

ings and of the people themselves.

Dividing the film up into distinct segments with no unifying storyline was probably the most effective presentation possible. If we'd been told the complete story of how the film crews tracked down the tribes and lived while filming them, it would have distracted from the tribes themselves. It also would have made us realize more clearly the kind of impact these crews must have had on the tribespeople. You see the crew extensively, as protagonists, only in the segment on Sumatra. They are shown picking leeches off their legs, pressing through the forest, and encountering several tribesmen. And you do feel that they're harming this tribe by, in effect, flushing it out of the underbrush. The tribe eventually moves its entire camp, seemingly to get away from the crew.

But the overall feeling I had was one of fascination rather than criticism. Fascination with the tribespeople, their beauty and vulnerability, and admiration for the directors and the footage they brought back. At least Bertolino and Floquet weren't chasing after the tribes to take away their culture, or sell them anything.

The most successful segment was on the pygmy tribe. It could be shown effectively on its own, and has in fact been aired on Radio-Canada. The pygmies' relationship with the jungle they live in and on is beautifully documented in an initiation ceremony for the young boys of the tribe which involves meeting the spirit of the jungle, Genji. And somehow even the rather grizzly scenes of filing teeth and circumcision don't come across as sensationalism, but rather as a look at an integral part of the tribal ethos – the need to learn to tolerate pain and suffering from an early age. The success of this filming may have been a result of the pygmies' relative familiarity with outsiders, compared to some of the other tribes. The Cintas Largas of Brazil had never before been in contact with white men.

There is a certain amount of romanticising of the noble savage, especially at the end of the film, but the filmmakers don't hesitate to show us sick and dying natives too. Still, I lost some of my belief that primitive life is short, brutal and fairly squalid. Though the situations of the different tribes varied, and they all obviously faced a variety of hardships, there still seem-

ed to be a great feeling of closeness and community, and all the children looked really happy.

So if *Ahō* makes it to your neighbourhood theatre (always a big if), try to catch it. It's really quite a time machine. The closing scenes, of tribal women doing exercises directed by a gramophone-toting

white woman and of men on giant machines literally razing the jungle, are devastating. But somehow not nearly so heartbreaking as the opening shot of a Sumatran tribesman, the most beautiful human being I've ever seen, quietly looking out of the forest at the white intruders.

Phyllis Platt

REVIEWS OF SHORT FILMS

Anguilla

d. ph. and ed. Derek Best, asst. ed. Peter Janecek, sd. rec. Leila Basen, narr. Ain Soodor, 1975.

Peter Janecek described me recently as "the only Canadian critic to put his foot where his mouth is". A lovely tribute, but not strictly true. Other critics occasionally take a stab at making films themselves, instead of merely instructing other people on how they should have made theirs. And more should try it. Putting your foot where your mouth is certainly refreshes your appreciation of other people's achievements.

The Peter Janecek above quoted worked with me on a documentary film I am presently editing, and he is credited as assistant editor on *Anguilla* by Toronto filmmaker Derek Best, which is the film I want to talk about. Peter learned a lot about camerawork from helping to edit *Anguilla*, and I learned a lot about editing, from watching it.

A 50-minute documentary on the social and political condition of a little-known Caribbean island, Derek Best's film is really a marvel of technique. Never post-card pretty – for *Anguilla* is a rather barren and impoverished place – the photography continually treats the spectator to fresh, telling, vivid images of the place and its people. And the camerawork (if I may distinguish between the picture and the handling of the equipment) displays a positive virtuosity. I'm not talking here about the deliberate ostentation of difficult technique; the film doesn't advertise its makers' skilfulness. But when you happen to be making a film of your own, you realize that (for example) in the lengthy shot where the camera follows one of the island's doctors from his Landrover, right inside a shack to examine a destitute, bed-ridden old man, Derek must have had to pull focus and change the aperture

while walking along with an Arriflex on his shoulder, and the sound-recorderist, Leila Basen, just out of sight at his side.

The point I want to emphasize is that doing these things – and the film is full of such *coups de camera* – calls for continual inventiveness and energy, together with the technical proficiency to realize your inventions. It's all too easy to become physically and imaginatively lazy.

