

Film Reviews

Atom Egoyan's Speaking Parts

With his third film, *Speaking Parts*, Atom Egoyan continues his exploration of memory, family, and technology. The landscape is becoming familiar: the video images, the alienated hero, the domineering patriarch, the bewildered feminine, the highly stylized performances. This time, however, technique is more assured; the vision denser, bleaker, and at times funnier.

Clara (Gabrielle Rose), university professor and writer, sits in a trance in front of a monitor in a video mausoleum grasping at images of her dead brother. Lance (Michael McManus) moves in a semi-catatonic state from room to room in a luxury hotel changing sheets. Lisa (Arsinée Khanjian), sorts laundry in the hotel basement; she is abstracted, dissociated from her tasks and environment. The dance begins as austere as an intricate Noh drama, in which gestures and silence delineate the boundaries of human communication. Here, however, video cuts a technological swath across the human, exposing, like an unhealed sore, memory and truth. When the body is stripped of skin, we find, not flesh or blood, but video images.

Lance waits for his chance at a speaking part, and until that chance comes, he is, for the most part, silent. Lisa waits for Lance to return her unrequited love and until then watches videos of B-movies in which Lance appears as an extra. Clara checks into the hotel where Lance and Lisa work, local production headquarters for the film she has written about her brother's sacrifice (he died giving her a lung). In a hotel meeting room, she confers with the distant Producer (David Hemblen) through a video link. Lance leaves his picture and resumé in Clara's room and carries on with his job, which includes sexual services for lonely female guests, arranged by the hotel housekeeper. Despite her sex, the housekeeper plays the role of local patriarch, while the Producer, a grander Big Brother, murmurs reassuring words and commands from the giant monitor.

At the video shop, Eddy (Tony Nardi) tells Lisa that his work includes recording events like orgies and weddings. Lance provides yeoman's service to the hotel guest in room 106, and repeats it for Clara after she auditions him. Lance gets the part, his first speaking part, while Clara is being eased out of the picture, erased and mutilated by the Producer, who rewrites history by changing the script. In an effort to save her story, Clara goes on location and waits, like Kafka's K, to meet with the Producer who is never accessible. The video link that served the purposes of patriarchal control becomes the instrument of Clara's and Lance's illicit sexual



Michael McManus as Lance

liaison. Illicit because of the electronic media's usurpation of the sexual; and illicit because of the essentially incestuous nature of Clara's relationship to Lance, who has become her brother's surrogate.

The film is particularly successful in maintaining the balance between the Lance-Clara story and the Lisa-Eddy one; moving effortlessly from one to the other, making each the obverse of the other.

In one of the funniest scenes in the film, Lisa operates Eddy's second camera at a wedding, driving the Barbie bride to tears and the Ken groom to aggression with the intensity of her video questioning about the nature of love. The enigma of love is a hidden theme in the film. Clara's brother loved her sister to the point of sacrificing a lung and then a life for her; she loves him and writes a film in homage to his sacrifice, and extends that love to his lookalike Lance. Lisa defines herself through her love for Lance. For both women, the loved one escapes them and is recaptured only in video. In room 106, an unknown woman kills herself for love of Lance. Presumably, she didn't have the consolation of video.

The men, however, love no one. Eddy records impassively; orgies and weddings are alike to him. The Producer is a controller of images. "Do you know who I am? If you watched television, you watched my shows," he tells Lance in an outburst of self-definition whose boundaries include all who have consumed his images. Lance, with his bisexual looks, stands poised and paralyzed between female and male. He neither watches nor makes images. He waits to be assigned his speaking part.

Clara, desperate that the film remain true to

the story, begs Lance to do something. But Lance can only keep his speaking part if he remains silent. Lisa is silent about Lance's connection to the death in room 106, despite having seen him emerge from that room. Clara retreats to the video mausoleum; Lisa to her room with another Lance video, while Lance readies himself for the first scene in his speaking part: a talk show whose host is played by the Producer, and whose topic is organ transplants. In a crescendo of rising tension, the film cuts from Lance to Clara to Lisa who, under the pressure of unresolved emotions, begin to video-hallucinate. The crescendo ends in the final explosive moment when Lance shouts no to his speaking part and the patriarchal lie.

In *Speaking Parts*, Egoyan has married a concern with the weight of the image to the weight of the word. Speech is fragmented and rudimentary; the characters speak in parts, compared to the sophistication of the video imagery. Speech, which holds out the promise of communication, is the medium of deceit; whereas video is often the channel of truth. The Producer tells Clara he respects her, that the story is special. But his video face immediately tells us a different story.

It is through their video hallucinations that Lance and Lisa begin to establish what is true or right, and video also serves the function of memory. In *Family Viewing*, it was the archive of the family, those images which in linking one to the past, kept one human. In *Speaking Parts*, the memory of the brother is preserved in video and reminds Clara and us of what is true against the lies of the Producer. But video can also be corruptive and expressive of patriarchal power relationships, particularly as used by the

Producer to control Clara and the film.

A cold film, *Speaking Parts* eschews audience involvement for more intellectual pleasures: an intricate construct within a finely balanced structure. In the confines of the rigorous stylization, the actors rarely strike a false note. Arsinée Khanjian brings to the screen a sweet innocence, which is particularly effective in her bewildered search for love; while David Hemblen is superb as the monstrous patriarch whose images dominate the given universe.

Tom Perlmutter •

SPEAKING PARTS p. Ego Film Arts w./d. Atom Egoyan d.o.p. Paul Sarossy m. Mycheal Dana art d. Linda Del Rosario ed. Bruce McDonald sd. ed. Steven Munro sc. ed. Allen Bell line p./p.m. Camelia Frieberg exec. p. (Europe) Don Ranvaud 1st asst. d. David Webb 2nd asst. d. Cynthia Gillespie 3rd asst. d. Paul Smith p. lawyer Martin Kryz p. co-ord. Bill Sweetman p. acc. Maria Pimentel asst. art d. Richard Paris asst. to art d. Sandra Smolski ward. co-ord. Maureen Del Degan hair Moira Verwijck m-up art. Nicole Demers set dec. § props Theresa Santandrea-Cull asst. set dec. Gavin Coford asst. ward. Robert Fenwick set § prop. const. Richard Paris asst. set const. Gavin Coford scenic paint. Jason Davis wig des. Cindy Emery gaff. David Owen best boy Tony Ramsey key grip Cynthia Barlow asst. grip David Patrick 1st asst. cam. David Plank 2nd asst. cam. Paul Boucher sd. rec. John Megill boom Peter Melnychuk sc. sup. Monika Gagnon stills Johnnie Eisen 24 frame vid. op. Cliff Lopes vid. co-ord. Bill Sweetman d. obs. Jordan Merkur loc. mgr. Ruth Mandel cast co-ord. Rose Gutierrez extras cast. Glen Schultz, Scott Mansfield p.a. Naomi Boxer craft Avant Gout, Heather McMillan art dept. p.a. Melinda Hector, Rick Conroy, James Butfin, Beth Patrick, John Wojkowski co-ed. Atom Egoyan dir. ed. Micheal Werth 1st asst. ed. David Trevis 2nd asst. ed. Kim Roseborough Foley art. Steve Munro re-rec. mix. Daniel Pellenin, Film House title Metamedia film timer Chris Hinton film proc. Medallion Film, Video ltd. l.p. Micheal McManus, Arsinée Khanjian, Gabrielle Rose, Tony Nardi, David Hemblen, Patricia Collins, Gerard Parkes, Jackie Samuda, Peter Krantz, Frank Tata, Patrick Tierney, Robert Dodds, Leslek Lis, Sharon Corder, David MacKay.

