the cast, quite distinct from the noisy brats of American television. That is probably a change that will bring sighs of relief from many critics of the state of Kidvid.

J. Paul Costabile •

And this was the 5th year in a row that the Cinema- tography Award went to a cameraman shooting with an ARRI 35BL.

EQUIPMENT
IN DEPTH

CLAIRMONT CAMERA

RAMONA p. Kim Todd exec. p. Michael Macmillan, Seaton McLean (Atlantis Films), Hugh Martin, Cecily Truett (Lancit) d. Randy Bradshaw created for TV Hugh Martin, Cecily Truett sc./story ed. Ellis Weiner, based on the novels by Beverly Cleary cont. Madeleine Duff asst. d. Erika Zborowsky (1st), Frank Siracusa (2nd), Jill Compton (trainee) d. o. p. Douglas Kiefer, C. S. C. focus puller Cathy Robertson clapper/loader Joel Guthro, Cudah Anarawewa ed. Sally Patterson, Lara Mazur asst. Dawn Higgins, Gloria Thorsteinson, Brett Sullivan (2nd) m. Fred Mollin loc. sd. John J. Thomson boom Martin Lacroix asst. sd. ed. Michael Cook sd. fx. ed. Arnie Stewart dialogue eds. Mata Steinberg, Dale Sheldrake apprentice ed. Thor Henrikson re-rec Wally Weaver, Daniel Pellerin Foley Andy Makolm art d. Peter Grundy asst. Angus McCallum set dec. Robert Bartman set dresser Lloyd Brown props Jeffrey A. Melvin asst. Mia Sturup hair Jocelyne MacDonald make-up Barbara Szabolowki gaffer Gary Phipps gen. op. Roger Bowden elec. Ton Durman best boy Harold D. Stroud key grip Mark Silver best boy grip Ian Henderson head carp. David Hamayda set construction Edge and Bratton scenic artists Nick Kosonic, Martin Morris art dept. trainee Ray Lorenz stills Mani Grossman craft service Amerind Day prod. co-ord Gillian Hershfield series consult Bill Seigler prod. consult Gillian Spencer unit man. John Calvert post-prod. co-ord Daphne Ballon post-prod. assi. John Harcourt, Roberta Ripp office prod. asst. Anthony Kadak, Lori Ishbaum transport co-ord G. Kris Hawthorne acc. Joan M. Scarrow asst. Solange Marciano dialogue coach Beatrice

Green tutor Laurel Bresnahan animal handler Laura Fisher casting Arlene Berman, Rose Lewis (extras), Darlene Kaplan (consultant) catering Blue Heron Catering Lab mixing PFA Film and Video neg cutter May Bischof opticals Film Optical titles Meta Media prod. company Atlantis Films, Lancit Media Productions, Revcom Television in association with Bayerischer Rundfunk (Munich), CHCH Television (Hamilton) Corporation for Public Broadcasting running time 10 x 30 minutes distribution Atlantis Films International, Lorimar (Videocassette) l.p. Sarah Polley, Barry Flatman, Lynda Mason Green, Lori Chodos, Jayne Eastwood, Nerene Virgin, Bobby Brecken, Marlow Ortel, Kerry Segal, Nicole Lynn, Alexandra Barrett.

Jacques Santi's Flag

In *Flag*, a Franco-Canadian co-production directed by Jacques Santi, we follow the lachrymose Inspector Simon (Richard Bohringer) through the familiar *mise-en-scène* of a typical French *policier*. The drizzling Parisian streets. The unmade beds and sad saxophones. The tough-guy *tripots*, filled with cigarette smoke and flurries of epithets like *mec*, *flic*, *salope*, *flambeur*, and the ever-popular *con*!

The key epithet in *Flag* (*argot* for catching a criminal in *flagrante delicto*, with his or her pants down) is not *flag*; it's *con* (literally vagina; figuratively dumb jerk). The *c*-word appears so often in the picture, every second line of dialogue seems to cling to it. "Petit con!" Inspector Simon snaps at some *mec*. "Grand con," another *mec* snaps at him. "Quel métier du con," Simon says ruefully about police work. "Arrête la connerie!" says everybody at one time or another. Eventually, you want to make your way through those drizzling Parisian streets and find the *con* who wrote the script.

There's not much in that script, or the film made from it, to sustain the interest of even the dullest *mec* in the audience. As *Flag* opens, we discover that for some vague reason, Simon has a deep need to bust the Dijan Brothers, a gang of North African thieves with connections in the contentedly corrupt police department and in the government. Because of those connections, Simon's slick, sleazy superior (Pierre Arditi) orders the inspector to dump the case and take a vacation. The rest of *Flag* could be called *Inspector Simon's Holiday*.

We watch the inspector hanging around African dance clubs, Tunisian cafés, and all manner of illicit Parisian gambling joints. Simon shoots craps, plays cards, and checks out a weird game that is a hybrid of roulette and billiards. When he's not getting deeper and deeper into gambling, our hero bickers with his girlfriend, and, in one exciting scene, he separates an egg!

The gambling milieu of *Flag* is populated by suitably shady, *louche* types – the kind of nervous, hawk-beaked, amusingly eccentric hoods who are the *policier's* gift to the world. Julien Guimar (the chef in Jean Beaudin's *Le*



The gang that couldn't shoot straight make a movie. Jacques Santi's aim is off in *Flag*, with Pierre Arditi (above, center)

Matou) almost brings the film to life as one of the head hoods, a tortoise-faced, weak-willed gangster who makes threats with his face stuck in an inhaler. When Inspector Simon is asked why he is hanging around one of Guimar's joints, Simon answers, Bogart-like, "The odor – it pleases me." It pleases me too, but unfortunately, the odor in *Flag* is really just a whiff of the kind of pungent, underworld poetry that Jean-Pierre Melville got on the screen in films like *Bob, le flambeur* and *Le Doulos*. And as Simon wanders into African nightclubs, we get an equally faint taste of the atmosphere and the Hi-Life music that could have charged up the film.

