

spiritual has to do with the production of knowledge as a response to the demands one encounters in life, if this knowledge is gathered as lore, that is through study, experience, tradition and intuition, then *Finding Mary March* is a spiritual film. Pittman's attempts to answer compelling questions about how we act integrate many ways of knowing and we can't help but know a little more after watching and listening to *Finding Mary March*.

Patricia Kearns •

FINDING MARY MARCH co-exec. p. Stirling Norris p./prod. man. Rob Iveson d./sc. Ken Pittman d.o.p. Michael Jones 1st. a.d. Paul Pope 2nd a.d. Barbara Doran 1st. asst. cam. Dominique Gusset 2nd asst. cam. Jamie Lewis gaffer Bob Petrie key grip Nigel Markham genny op. Robert McDonald cont. Barbara Gordon asst. p. man. Janice Ripley p. sec. Susan McGrath bookkeeper Eleanor Merrigan art d. Pam Hall asst. art. d. Peter Walker set dec. Francine Fleming prop master Dave Roe cost. des. Peggy Hogan hair/makeup Paulette Cable sd. rec. Jim Rillie boom op. Alex Salter p.a.'s Barry Nichols, Bill Dancey, Sharon Halfyard, Erika Pittman pub. Kevin Pittman ed. Derek Norman asst. ed. Antonia McGrath sd. ed. Les Hallman l.p. Andree Pelletier, Rick Boland, Tara Manuel, Des Walsh, Austin Davis, Paul Rome, Mary Lewis. A Red Ochre Production. dist. Malofilm Group.



Simon Esterez in *The Box of Sun*

might have been there before; roaring motorcycle point-of-view shots suddenly appear and disappear. The sun stays behind a lushly overcast cover. A sensuously logical array of pipes, steam and tanks ominously belches life, the sea heaves with dark promise.

This montage, running through the film until the brighter resolution at the end brought on by the children, is no ironic commentary. Rather it brings a pulverizing context for the dramatic sequences to overcome. Lefebvre has kept the irony for the animation, which begins innocently enough with the group of children cutting consumer images from domestic magazines. In a blast of whimsy, a gust of wind blows the images from the children's room into a world of their own. The irony is, of course, that the images of lips, household appliances and consumer items have an animate life of their own already. Lefebvre's sometimes crude and quite delightful animations also break the dank and threatening landscapes of what's left of the natural world into digestible bits. They also serve to reinforce our sense of distance by interrupting the flow; it's a technique often used by Godard to remind us that we are watching a movie rather than participating in the story itself.

The manipulation of images in *The Box of Sun* is very plain and yet manages to steer clear of triteness. The group of children who provide the main dramatic interest in the film are never reduced to cuteness. Rather they are utilized in the film to help restore life to the world with their boxes of sunlight. Their mythic overtones are held in check, however, by their very unassuming winter clothing and the modestness of their silhouettes against the snowbound winter forest. The box of sun that finally is opened, after a strange and inconclusive

journey, brings the sun out from behind the clouds and returns the world to an unsettled normalcy complete with joyous shards of rainbows flitting over Atom Egoyan and Arsinee Khanjian, while cluttered sidewalk traffic replaces the solitary roaring motorcycles.

The fairytale-like quality of *The Box of Sun* does not bear much relation to the *Tales for All* series. Indeed, the indefinite narrative defies the simplicity inherent in a linear narrative. It is through a different approach, a richly associative and aesthetic approach, that *Box of Sun* starts to resemble the urgent simplicity of a folk-tale.

Jean Pierre Lefebvre's *The Box of Sun* is almost an exercise in the nature of the purity of cinema itself, devoid of the distractions of conventional word-driven drama. Its formal aspects, however, are always tempered with a playful, self-referential sensibility. We are never allowed to forget that we are watching a film, not disappearing into one. And a challenging, provocative, plaintive and finally deeply profound film it is.

Ronald Foley Macdonald •

LA BOITE A SOLEIL / THE BOX OF SUN a film by Jean Pierre Lefebvre d.o.p. Lionel Simmons asst. cam. Dominique Gusset grip Raymond Lemy asst. grip Jerome Sabourin loc. man. Louis Ricard sd. mix Michel Charron ed. Barbara Easto titles Simon Esterez soundtrack Jean Pierre Lefebvre lab. Bellevue Pathe Quebec timing Pierre Campeaux neg. edit NegBec p. asst. Halifax Terry Greenlaw 2nd p. asst. Halifax David Middleton l.p. Joseph Champagne, Arsinee Khanjian, Simon Esterez, Barbara Easto, Atom Egoyan, Jerome Sabourin, Simon Easto Lefebvre, Herman Hamilton Colyer, Timothy Heyligen, Scott Menard, Karen Mae Simms, Jerry Bannister, Mark Burgess, Trevor Cohen, Heather Davis, Roger Honeywell, Lisa Robertson. A Cinak Ltd. production with a grant from the Canada Council. 16 mm, colour running time 73 minutes.

Graeme Campbell's Blood Relations

One of the safest bets in the film industry is the "genre" movie. That is to say, the audience knows exactly what to expect once the lights grow dim, be it Stallone in an action picture, Pee Wee Herman in a comedy, or any number of pubescent nonentities in teen adventure flicks.