William D. MacGillivray's
The Vacant Lot
and
Bruce McDonald's
Roadkill

Goodness!!! Gracious!!! Great balls of fire!!! Two Canadian rock and roll flicks were unspooled during the most recent edition of the Toronto Festival of Festivals. One of them, Bruce McDonald's *Roadkill*, blasts across the silver screen like some insane cross between *Eraserhead*, *This Is Spinal Tap* and *Rock N' Roll High School*, while the other, William (Life Classes) MacGillivray's *The Vacant Lot*, plods its way to celluloid immortality alongside such earnest, but definitely unhip, cinematic song-fests as Neil Diamond's *The Jazz Singer*.

While MacGillivray's film means well, McDonald's picture means very little (and appears to be gloriously proud of that fact). *Roadkill* is hilarious, raunchy, and boozy - it's endowed with a crassly-winning, up-yours mentality that's sadly lacking in most Canadian cinema (and even more sadly lacking in *The Vacant Lot*). In a nutshell, *Roadkill* is rock n' roll. *The Vacant Lot* pretends to be rock n' roll.

The latter movie tells the mid-life tale of David (Grant Fullerton, in embarrassingly stiff form), a 40-ish musician who befriends the 17-year-old Trudi (Trudi Petersen, an actress who is not without screen presence, but is saddled with an incredibly dull role), a choir-singing cherub who finds herself playing with "The Vacant Lot," a feminist punk band. At first, their relationship is strictly platonic; David is swept away by Trudi's (apparent) talent, (supposed) spunkiness and (undeniable) beauty, while Trudi finds a combination of mentor and father figure in the old rocker.

Trudi's dad, you see, was once a talented musician who bugged off in search of fame and fortune, only to become a pathetic alcoholic living on past (and not all that glorious) glories. David - unlike Dad - is not only talented, but is blessed with such "New Man" qualities as sensitivity, wit, and imagination. Dave's idea of a good time is driving out into the middle of airfields to watch jets take off and make landings. The airplanes, you see, symbolize flight and freedom. It's also a great way to pick up naive teenage girls. Eventually, you see, the two songbirds become lovebirds.

Ain't life sweet?

On the plus side of this celluloid mass of creaky conservatism, *The Vacant Lot* is endowed with an earnestness which is - at the very least - consistent. All the way through the film,



David and Trudi playing at rock 'n' roll

MacGillivray's intentions seem fuzzy, but the picture keeps nagging at you to like it. And, once in a while, the picture actually manages to squeeze out something that isn't contrived, maudlin or unintentionally humorous (although one thanks the good lord for the latter in this utterly humorless exercise).

For example, the scene in which Trudi confronts her babbling father is - in and of itself - rather well written and nicely performed. The scene actually comes close to being quite moving. But in the final analysis, these few moments only work out of context since the rest of the film is so sadly overwritten/underwritten and underplayed. Mainly, the problem here is that *The Vacant Lot* is so square. It appears to have absolutely no feel for the life rhythms of the rock world. Most of the musical numbers resemble an episode of *The Tommy Hunter Show*, rather than the music of a boozy, aggressive basement band gone semi-pro.

Ironically, one of the best things about *The Vacant Lot*, is the very thing that MacGillivray and his central character, David, seem to dislike. The leader of the feminist punk band, Patti Precious (a deliciously lurid and loudmouthed performance from Barbara Nicholson) appears to represent - at least to David - everything that's wrongheaded about the alternative music scene. In the context of all the dreariness and the grinding monotony of David's music, Patti Precious and her precocious self-importance are actually refreshing.

Another gem amidst the mire is Patti's lyrics. The words that she belts out are delightfully and (thank Goodness!!!) intentionally dreadful.

According to the film's press package, MacGillivray's production company, Picture Plant, prides itself on generating artist-driven product that is "fiercely independent". *The Vacant Lot* is fiercely independent, all right - fiercely independent from anything resembling fierce independence. The boys over at CBC-Drama should just love this one.

Roadkill, on the other hand, is everything *The Vacant Lot* isn't. Working with a kamikaze

shooting schedule and a minuscule budget, director Bruce McDonald has fashioned a rip-snorting odyssey through rock n' roll Hell, a hell that could only be Northern Ontario.

Yeehah!!! Regionalism with universal appeal. *Roadkill* follows the adventures of Ramona (the exquisite Valerie Buhagiar), a simpy, zombie-like underling of a sleaze-ball booking agent. Ramona has been dispatched to the wilds of Northern Ontario to put a stop to a renegade rock band that's gone completely apeshit while on tour. On the way, she encounters a variety of nutbars: a roadie-turned-cabbie who's infused with more hallucinogens than William Burroughs and Timothy Leary combined, a whacked-out filmmaker (McDonald himself), and a young man who dreams of being a successful serial killer. As well, we're treated to a superb rock score and a couple of delightful cameo appearances by the likes of Nash the Slash and Joey Ramone.

Shot in superb, high-contrast black and white, *Roadkill* manages to superbly capture everything that's endearing, sleazy, and moronic about the wonderful world of rock n' roll. Beginning with a riotously funny spoof of homage to those notorious Canadian Wildlife Service PSAs, and ending with a glorious and terrifying display of mass murder, *Roadkill* is yet another example of the sort of film which will continue to put Canada on the map. Just as *The Vacant Lot* represents the dry, humorless aspect of our country's popular culture, *Roadkill* digs beneath Canada's underbelly to reveal our sense of obsessive alienation, and our incredibly (and delightfully) perverse sense of humor.