When *Flag* is not offering a pale reflection of the world according to Jean-Pierre Melville, it serves up a little evil according to Claude Chabrol. All the main *crapules*, or villains, are seen amidst the details of their banal domestic lives: bourgeois apartments; dining room tables strewn with the remnants of dinner; proper mothers, wives, and daughters. Even the nasty Dijan Brothers appear *en famille* in a crowded, tastelessly decorated little parlor. A TV blares away, *sexy poules* sprawl on the boys' knees, big guns appear suddenly, and in the foreground, the family matriarch sits at a table calmly peeling vegetables. The scene, like a few others in the film, has a certain wit, although you might wonder uneasily whether it is supposed to play to the kind of anti-immigrant racism that surfaced during the last French election.

Probably not. *Flag* is the most lackadaisical of *policiers*, unmarked by the kind of icypick-in-your-ear viciousness sometimes characteristic of the genre. The Dijan Brothers don't get around to doing anything significantly nasty until near the end of the film; the car chases are remarkably relaxed; Inspector Simon *flags* the bad guys without beating anyone up or firing a single shot. In fact, he doesn't even change his sweater

until the picture is almost over.

The laid-back atmosphere of the film has a lot to do with Richard Bohringer's performance as Simon. Famous for his roles in Jean-Jacques Beineix's *Divia*, (as the cool guardian angel who wears a diving mask while buttering *baguettes*), and in Jean-Loup Hubert's hit, *Le Grand chemin*, Bohringer is rapidly becoming an institution. In *Flag*, he pushes his patented style of zen detachment to new extremes, meandering through the movie, his big sleepy face seemingly indifferent to everything around him. When his old girlfriend decides to move to Montreal (possibly because she wants to escape a damp autumn in Paris for an early blizzard in Canada), Bohringer barely flickers one of his considerably over-made-up eyebrows. When the Inspector spends the night with his new girlfriend, a *minette* called Josie (Anne Létourneau), he looks as if he would rather be buttering a baguette.

Anne Létourneau, who engraved herself on our memories as Rita Toulouse, the sweet tease in the *Plouffe* films, appears currently in Quebec's daily TV soap, *La Maison Deschênes*, and will be seen in the upcoming *Les Tisserands du pouvoir*, is one of the Canadian contributions to *Flag*. There's not much for this very talented actress to do in it – and even less for Donald Pilon, who knocks off about six lines in a completely expendable role. Quebecer François Protat's cinematography is decently professional.

Flag is not really an offensive movie. Like many other pictures, it is simply unnecessary. The only mystery the film generates is why did anyone – the young French director Jacques Santi (sadly, he died recently), or the French and Canadian co-producers – want to have anything to do with the project? And why would Telefilm invest in it?

It is extraordinary that more than a quarter of a century after Jean-Luc Godard took the *policier*,

turned it inside out, upside-down, and then sent it into a spin, the French are still making films like *Flag*, and, in this case, Canadian money helped make it possible.

Maurice Alioff •

FLAG *dir.* Jacques Santi *sc.* Jacques Santi, Simon Michel, Tansou *cam.* François Protat *éd.* Bernard Aubouy *ed.* Françoise Javet *sets* Dominique André *stunts* Roland Neunreuther, Alain Guenillot *mus.* Jean-Pierre Mas *l.p.* Richard Bohringer, Pierre Arditi, Philippe Leroy Beaulieu, Anne Létourneau, Julien Guimar, Philippe Pouchain, Smain, Donald Pilon, Philippe Besson, Philippe Slez, Charlie Chemouny, Laurent Gendron, Smail Mekki, Patrick Poivey, Michel Melki, Jean-Luc Porraz, Jean-Paul Muel, Jenny Astruc, Simon Michael, Philippe Alexandre. *prod.* Les Films Ariane, Cinévidéo, FR3 Films Production, Soprofilms. France-Canada co-prod. *running time.* 104 min. *dist.* Gaumont.

Herménégilde Chiasson's Le Grand Jack

Acadian director Herménégilde Chiasson has made, in his *Le Grand Jack*, an incisive and multi-angled rendition of the rather complex Jack ("Ti-Jean") Kerouac: an American son of Québécois expatriates who grew up to become an internationally known writer and the Beat Generation's most eloquent voice as author of *On the Road*.

This biographical documentary, out of the "Américanité" series by the National Film Board, utilises several cinematic "tools" in painting its picture of Kerouac, trying to separate the man from the myth, the profoundly gifted artist from the self-destructive, raging drunk.

At the same time, Chiasson explores Kerouac's cultural background as an influence, quoting his "Everything I know I owe to my French-Canadian background." The term "un grand Jack" is a popular expression among French Canadians meaning anyone of particular great height, but its use in this title denotes a different kind of stature: part of the pleased astonishment most Québécois must have felt in the early 1960s when they heard him interviewed in French, their particular breed of French, as a best-selling American writer, the man who coined the term "Beat" adopted by the Beat Generation, Beat Poets, Beatniks, and even a British musical group called The Beatles.

Born in Lowell, Mass. in 1922 to Léo and Gabrielle Kerouac, who had moved to Lowell as part of the mass emigration to the American textile mills at the turn of the century, he was raised in the totally French-speaking atmosphere of the French 'ghettos' and as a youth spoke no English whatsoever – the language which, like Joseph Conrad before him, he would eventually write in.

His formative years are documented abundantly, especially through his writing but