Blood Relations, directed by Graeme Campbell, falls into the thriller/suspense category. At times, however, it also lapses into that of a comedy and/or horror movie, but unfortunately without the desired results. It is this basic ineffectiveness of deciding what emotion to elicit from the viewer that mars its potential strength. Because the formula for a suspense film is so well known to the audience, with its cliché characterizations, hackneyed settings and plot twists, one often speculates as to whether the filmmaker falls into self-parody on purpose or by accident.

Certainly *Blood Relations* contains an abundance of familiar motifs in the thriller vein. The characters are instantly recognizable: Jan Rubes playing Vincent Price as the mad scientist, Kevin Hicks, a young Mel Gibson, as his son, and Lydie Denier as his fiancée, reminiscent of the late Romy Schneider. The story is a loose hodge-podge of *The Bride of Frankenstein* and *Oedipus Rex*, where both father and son, Andrew and Thomas Wells, do battle for Thomas's fiancée, Marie, who ironically of course resembles Andrew's late wife.

In true Agatha Christie tradition, there are a lot of unanswered questions and holes to be filled in right off the bat, keeping the audience on their toes. Apparently both Thomas and Marie have plans to knock off Andrew in order to inherit the fortune left by Andrew's ailing father-in-law (played by your favourite Martian, Ray Walston). The problem, of course, is that no one is quite sure whether Gramps will leave the money to Andrew, already a wealthy neurosurgeon, or to Thomas, the gallivanting playboy grandson.

And so the manipulation commences, with Marie being alternately attracted by both father and son's displays of virility, and repulsed by their warped sense of humour.

However, there is a singular flaw in the pacing of the script, as there is little time allowed for building suspense. Andrew and Thomas throw sexual puns back and forth at one another with the regularity of a Mae West, so that once a frightening effect is finally presented, its impact is, shall we say, somewhat subdued. For a good portion of the film, there is a deliberate ambiguity as to the intentions and integrity of the characters involved. Now if only we can be allowed to empathize with them a bit, we will accordingly be expected to believe in and

Jean Pierre Lefebvre's La boîte à soleil/ The Box of Sun

Part experimental feature, part children's film, part formal essay and part pure whimsy, *The Box of Sun* presents us with all sorts of problems. The first is that there is no dialogue.

The second is that the sombre, primitivist soundtrack seems to repeat the same endless interval. The third is the uneasy animation that interrupts the shots of post-industrial urban decay. The fourth and most important, is the splintered dramatic sequences consisting of a group of children wandering through grey forests attempting to capture, and then unleash upon the world, the box of sun of the title.

Lefebvre, whose importance to the Canadian cinema cannot be underestimated (the 1981 Critic's Award at Cannes for *Les Fleurs Sauvages* amongst others), has presented us with a challenge with his latest film: changing and/or ignoring the accepted notions of film grammar. The necessary accelerated plot development of the last few years, so essential for the wide audience that Canadian film has been reaching lately, is nowhere to be found in *The Box of Sun*. Instead, Lefebvre gives us Arsinee Khanjian (*Family Viewing*) wandering around concrete highway interchanges in a blond wig like Monica Vitti in Antonioni's *The Red Desert*. Bushes have been painted onto the concrete supports like spindly ghosts of the ones that



Kevin Hicks and Jan Rubes share a warped sense of humour (among other things) in *Blood Relations*

identify with their ensuing course of action. But after listening to the continual drivel coming out of their mouths, this seldom happens.

It is no surprise, then, that the most effective segments of *Blood Relations* are Marie's dream sequences of Andrew and Thomas lusting after her. They are skilfully directed with an effective distortion of both the voices and motions of the actors. Towards the end of the film, when Marie is running down a corridor into Andrew's secret operating room, you are genuinely startled to find out that this is no dream sequence. At this point, the film finally delivers the goods, only to end in a madcap, free-reined barrage of lurid and grisly twists and counter-twists, which conveniently tie all the loose ends together, and leave the audience chuckling merrily along. Which left me with the thought that making a horror film without scaring anyone, is like making a porn film where everyone keeps their clothes on.

Suffice to say, Campbell & Co. could conceivably have had a cult classic on their hands if they had done the whole thing in the same manner the dream sequences were shot; i.e. with a deliberate distortion of both the actors' movement and dialogue, which would then only enhance the sense of discomposure. One ultimately has to break away from safe territory in order to establish a unique approach to a particular format. Although clichéd, the actors are well cast and Dr. Wells' sprawling mansion makes a suitable neogothic locale.

So, if you're in the mood for a quasi-thriller/comedy/suspense/horror experience, be sure to have all your appropriate emotional responses kept on hold. And don't worry about not getting too excited. You're not expected to.