In *Roadkill*, sickness rules - and we're all better off for it.

Greg Klymkiv •

THE VACANT LOT p. Terry Greenlaw d./sc. William D. MacGillivray d.o.p. Lionel Simmons mus. dir. Scott MacMillan art d. Angela Murphy loc. sd mix. Jim Rillie ed. Angela Baker, Bill MacGillivray p. mgr. Terry Greenlaw 1st. a. d. Paul Pope asst. p. mgr. Robin Sarafinchan loc. mgr. Gary Swim cont. Grant Innes 2nd a. d. Barry Nichols 3rd.



Russell (Don McKellar) and Ramona (Valeria Buhagiar)

a. d. Evangelo Kioussis asst. p. Cari Green p. sec. Paula McNeil unit pub. Heather Leveque key props Monique Desnoyers props Stephen Arnold set dressers Reisa Muir, Darlene Sheils, Heidi Haines cost. des. Marilyn Richardson makeup Cathy O'Connell, Paulette Cable, Gloria Glacier boom Alex Salter 1st. asst. cam. Dominique Gusset 2nd. asst. cam. James Lewis stills/grip Dan Callis 2nd cam op. Nigel Markham gaffer Dean Brousseau best boy David Coole gen. op. James Nicholson, Jan Meyerowitz, Chuck Lapp key grip Raymond Lamy grip Chuck Clark carpenters Claude Goulet, Ged Clarke, Mark Larkin, Roberto Tarlo, Cheryl Newman p. a. Paul Broadbent, Tim Woolner art dept. contr. Martha Reynolds craft. Joelle Desy sc. cons. Jean Pierre Levebvre asst. ed. David Middleton, Jane Porter sup. sd. ed. Alex Salter dial. ed. Angela Baker asst. sd. ed. Grant Innes mus. ed. Bill MacGillivray mus. eng. Harold Tstinas, Donnie Chapman, Alfred Larter. l. p. Trudi Peterson, Grant Fullerton, Barbara Nicholson, Rick Mercer, Caitlyn Colquhoun, Cheryl Reid, Tara Wilde, Heidi Petersen. A Picture Plant Production, with the participation of Telefilm Canada, and the Province of Nova Scotia.

ROADKILL exec. p. Mr. Shack p. Bruce McDonald, Colin Brunton assoc. p. Keith Michael Bates d. Bruce McDonald sc. Don McKellar story Bruce McDonald d. o. p. Miroslaw Baszak art d. Geoff Murrin ed. Mike Munn sd. des. Steve Munro m. co-ord. Peter McFadzean or. m. score Nash the Slash st. ed. Allan Magee p. acc. Maria Pimentel asst. art d. Jim Murrin ward. Kate Healey gaff. David Healey, Johnny Askwith 1st asst. cam. Lilita Tannis sd. rec. Herwig Gayer stills Chris Buck extras cast. Susan Hart p. a. Bruno Bryniarski, Michelle Bellerose, Alexandra Gill, Geoff Hayes, Jane Shmelzer, Steve Houle, Amy Bodman, David Hoyle, David Bates p. co-ord. Cynthia Roberts guest star asst. d. Ron Repke trans. co-ord. Evan Siegel sp. fx. Brock Joliffe sharpshooter Dr. James McDonald st. board art. Dr. Chris Minz iconography Kevan Buss m-up cons. Nicole Demers asst. ed. Stephanie Duncan, David Trevis, John Dowsett Foley art. Sid Lieberman sd. mix. Daniel Pellerin titles & anim. Metamedia f. timer Robert Boric f. proc. Film House f. Kodak equipm. Production Services comp. guaranter Motion Picture Guarantors, Don Haig/FilmArts inc. Canada Council, Ontario Art Council, OFDC, Mr. Shack thanks to: Robert Shoub, Bananazz, Inco, Jim & Cathy McDonald, Joe Quan, Dianne Siegel, The Catholic Church, Manny's Gaz Bar, LIFT, Our Furry Friends, Mr Shack's #1 Groupie Heather Davis, Michelle Pinaud sp. thanks to: Norman Jewison, Louise Clark, Atom Egoyan, Neal Arbick, A Neon Rome l. p. Valerie Buhagiar, Gerry Quigley, Larry Hudson, Bruce McDonald, Shaun Bowring, Don McKellar, Mark Tarantino, Bob, Peter Morlea, Patricia Sims, Nazareno Buhagiar, Giovanna Buhagiar, Glen McLaren, Ellen Dean, Earl Pastko, Dean Richards, Jim Millan, Bruce Wilson, Herwig Gayer, Namir Khan, Evan Siegel, Kate Healey, Casey Sebert, Tim Sebert, Dr. Chris Minz, Leanne Haze, The Sargent Family, The Leslie Spit Tree-O, Nash the Slash, Dave Williams, Joey Harden, Martin Waxman, Sidney Stoyan, Donald Nijboer, Colin Brunton, Joey Ramone, Joanie Noorderover.

Robert Favreau's
Portion d'éternité

I went to see *Portion d'éternité* at its premiere at the 13th Montreal World Film Festival, and just managed to slip into the last seat. Even Lise Bacon, Quebec's Minister of Culture, was there to see the only Canadian feature selected for the official competition. I expected to be disappointed. A movie about artificial insemination did not seem exciting. But, on the whole, I was pleasantly surprised. After all those "Old World" films, I felt like I was back in the 20th century. The audience must have liked the film as well, for it won the Stella Artois Award as most popular Canadian film.

Still, I don't know if the audience and I liked the same things about this film. After all, Danielle Proulx won the Best Actress Award, while I preferred Patricia Nolin who played Hélène. But then, I preferred that part of the movie to the passages in which Danielle Proulx plays Marie. For in fact, *Portion d'éternité* is almost two films – a hybrid genre comprised of a social melodrama and a science-fiction cum horror movie with a documentary base. I've always preferred horror movies to social dramas, so I admit that I am biased. The sight of ordinary people wrestling with their not so ordinary problems makes me want to get up and go for a walk. This section of the film has all the earmarks of a made-for-TV movie; it's shot in a television style, all seamless realism and lots of close-ups.

Marie and her husband, Pierre (Marc Messier), want a child (at least, Marie wants one desperately, Pierre seems cooler to the idea), but they can't conceive. Off they go to a fertility clinic for numerous tests to see which one is infertile. There is much emotional upset about this, particularly on Pierre's side when he finds out that he's going to have to accept his wife's eggs being fertilized by another man's sperm. You can imagine the tears and the jokes. This, in part, is what's wrong with this section of the film. One can see Robert Favreau, who also wrote the script, sitting around and imagining a typical couple's reactions to this situation, and he seems to have included all the possible variations.