For the sake of its editing, *Anguilla* should be a prescribed text in film departments. The film is structured around the return from London of the (black) head of the island's council, Ronald Webster, with a revision of *Anguilla's* colonial relation to Britain and to the neighbouring island of St. Kitt's. On Anguilla Day, one week later, he announces to a holiday crowd in Ronald Webster park that *Anguilla* is now free – free to remain a colony of Britain rather than be part of an independent federation with St. Kitt's. The white governor, in his tweed suit, guards' tie, and trilby hat (not exactly the most comfortable thing for the tropics, but one has an obligation to keep up appearances) smiles approvingly.

Director Derek Best



In the days which elapse between Webster's return and the public holiday, the film explores some of the ironies that pervade the social fabric of this tiny dependency. Elaborately woven out of dozens of component scenes, interviews, events – from the governor's council to a hellfire sermon, from a radical history-teacher to a frenetically dial-twirling disc-jockey in the island's radio station – the editing is deft, condensed and intricate. There's a sense of fluid rapidity, as scenes interpenetrate and overlap, commenting on each other, multiplying the perspectives. If you want to know how demanding it is to weave together several threads of picture and soundtrack, to play them off against each other, to maintain rhythm and pace and variety... just try it.

And what does **Anguilla** have to say about its subject? With the aid of a mildly ironic commentary, it reports, without flippancy but perhaps a trifle superciliously, on a community that hasn't really anywhere to go. Economically stagnant, politically dependent, Anguilla seems to jog along from day to day, listening to syndicated BBC radio and occasionally turning out in full dress parades of police constables and Brownies, to be blessed by Her Majesty's representative. We leave the island with a good-natured shrug. There it is – that's Anguilla for you.

Robert Fothergill

Cree Hunters of Mistassini

d. Tony Ianzelo and Boyce Richardson, sec. B. Richardson, ph. Tony Ianzelo, sd. rec. Richard Besse, sd. ed. John Knight, ed. Virginia Stikeman, p. Colin Low and Len Chatwin, p.c. National Film Board, 1972-73 Colour, 16mm, running time: 58 minutes, dist. N.F.B.

The viewing time for this documentary seems short but when the credits finally start creeping across the screen you may feel that you have been glued to your seat for hours. And it won't be because you've been bored.

The film is a totally absorbing experience, not just because the scenes are magnificent and the details of a strange existence so absorbingly told, but because the total concept is crammed with levels of meaning and delightful contradictions.

The camera takes you along with a group of Indians who apparently fly to the remote regions of Northern Quebec each year in an attempt to get back to nature. I have a doctor friend who does the same thing. He flies into the Algonquin Park area to get away from it all. There's something very up-to-date about Indians who fly into their past, just as there is in the chain saw that cuts their wood and the high-powered gun that cuts down the game and the sugar that sweetens their meals.

These little white-man touches are cheek and jowl with scenes of ancient ritual, moments of death (strangling a bird the bullet didn't quite kill) and moments of inadvertent humour (when the skin of a rabbit won't come off the head).

The life of an animal is seen to be unimportant: it is simply food. Life is violent. The Indian kills to eat. And yet one remains aware that if the hunter didn't find anything to shoot he could just catch the next plane home.

Above all, the film raises the abiding question: How long can the north lands escape the "developer"? How long can these vast regions remain the private hunting grounds for a few Indians.

There are hours of disturbing thinking in this glimpse of the virgin north and its native people.

M.D. Edwards

I Am a Gypsy

d. and sc. Eugene Buia, ph. Helmfried Mueller, ad. ph. Buia, sd. Dennis Matick, Richard Ross, ed. Jim Fisher, p. Buia 1975, 16mm colour, running time 30 minutes, dist. Buia, 40 Prince Rupert, Toronto. (416) 535-7708.

A naked baby is immersed three times in holy water. Magic incantations are chanted to ward off evil spirits. The child wails as the priest holds him up for all to see and the image freezes on the screen. Another gypsy is born, this time in Canada.

Thus begins a fascinating documentary about a very elusive group of people, the gypsies. Throughout their long history, stretching back to Egypt and India, these nomadic tribes have managed to go from country to country, enriching each culture they touched but never assimilating, always retaining their own traditions, cust-

Director Eugene Buia



and values. Known by various names in different places – cigany, romany, tinker – they are excellent musicians, spirited dancers, crafty tradesmen and practitioners of the occult.

Generally, they shy away from documentarians.