J.D. Stewart •

BLOOD RELATIONS *exec. p.* Syd Cappe *p.* Nicolas Stiliadis *assoc. p.* George Flak *d.* Graeme Campbell *d.o.p.* Rھےft Morita *sc.* Stephen Saylor *ed.* Michael McMahon *mus.* Mychael Danna *art d.* Gina Hamilton *cast* Anne Sketchly *p. min.* Paco Alvarez *1st. a.d.* John Bradshaw *1st. asst. cam.*

Mark Hoffman *2nd asst. cam.* Patrick Williams *3rd. asst. cam.* Cathy McDonald *addn. cam.* Paul Mitchnick, Stephen Gelder *key grip* Cynthia Barlow *best boy* John Wilcox *grip* Dave Martin *gaffer* John Biggar *best boy* Chris Little *3rd gaffer* Mark Currie *sd. rec.* Ao Loo boom Kevin Galbraith *asst. art d.* Mary Noble *set dresser* Theresa Buckley-Ayrea *props* Jeff Mawle *loc. /unit man.* Doug Brisebois *ward.* Sharon Fedoruk, Michael Austin *hair* Debra Johnson, Elizabeth Engel *makeup* Lisa Rankine *sp. fx. makeup* Gianico Pretto *sp. fx.* Brock Jolliffe *cont.* Stephanie Rossel *2nd. a.d.* Bruce Speyer *3rd. a.d.* Rob Costigan *prod. coord.* Alice O'Neil *prod. sec.* Deborah Leblanc *stunts* TJ Scott *stunts team craft service* Jim Murrin *transport* Jackson C. Boyd *p.a.* /*s/drivers* Mike Dryden, Geoff Murrin, Caroline Gee, *p.a.* Jackie Lee *art dept. p.a.* Angela Thomas *cat wrangler* Jane Conway *stills photo* Robert Stamenov *post-p. sup.* George Vukojevic *1st. asst. ed.* Ellen Heine *asst. eds.* Marvin Lawrence, Dean Richards *wiancko.* Fiona Patterson, Benny Van Velsen, Craig Baril *sup. sd. ed.* Stephen Withrow *dialogue eds.* Gregory Glynn, Michael Werth, Josephine Massarella, Arnie Stewart *sd. fx. ed.* Timothy Nolan Roberts, Marvin Lawrence *asst.* Dean Richards *wiancko 1st. asst. sd. ed.* Benny Van Velsen, Shan Barr *asst. sd. ed.* Fiona Patterson, Paul Douglas *trainee* Gary Fluxgold *Foley ed.* Andy Malcolm *rerecording* Film House *mixer* Tony Van Den Akker, Marvin Burns. *l.p.* Jan Rubes, Lydie Denier, Kevin Hicks, Lynne Adams, Stephen Saylor, Sam Malkin, Ray Walston, Joe Rahonick, David Mackay, Marilyn Haskell. Produced by SC Entertainment Corporation.

Martyn Burke's Witnesses

"Oh Gods, from the venom of the cobra, the teeth of the tiger, and the vengeance of the Afghan, deliver us."

— Old Hindu saying

In 1980, Canadian journalist Arthur Kent wondered if the Soviets were at a loss to crush the Afghan resistance from the rough mountain slopes and valleys, despite their superior firepower and trained military personnel. Kent's film, *Afghanistan Spring (Fighting With Faith)*, ended with the Mujahideen (the resistance) saying, "We are patient. We must fight and trust that our holy war will be

won." After the Soviet invasion in 1979, Afghans mounted a guerrilla war, which, contrary to all expectations, culminated in the eventual withdrawal of Russian troops nearly nine years later. Unlike Vietnam, the *jihād*, or holy war, remained largely uncovered by the press.

Martyn Burke's *Witnesses* attempts to rectify these gaps in information. What emerges is a portrait of a country and its people as seen through the eyes of various French, British, and American volunteers and correspondents. As well, deserters from the Soviet army tell of their mounting disillusionment and horror when faced with atrocities perpetrated by their own troops upon the Afghans. The top leaders of the Mujahideen speak of the tactical maneuvers used to gain advantage over Soviet strongholds. In most cases, the interviews are intercut with footage showing the speakers' involvement in the Afghan struggle, whether it be giving medical aid, teaching, or preparing to go into battle.

One of the most well-known Mujahideen commanders, Ahmad Shah Massoud, known as the "Lion of the Panjshir", prepares his men in one sequence to capture the depot of Narin near

the capital of Kabul. The tactics he used in 1986, marked a change in fighting strategy. Until then, the typical methods used were quick ambushes. Massoud now decided to launch a large-scale attack against this key position. The ultimately successful battle plan is outlined with the aid of graphics. Combat footage combined with the dispassionate narration doesn't minimize the impact of seeing the tape distort suddenly, as a voice relates that the Afghan cameraman, who filmed the sequence, was at that moment killed instantly as "a bullet went into the camera, a videotape, and into his head..."

Director Burke places his "witnesses" against a simple background in the interview sequences. Their Western clothing in this staging contrasts sharply with their physical presence in the Afghan landscape where they wear the clothing of the country. These are individuals who have placed their lives at the service of the Afghan people in their war of liberation. Afghanistan is a hard country without an overabundance of amenities emanating from its village economy. Michael Barry, a former Princeton scholar, who became involved in Afghanistan says, "The most



Director Martyn Burke in Peshawar on the Afghan/Pakistan border