It's obvious that Favreau has not lived/felt the situation. And it is to Danielle Proulx's credit that she does have empathy for the character and does manage to bring her to life through her emotional acting. But it is the situation that is at the center of this part of the film and not the characters. Like most TV movies and programs, this story is built around a problem which disrupts the smooth flow of family life. The situation can be dramatic or comic and it is often both. And like most TV programs, this part of the film mixes comedy and pathos in equal

degree. Each dramatic scene is ended by a line guaranteed to make the audience laugh. And it does; they loved it. Melodrama has been around since the 19th century, and the trials and tribulations of the young lovers in this type of drama offer the audience heightened emotions which are relieved by laughter.

In a true melodrama, however, there has to be a villain: enter the science-fiction cum horror movie. The head of the infertility clinic is a good-looking, older man, called Antoine, played by Paul Savoie. Now, the thing is that we are not so sure whether Antoine is a villain or not. This remains a mystery until the very end of the film and helps to make this part quite interesting.

The clinic itself is also quite fascinating, with its cold, technological environment and its dabbling in the mysteries of the universe. For, after all, an infertility clinic deals with the mysterious process of creation. This fact is brought home to the audience with beautiful, huge close-ups of embryos and fetuses seen through a microscope. It did remind me a bit of Godard's *Je vous salue Marie* here, but only a little bit. Actually, this part is more like *Dr. Frankenstein* minus his monster. (Unless the monster is what gets created inside Marie's womb.) There is a terrific scene in which the happy couple are looking at a video-scan of her finally fertile womb and they discover that they have twins. "Oh great, twins!" says Marie, "they'll never be lonely." Then the doctor moves the scanner and sees three, oh no, four babies. The worst is that two will have to be eliminated, and that Marie cannot face.

But Antoine is a truly dedicated researcher and he has even worse monsters up his sleeve. Out of one embryo, he can make 64 identical twins. This means that a cancer patient could cure himself with reproductions from his own organs – that one could live almost forever. He promises that we will be able to create human

beings outside of a woman's body and program them according to our desires. Dr. Frankenstein played God but created a monster. Our own fear of the ever increasing power of science, both as a creative and a destructive force, is bound up with the fear of the punishment that humans may suffer for this kind of hubris. This hubris of the rational mind trying to manipulate the forces of life is also the subject of films by another Canadian – David Cronenberg. But, whereas Cronenberg's scientists are truly villainous, there is a priest-like aspect to Antoine that evokes the idea of science as religion.

However, the true parallel drawn in this film is between the scientist and the artist. Pierre is a modern-day artist; he works with photography and collage and creates ads. His father is an old-fashioned artist – a sculptor – who works in stone, carving gravestones. However, once upon a time, he sculpted wood (living matter) and studied with Borduas and Riopelle. Much to his dismay, he had to give this up to support his wife and family.

And so, as in most Québécois films, the snake in the garden ends up being money, and the real villain is the businessman who has become Antoine's boss and who works for Technogène. (I wonder if a film made in Toronto would posit money as the ultimate evil?) Technogène ends up selling human embryos on the New York stock market and no one bats an eyelash. But by this time Antoine has quit the company. It is this ethical side to his character that makes Antoine likeable. It helps too that Hélène, the most intelligent and sympathetic female character in the film (played by Patricia Nolin with understated grace) falls in love with Antoine while investigating the case for the government.

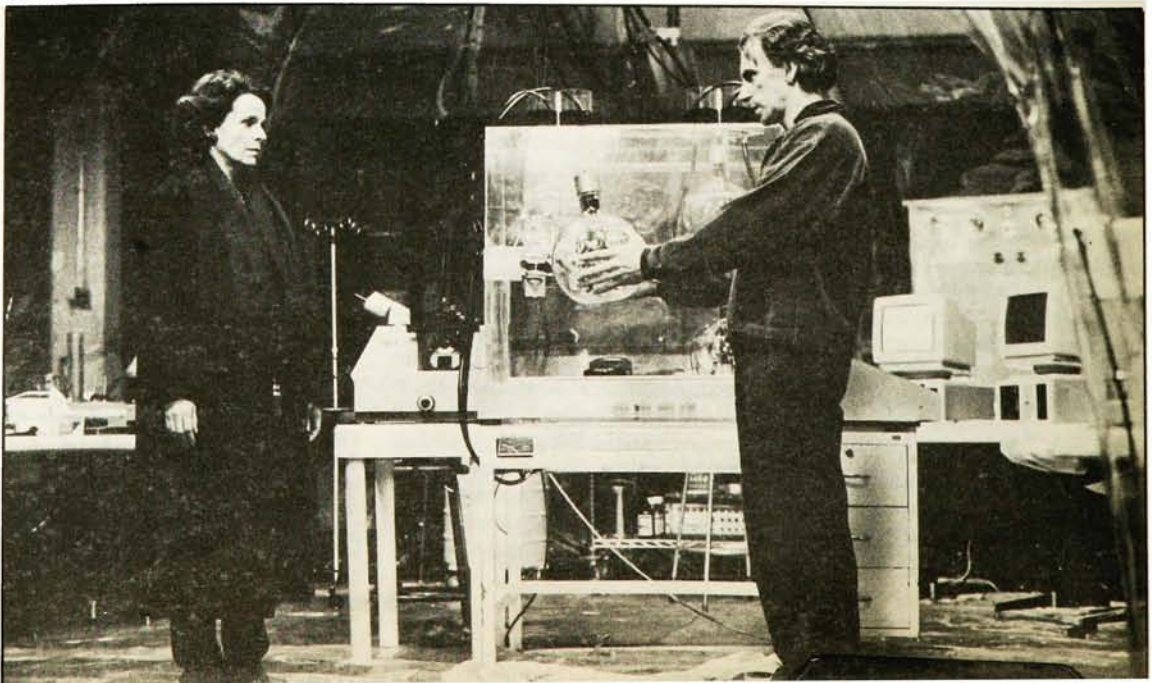
Nor is Antoine entirely blameless either. He acknowledges using a fertility drug that could give a woman cervical cancer. But, as an artist / magician playing with the forces of life, he is quite fascinating. And the final image of

him walking like a trapeze artist on a narrow steel bar that overhangs a raging torrent, is a fitting end to the movie.