Some say ancient laws forbid "soul stealing," as they regard picture taking. One suspects a more modern reason: for people constantly on the move and often on the wrong side of contemporary laws, being photographed is unwise and impractical.

Yet filmmaker Eugene Buia was able to befriend a number of them living in Toronto, and capture some very candid remarks about their lifestyle on film. Born in Rumania, Buia was able to conjure up his childhood association with the romany, during his research on gypsies in Canada. "Every emigrant is a gypsy in a sense," says the director. "Anybody who leaves his country and moves from place to place, understands their experience."

I Am a Gypsy features music, interviews, the orthodox baptism (filmed for the first time), young gypsies at work and play, and a very moving sequence of forty-five Yugoslavian gypsies encountering Canadian immigration and uncertainty. Old photographs round out the visuals, while the sound track resonates with the chords of the cimbalon, lute, bouzouki, and violin.

Discussions touch on where they came from, how they survive, some of their customs such as marriage and the dowry, and fortune telling.

We find out, for instance, that no one really knows how many gypsies live in Canada. Estimates range up into the tens of thousands, but they are not officially recognized as an ethnic group, so they are categorized according to their country of origin.

By no means a definitive work, **I Am a Gypsy** was meant as an essay on film. Considering the miniscule production budget, some sleight of hand must have been involved in completing this colour docu-

FILM REVIEWS

mentary, strictly adhering to professional standards. It cost a fifteenth of what the CBC spends for producing such a film, and a fortieth of what some 30 second TV spots are made for. Such determination on a shoestring is fitting for its subject.

The gypsies have survived through the centuries through cunning and sheer will power. Eugene Buia and his associates should be commended for undertaking such a labour of love and enriching our multicultural treasure chest with **I Am a Gypsy**.

George Csaba Koller

The Christmas Tree

d. George Mendeluk, sc. Mendeluk, ph. Robert Saad, l.p. Mike Mazuki, Carrol Soro, David Eveson, Natalia Nelipa and Michael Zenon, 35mm Colour, running time 16 minutes, dist. Faroun Films.

George Mendeluk has taken the business of filming in hand and has written, produced and directed a good, short, family film about a small boy's belief in the spirit of Christmas. He has also sold his film well and got his money back.

The film is about a poor Ukrainian peasant family, a lone pine tree outside the window of their home, and a little boy's faith. Ivanko, the boy, is deceived and disappointed when his father cuts down the tree and sells it to a rich man on Christmas eve. The hope and mystery of Christmas are momentarily gone, the victim of the father's weakness. The adult can no longer understand the meaning of the tree to the boy.

The film tells the story. It's the universal story of faith conquering all,

The old man and Ivanko



of the importance of innocence in a world endangered by skepticism. The pace is right for a film aimed at children; a lot of things happen, including a meeting in the forest with an old man who sets things right again... could it have been Father Christmas?

In its own small way, the film has a dramatic punch. Ivanko gets lost in the forest, the wolves howl and the winds blow. The family becomes concerned but in the end, all are united and everyone is well. Even the pine tree is back in the courtyard, though no one will believe Ivanko's story about the old man in the forest.

But the context is as important as the story. We see inside the peasant home with its big central room and warm fireplace. The preparations for Christmas eve supper are underway, and the folk traditions of the season, both pagan and religious, dominate the story line.

Robert Saad's camerawork gives the film a rich tone and there are some wonderful night scenes in the forest. It comes as a surprise that one can film in Oshawa and come up with a corner of the Ukraine.

The film makes no pretense of striking out in new directions. On the contrary, it's made up of stock situations which were sure to work and which do. It tackles the old questions of faith, superstition, tradition, love and the family, and does so by making these notions accessible to children. Mendeluk's press kit even includes "Discussion Questions" like, "Is it faith or naiveté which guides Ivanko? Does intuition or superstition guide the mother?" and "Do you think the father should have sold the tree?" These are good questions and I'd like to sit down with some children who have seen the film and talk about them.

Films needn't be aesthetic masterpieces to be useful. They needn't cost a fortune or be funded by the government either; Mendeluk found his backing through some Ukrainian-Canadian businessmen. This film was made with a purpose: to find its audience and to sell as an interesting, even educational reflection about Christmas and to sell as an interesting, even educational reflection about Christmas these points, has been shown nationwide on television and sold to Disney. This will allow its producer-director to go on and make another film. For a first film, that's a lot.

by Connie Tadros

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