Mary Alemany-Galway ●

PORTION D'ÉTERNITÉ *del. p.* Monique Létourneau *ass. p.* Doris Girard *exec. p.* Jean-Roch Marcotte *sc. Dial. Id.* Robert Favreau *d.o.p.* Guy Dufaux *art d.* Vianney Gauthier *photo ed.* Pierre Guimond *cost.* Huguette Gagné *cast.* Emmanuelle Beaugrand-Champagne *sd.* Serge Beauchemin, Claude Beaugrand, Miriam Poirier *script-girl* Marie La Haye *1st asst. d.* Louis-Philippe Rochon *p. mgr.* Muriel Lizé *ed.* Hélène Girard *m.* Marie Bernard *p.* Marie-Andrée Vinet *2nd asst. d.* Emmanuelle Beaugrand-Champagne *1st cam. asst.* Nathalie Moliavko-Visotsky *2nd cam. asst.* Sylvaine Dufaux *stills* Bertrand Carrière *boom* Jean-Guy Bergeron *hd. elec.* Normand Viau *elec.* Claude Fortier, Robert Auclair *hd. op.* Serge Grenier *op.* Grégoire Schmidt *set dec.* Jean Kazemirchuk, Anne Galéa, André Chamberland *prop. mast.* Daniel Huysmans *asst. to prop. mast.* Anne Grandbois *cost. asst.* Lyse Pomerleau *m-up* Brigitte McCaughy *gen. co-ord.* Mario Nadeau *ext. co-ord.* François Fautoux *loc. scout.* Mona Medawar *p. adm.* Claire Lapointe *p. co-ord.* Nicole Hilaréguy *p. sec.* Jacqueline Marleau-Blouin *p.r.* Marielle Caron *NFB adm.* Monique Lavoie *NFB co-ord.* Sylvie Roy *p. acc.* Daniel Demers, Yves Rivard *p.a.* Catherine Faucher, Normand Fortin, Robert Packwood *craft* Yanne Poirier *driver* André Desrochers *asst. set dec.* Jean-François Pichette, Stéphane Côté, Louise-Anne Bouchard *carp.* Martin Leblanc, Gilbert Leblanc, Dino Larossa, André Villeneuve *sp. fx.* Jacques Godbout, Yvon Charbonneau *stunt* Peter Cox *stunt co-ord.* John Walsh *asst. ed.* Myriam Poirier *asst. sd. ed.* Diane Douville, Francine Poirier *sd. fx.* Lise Wedlock, Marie-Josée Vermette, Louis Hone *post-synch.* Diane Boucher, Marie-Claude Gagné, Paule Bélanger *sd. rec.* Paul Pagé, Sylvain Lefebvre, Ambroise Dufresne *m. mix.* Paul Pagé *mix.* Hans-Peter Strobl, Adrian Croll *neg. ed.* Claude Cardinal *titles* Serge Bouthillier *opt. fx.* Susan Gourley, Micheal Cleary *anim.* Pierre Hébert *scient. cons.* Jacques Testart *med. cons.* Dr. Alain Campbell *bot. cons.* Marie-Fleuriette Beaudoin *microphoto.* Jean-Pierre Ozil, Jacques Testart, Thierry Ozil, Bruno Lasalle *retro-proj.* Denis Gillson, Simon Leblanc, Richard O'Shaughnessy *l.p.* Danielle Proulx, Marc Messier, Patricia Nolin, Paul Savoie, Gilles Pelletier, Maryse Gagné, Raymond Clouthier, Joanne-Marie Tremblay, Daniel Gadouas, Hélène Mercier, Patricia Tulasne, Pierre Chagnon, Marie-Lou Dion, Roger Joubert, Jean-Bernard Côté, André Lacoste, Huguette Gervais, Luc Gouin, Sylvie Drapeau, Monique Chantrier-Hoffman, Benoit Lagrandeur, Alain Campbell, Jean-François Pichette, Marie-Andrée Corneille, Francine Guénette, Danielle Garneau, Manon Vallée, Josée Lacle, Suzanne Bonneau, Marie Cantin, Gaétan Côté, Julie Drolet, René Gagnon.

Patricia Nolin and Paul Savoie in *Portion d'éternité*



John N. Smith's
**Welcome
To Canada**

Earlier this year, Canada instituted a new refugee policy despite vociferous opposition by church and civil liberties groups. Designed to clear up an enormous backlog of refugee claimants, this legislation increased government powers of detention and deportation and represents a major step backwards from Canada's previous policy of universal access.

Given this political context, *Welcome to Canada*, focusing as it does on the sudden arrival of a group of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees off the coast of Newfoundland, might be expected to be a timely and informative addition to the debate. Unfortunately, though, the film ignores the political implications of the subject entirely and chooses to focus only on the human aspect. Despite the undeniable emotional power and integrity of the film, its central thesis – that Canadians should be more understanding of the plight of refugees – is weakened through an absence of political analysis.

Welcome to Canada is a fictional account of the encounter between members of an isolated Newfoundland community and the eight Tamil refugees they rescue, then shelter, before immigration officials arrive. The film chronicles the development of an understanding between the two groups as they learn about each others' religion, culture, and way of life. These scenes are intercut with footage of Sri Lanka, depicting the violence in that country which has led to the flight of over 100,000 of its citizens and the deaths of thousands of others.

In the tradition of the National Film Board's alternative dramas, *Welcome to Canada* was filmed on location (in Brigus South, a tiny Newfoundland town) with non-professional actors speaking improvised dialogue. Like director John N. Smith's two previous films in the genre, *Sitting in Limbo* (1986) and *Train of Dreams* (1987), *Welcome to Canada* has a strong documentary feel to it, reinforced by documentary-style camera work.

Although the film's plot superficially resembles two incidents which actually took place (the arrival of 155 Tamils off Newfoundland's coast in 1986 and the 1987 landing of 174 Sikhs in Nova Scotia), these events serve only as a point of departure. In fact, the movie carefully shies away from the controversies which followed these events, including the vicious public backlash against the refugees and (in the case of the Sikhs), the calling of an emergency session of Parliament. In doing so, *Welcome* fails to do justice to the complex issue it tackles.

Where the film does succeed is in its sensitive



Tamil refugees arrive in Newfoundland, in *Welcome to Canada*

portrayal of the Newfoundlanders and Tamils – their traditions, values, and the problems they face. In a series of low-key scenes, Smith's effort slowly builds up a picture of the Newfoundlanders' struggle to maintain their traditions despite the economic reality of a dying fishing industry. Similarly, the film portrays the Tamils' strong emotions as they try to cope with the death of one of their group, their sense of dislocation, and their uncertainty about their future in Canada.

Improvised dialogue, especially with non-professional actors, is a hit-or-miss affair, and in *Welcome to Canada*, the dialogue tends to be strained and didactic. But the magic of improvisation does sometimes work to the film's advantage, as in the scenes between a young Tamil man and Charlene, a young Newfoundland woman. These two seem to have developed a chemistry that adds to the film's realism. In another effective scene, a young girl earnestly attempts to teach a 12-year-old Tamil boy how to play checkers, failing to notice his bewildered expression. The performances of the Tamils, particularly those in the lead roles (Kasivisanathan and Kumaraselvay Karthigasoo), give one the impression that they are reliving their own experiences rather than acting.

Welcome to Canada gets its message across most effectively when it foregoes dialogue for images and music. The opening sequence, depicting the rescue of the Tamils from stormy waters and the help offered by the townspeople, communicates more about the townspeople's commitment than any of the later dialogue scenes. Similarly,

a scene portraying the Newfoundlanders at a birthday party quickly conveys their strong sense of community and tradition. Even the Sri Lankan footage, despite the fact that it is left unexplained, helps us understand the way of life the Tamils have left behind, as well as their reasons for leaving.

The film uses music – both Newfoundland and Tamil – in an extremely evocative way. A Newfoundland song about a fishing tragedy works in conjunction with footage of men repairing fish nets, underlining the danger that accompanies this way of life. Tamil music is used under the Sri Lankan footage to add to its emotional impact.

Welcome to Canada is strongest in its emotional appeal – its ability to gain the audience's sympathy for its characters. Who can help but feel for the Tamil man whose daughter has perished on the journey, and who desperately wants to arrange for her cremation in keeping with Hindu rituals?

How can one resist the warmheartedness of the Newfoundlanders who accept the Tamils unquestioningly and try their best to communicate despite language barriers? And how is it possible not to feel ennobled and uplifted in the church scene towards the end of the film, when Catholic Newfoundlanders and Tamil Hindus take turns worshipping?

It is difficult not to be moved by these scenes and the humanistic philosophy they communicate. But these emotions do not help us deal with the questions that are at the heart of the refugee issue. If Canadians are so welcoming, then why was there such a backlash after the

arrival of the Tamils in 1986 and the Sri Lankans in 1987? Why is it that Canada has institutionalized such a harsh policy towards refugees, after years of being relatively open? And why does this film – which seems to aim at increasing understanding of the situation of the refugees – back away from these questions at a time when they are crucial to the articulation of future refugee policy?

In the church scene towards the end of the film, the priest says "We pray that Canada will respond to their needs, see their tragic circumstances, and open its doors." Unfortunately, the film fails to tell us that these prayers may not be enough, and that only by coming face to face with all aspects of the issue, will anything change.

Anita Malhotra ●

WELCOME TO CANADA p. Sam Grana d. John N. Smith sc. John N. Smith, Sam Grana cam. op. David de Volpi, Roger Martin assoc. p. Paul Pope comm. relations/costumes Barbara Greene ed. rec. Jacques Drouin cf. John N. Smith, Sam Grana, Martial Ethier gaffer Roger Martin key grip Guy Remillard cam. assi. Dominique Gusset best boys Roy Holloway, Norman Bruff p. a. Wayne Baker, Gerard Hayes St-John's casting Ed Riche Tamil cast. Lois Siegel driver Leonard Power catering Gloria Bruff housekeepers Theresa Baker, Bernadette Hawkins hair Bernadette Hayes p. sec. Josephine Power l. p. (Tamils) Kasivisanathan Karthigasoo, Kumaraselvay Karthigasoo, Pathanjali Anand Prasad, Murugesu Sivanesan, Nirmalan Masilamany, Sinnakli Baskaran, Kumar Singam Nadarajah, Shanmuga Thayaparan, Beatrice Masilamany (Brigus South) Noreen Power, Brendan Foley, Madonna Hawkins, David Sullivan, Charlene Bruff, Des Walsh, Beverly Power, Peter Hawkins, Rosie Power, Ron Rowsell, Francis Power, Edward Baker, Joseph Hawkins, Clarence Hawkins, Lenny Power, Annette Clarke, Paul Pope. An NFB production.



Roberta Maxwell and Christopher Plummer in *Kingsgate*

Jack Darcus' *Kingsgate*

It becomes evident, while watching *Kingsgate*, that one is observing the work of a Canadian "master." Jack Darcus is a director whose unique vision is fine-tuned, whose mode of expression is honed to a particular perfection for the conveyance of a powerful message.

In *Kingsgate*, Darcus makes creative use of a sensibility generally found in English Canadian film drama – deadened sound, overly dramatic musical effects, and theatrically "realistic" acting, all used here to alternately chilling and sardonic effect.

Kingsgate grapples with familiar fare: alcoholism and troubled couples. Darcus, with a tremendous script, takes these subjects (difficult ones to explore with new insight) and spins webs of emotional blackmail over a whitewash of contemporary malaise and alienation. The effect is not only thought provoking and moving (no small feats) but filled with black humour and altogether unnerving.

Kingsgate has only two principal locations: a suburban home and a country estate, the only respite being the driveways, a veranda/yard, a country path, a motel room, a barn and a car. The result is an effective, claustrophobic atmosphere. All the scenes take place in either shelters or defined paths which lead to and from them. To go out into the fields or off to work is to disappear into a void, to become lost, unanchored.

There is something about *Kingsgate* that holds you, pulls you in close to the silences, forces you to listen and to watch. The dialogue is dense,

emotion packed and often cutting. It's a literate, finely detailed screenplay. It supports the intricacies of the powerfully stylized performances of an excellent ensemble cast.

Three couples' lives are interconnected by ties of kinship and intimacy. Their individual failings fester within unsuccessful relationships. Their behaviour is constrained and distorted. These men and women do not suffer the stresses of poverty, disability or disenfranchisement. These are privileged, cerebral, white middle-class heterosexuals drowning themselves in alcohol, confused communications and repressed, misdirected emotions. And despite their efforts to push away from each other, they each crave companionship, whatever its nature. Their world is a desperate one where even the cows are drunk.

Tom (Christopher Plummer) and Marlene (Roberta Maxwell) are the overblown patriarch and matriarch who are crushed by their own destructive routines. Both alcoholics, they tear at each other emotionally, then physically in a never-ending cycle of love-hate. Tom threatens Marlene with disloyalty – he's always got a younger woman on the go – an escape route when things get too hot at home, a scalding poker to thrust at his wife and stir up the flames of anguish. She vents sorrow, frustration, then anger, in tearful verbal outbursts and fits of vandalism against him. His response: running away again, always to come back.

In the shadow of this abusive rage is their adult daughter, Fee (Elizabeth Dancoes). Although now living on her own, she cannot quite bring herself to pull completely away from her parents. The family ties are too tight. And when the pot boils over, and the emotional guts begin to spill, she reaches for the bottle herself.

Ellis (Duncan Fraser), her boyfriend, the invited reluctant observer, is continually urged to plunge into the neurotic squabbles. He's

always planning to leave but never does; his continued presence alone involves him. The only non-drinking character, the others turn to him in their desperate drunkenness to try to express what each can't bring him/herself to express to his/her mate. A little soft on strength of character, Ellis is a seemingly "together" guy with hardly an angry bone in his body – the perfect type to be badgered. Going with the flow or operating out of sheer exasperation in situations he doesn't know how to deal with, the only trait Ellis has which colours him in any way other than passive and indecisive, is his reputation as a womanizer. However, we are left with the impression that this so-called womanizing is in effect a result of his inability to be involved in an honest, challenging relationship in the first place. Living off his tenuous reputation as a professor of literature, he has one expertise: the analysis of the work of his friend and idol, the prolific writer, Daniel Kingsgate.

Alan Scarfe's portrayal of Kingsgate is a *tour de force*. His every moment on the screen ripples with pent-up hostility and searing emotional pains. Kingsgate is a man whose cutting wit, bitter cynicism, destructive creative drive and alcoholism, fire a furnace that coals never cool. He smolders in his isolated country house and its surrounding expanses, about to burst into flame with the slightest gust of instigation.

With Kingsgate lives his wife, Brenda (Barbara March), also a writer, a victim of his psychological and sometimes physical abuse, who defends herself with alcohol and a running commentary on the angst that is their existence. Always wanting to escape but never acting upon the desire, she is mired in a mutually destructive relationship that has nowhere to go but down, then under.

The film has a fascinating way of alternating between high-pitched melodrama, black comedy and the edges of psychological horror. It is indeed "social horror," mirroring severe social disarray. With *Kingsgate*, Darcus offers up the dark side of a deadly farce.

Toby Zeldin •

KINGSGATE *w./p./d.* Jack Darcus *co-p./p. mgr.* Tom Braidwood *p. co-ord.* Penny Gibbs *ass. p.* Paul Mears *appr. p.* Jill Brett *1st asst. d.* Ty Haller *2nd asst. d.* Robert Lee *sc. asst.* Jessica Clothier *loc. mgr.* Dean Stoker *p. acc.* Judy Wolch *p. des.* Micheal Nemirski *asst. art d.* Lawrence Pevec *set dec.* Roger Dole *asst. set dec.* Dave Ball *prop. mast.* Neil McLeod *asst. prop. mast.* Dean Eiletsen *cost. des.* Christina McQuarrie *const. co-ord.* Clare Davis *hair* Nicki King *m-ny art.* Imelda Bain *d.o.p./op.* Doug McKay *1st asst. cam.* Joel Ransom *2nd asst. cam.* Gary Kennedy *trainee* Steve Black *stills* Bob Akester *gaff.* Jeff Upton *best boy* John Dekker *gummy op.* James Sallis *key grip* Fred Ransom *dolly grip* Gordon Tait *grip* Ron MacLeay *sd. mix.* Rob Young *boom* Don Brown *sup. ed.* Doris Dyck *asst. ed.* Patricia Lambkin *trans. co-ord.* Dave Anderson *driver capt.* Peter Huff *honeywagon driver* Keith Noble *driver* Elaine Barrett *sec.* Norm Chretien, Ken Meier *1st aid/craft* Jim Rankin *craft* Tana Tocher, Lisanne Collett, Lynda Hopkins *l.p.* Christopher Plummer, Roberta Maxwell, Duncan Fraser, Alan Scarfe, Barbara March, Elizabeth Dancoes.

Lois Siegel's *Stunt People*

Stunt People is a comic and steadily-paced documentary on Quebec's very own Fournier family, a four-generation stunt family whose career began in 1969 with their first feature, *Red*, directed by Gilles Carle. Siegel's film features a variety of action clips from the Fourniers' films, which include Marc-Andre Forcier's *Au Clair De La Lune*, Harold Greenberg and Claude Heroux's disaster picture *City On Fire*, John Dunning and Nicole Boisvert's *Blackout*, as well as David Cronenberg's *Rabid*, just to mention a few. In all, they have worked on over 200 features and commercials.

Also included are interviews with members of the Fournier family talking about how they got started in the business and problems finding babysitters for their children who tended to perform stunts around the house. An interesting insight is offered by one of the Fournier daughters regarding the implication of a woman doing a stunt "doubling" for a male actor – perhaps resulting in a crushed male ego.

Stunt demonstrations are introduced via animation titles that read "How to make a gunshot wound", and so on. An interview with director Larry Kent explaining a stunt for his film *Slavers* is effectively cross-cut with one of the Fourniers explaining their preparation for the same stunt. Kent was worried that the explosion of a Volkswagen wouldn't be big enough. The scene is then shown; believe me, it was big enough.

Although the film tends to bog down near the end with an extended excerpt from Ron Lee's *Country Roads*, it flows nicely overall and is an entertaining look at a family that enjoys falling



off buildings, smashing cars, and setting themselves on fire.

Jim Levesque •

STUNT PEOPLE *p.* Breakneck Productions *d.* Lois Siegel *cam.* Peter Benison *add. cam.* Daniel Villeneuve, Glen MacPherson, Andrew Nevard, Ron Hallis *asst. cam.* Christiane Guernon *m.* André Vincelli *sd.* Michel Charon, Lois Siegel, Delano, Jureidini, Albert Ohayon, Gaby Vadney, Don Cohen, Glen Hodgins *voices* Edgar Charlebois, Alexandra Innes, Margaret Monaghan *graph.* Dan Clark *stills* Lois Siegel, Claude Labrecque, Tom Robertson, Simon Lefebvre, Yves Belanger *p. a.* Hunt Hoe, Marcel Brassard, Mike Sadan, Mark Job *narr.* w. Kevin Tierney *narr. voice* Stan Asher *l. p.* the Fournier Family.

Robert Bergman's

A Whisper To A Scream

Usually like thriller/suspense films, especially if well done. Unfortunately this isn't the case with Robert Bergman's latest entry into the genre, *A Whisper To A Scream*. This low-budget/low-tech formula piece, "set against the backdrop of an artistic community," is nothing to write home about.

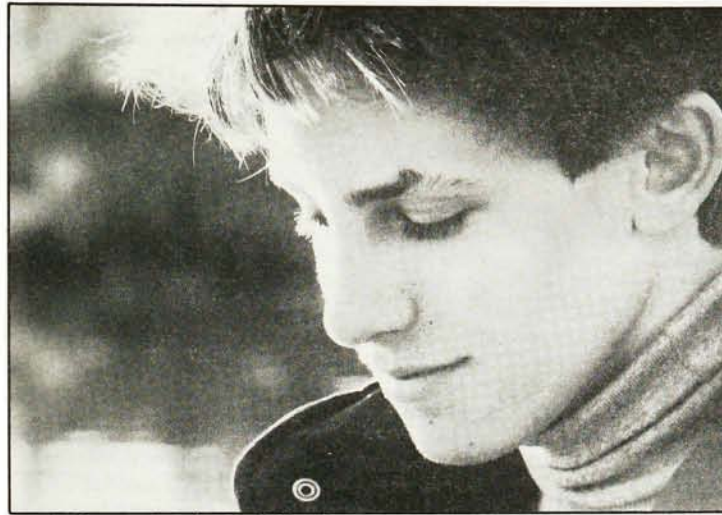
The basic plot revolves around Matt, a DJ/sound engineer/artist/maniac who murders semi-clad female performing artists who also sideline as sex phone girls at the same club - Whispers. Enter Gabrielle (Nadia Capone), an out-of-work actress who must resort to working as a sex phone girl at the club in order to support herself and her unsuccessful artist boyfriend Frank. Matt develops an obsession with Gabrielle after inadvertently witnessing her performance in an independent video as, believe it or not, an angel.

Conveniently, Matt also works at the club and begins calling Gabrielle in his quest for the right voice for his art. His art being capturing his victims' screams of death on tape. After a few murders and a series of coincidences, Frank becomes a prime suspect. Since we already know who the killer is, and Frank's character leaves much to be desired in the first place, there is little in the way of suspense.

Yaphet Kotto, for some obscure reason, makes an appearance as the cop assigned to the case, but it is Gabrielle who ultimately leads the authorities to the killer. Saddled with a tired plot, lame dialogue, and pseudo-religious references, the film is technically weak and suffers from a clichéd rock soundtrack. A more alternative/underground sound would be more appropriate, considering the focus is on the artistic community.

Jim Levesque •

A WHISPER TO A SCREAM *d.* Robert Bergman *sc.* Gerard Ciccoritti, Robert Bergman *cam.* Paul Witte *p.* Gerard Ciccoritti, Robert Bergman, Lightshow Communication *m.* Barry Fasman, Dana Walden *set des.* Nicholas White *ed.* Richard Bond *l. p.* Nadia Capone, Yaphet Kotto, Lawrence Bayne, Sylvio Oliviero, Micheal Leibowitz, Denise Ryan, Soo Garay, Susan Hamman, Klea Scott, Leslie Kelly.



Jamie Simpson in *The Dark Island*

Seen at the 1989 Festival of Festivals in Toronto

THE DARK ISLAND

Visuals of still water with floating lilies, and city buildings and highway underpasses; the sounds of the country, the noise of a city. A man's voice is heard talking about his younger brother Aaron, and on-screen we see them driving with their mother through the fall colours to the family cottage. They squabble amicably, go canoeing together - and then comes the news of their grandfather's death.

This event troubles the adolescent boy, and as he walks through the woods with his brother, he feels that Aaron has disappeared. Running through the trees, he senses a true loss, and attempts to cope with his panic - which is not completely assuaged by Aaron's reappearance.

A film of delicate feeling and visual delight. A turning point in an adolescent life skillfully evoked by different rhythms, and by the use of overlapping sound to combine references to the past and the present. There's a ravishingly beautiful bit when the brother is circling through and around white sheets drying on a clothesline, looking for young Aaron... and the Mozart string quartet is well selected too.

p. id. /sc. /ed. /sd. ed: Ross Turnbull *assoc. p.* Jennifer Hazel *cam.* Derek Redmond. *sd.* Marc Lafoy, Egidio Coccimiglio. *l. p.* Jamie Simpson, Perry Nemirov, Sandy Cond-Flower, Jennifer Hazel, Kim Turnbull, Robert Preston. 22 mins. 16mm/tape. Assisted by Ontario Arts Council & The Canada Council. Distribution: Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre, 67A Portland St., Toronto M5V 2M9 (416) 593-1808.

DEAD MEAT

Holly Dale made this little drama when she was a Resident at the Canadian Centre for Advanced Film Studies, 1988-89. It sports a seedy gloss, a mean and gritty atmosphere, and is full of repetitive four-letter-word dialogue reflecting the pitiful inadequacy of its street

LIKE A DREAM/ THE MARIO LANZA STORY

Mario Lanza (Alfredo Coccoza) (1921-1959) was reported as saying, "Mario, you doll, you sing like a son of a bitch." His detractors said he only vocalized "loud and soft" with nothing in between, and would go on to jest about his weight problems.

These opinions float through the mind as the credits roll, Lanza's voice vibrates and throbs on the track, and the orchestral arrangement swells up as the singer confesses, "You Do Something To Me".

Two small boys run and play on the seashore, pausing to watch an aeroplane overhead and a luxury liner sail by. One of the lads represents Lanza as a child in Italy who responds to his mother's call by telling her he is dreaming.

His dreams conjure up a fantasy firmly rooted in the MGM musicals of the '40s and '50s. As Mario's voice pours out Puccini's *Que Chelida Menina*, Johnny Mercer's *Song of India*, Rudolf Friml's *Some Day* - the images and tableaux are a homage to the innocence of the period and the never-never land of the Hollywood studio musical extravaganzas.

This stylishly romantic tribute to Lanza and his era was concocted by first-time filmmaker John Martins-Manteiga, born well after the period. He offers a fanciful, painterly view of the Technicolor visions of the musical silver screen, with Kirk Dunn to the forefront, ably acting and lip-syncing Mario around Hollywood and also in some recognizable locations in Toronto.

The audience at the Festival seemed to find the film quite funny (ha-ha, that is), but Martins-Manteiga maintains that it is meant to be a "sweet film." At a cost of just \$7,500, it's a miracle that he even attempted a lavish production - and it almost comes off.

p. id. /sc. John Martins-Manteiga. *cam.* Mark Caswell. *ed.* Gail Mentlik, Mark Caswell. *l. p.* Kirk Dunn (Mario Lanza), Dawn Gilmour (Nina), Young Mario (Jesse Manteiga). 24 mins. 16mm. Art and Industry/20th Century Limited/Toronto (416) 537-3493.



The Mario Lanza Story