

# FILM REVIEWS

*Gordon Sheppard's*

## Eliza's Horoscope

d. Gordon Sheppard, asst. d. John Board and Al Simmons, sc. Sheppard, ph. Jean Boffety, Paul Van Der Linden and Michel Brault, ed. Sheppard, asst. ed. Marguerite Corriveau, sd. rec. Lenny Lencina and Ron Seltzer, sd. ed. Vincent Gutierrez, a.d. François Barbeau, m. Elmo Peeler, cost. François Laplante and Louise Jobin, i.p. Elizabeth Moorman (Eliza), Tom Lee Jones (Tommy), Lila Kedrova (Lila), Rose Quong (Astrologer), Pierre Byland (Clown), Marcel Sabourin (Pervert Doctor), Richard Manuel (Hippie Composer). p. Sheppard, asst. p. Marguerite Corriveau, p. manager. Lenny Lencina, p.c. O-Zali Films Inc., 1974, 35mm, color, running time 121 minutes.



Lila Kedrova (who won the Canadian Film Awards Best Supporting Actress for this role) as Lila, Eliza's friend in *Eliza's Horoscope*

It's been a long time coming. After so many years — estimates range from six to eight — *Eliza's Horoscope* is up there on the screen, and I must admit that I entered the theatre with a great mixture of interest, curiosity, suspense, and, since Gordon Sheppard has worked so long at it, trepidation: what if it wasn't any good? After all this time!!? Well, a short while later, through a combination

of François Barbeau's absolutely stunning design, first-rate cinematography by Jean Boffety, Michel Brault and Paul van der Linden, and Sheppard's humorous and ingenuous script, I realised that the wait was worth it.

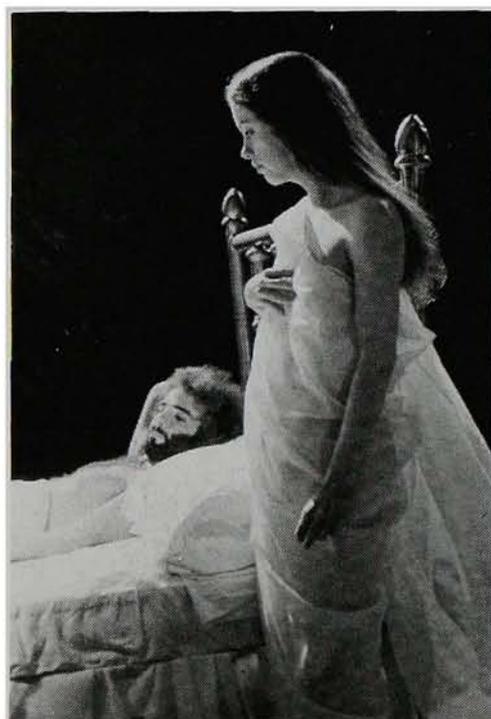
Sheppard has said that a novelist can take years to create a novel, so why can a filmmaker not do the same? A valid point, but the trouble is that contemporary films usually take about two years from conception to release for a very simple reason: somehow the content, and especially the tone and attitude, may date very quickly. And Sheppard's film, if it has any major fault, seems at times to be too obviously a film of the Sixties.

For while the form is universal — the youthful quest and the search for love — the content consists of an astrological journey among a very stylised group of people. The construction is much more simple and straightforward than the jumping, obscure films of the late Sixties, but Astrology seems to be a fad of the past.

Of course Sheppard's intentions are of greater scope. He's really concerned with Love itself, and comments

on it in a religious context (Eliza, with all her innocence, is driven from home because of her godlessness), and in a social context by showing other kinds of love and lust in the tenement in which Eliza makes her home. He also shows love in our world of technology and material obsessions. To present his observations, he plucks imagery from classic and common sources, employing a beautiful white horse, a clown, an Indian Mask, a neon-lit cross side-by-side with a radio transmitter, grotesque but not repulsive tenement inhabitants made-up in chalk-white and grey facial colours, and above all the Ceremony.

There are really two ceremonies in the film. One is at the very end, as Eliza is initiated into the Astrology cult on the top of Mount Royal. All of the imagery gathers into the dance circle, and the priest inducts her and her fellows. At the same time her true love, whom she refuses to acknowledge as such and therefore loses in the end, makes his own journey; a radical with Indian blood, he attacks injustice by attempting to blow up a bridge, and is shot when the project misfires. He travels up



Eliza (Elizabeth Moorman) during initiation ceremony in *Eliza's Horoscope*.

Mount Royal mountain too, but it is to die in the presence of the Indian in the Sun-mask.

Eliza really is a film. The dialogue is minimal and one-dimensional, and the richness and life on the screen are visually achieved. Sheppard has timed his film to occur in Indian Summer, that October week when Canada is at its most beautiful. He plucks another symbol out of the season, of course, because Indian Summer is a strong image of the last breath of life before the winter death; in other words, an illusion.

One of the most enjoyable and endearing aspects of the film is Sheppard's sense of humour. He creates some marvellously comic moments. Marcel Sabourin is superb as a perverted doctor who can achieve sexual climax only when Eliza pulls him about on a fake centaur. Even a sly gibe at today's obsession with film-making: his butler Blip photographs everything the doctor does in Super 8, but of course when the centaur scene occurs, and the doctor does reach a climax, Blip has forgotten to put film in the camera. Eliza's costumed excursions to find her love are bright and funny, but never is Sheppard condescending to his subject.

The art design by Francois Barbeau, along with his work in **Kamou-raska** and **Lies My Father Told Me**, ranks him as surely the best in Canada. He has been aided in this effort by Jean Boffety and Michel Brault on camera, and, starting out as assistant then taking the helm, Paul van der Linden. The acting is just right for the tone. Lila Kedrova as an old performer is sometimes too strident, and Elizabeth Moorman ultimately functions as a rack for Sheppard to hang his film on, but the acting is not central to the film's level of success.

Sheppard is central to the film's success. He and his assistant Marguerite Corriveau have been working for five years to get it into shape. A long list of acknowledgements at the end of the film names those who also offered their aid. The film must finally be judged on its artistic merits and its ability to sell itself. Despite my few misgivings about the former, it is an enjoyable and interesting experience. In the sales area, I think it has a market, but I fear that it is small. Which is a shame, not only because of the years of hard labour but because of what Gordon Sheppard has created.

Stephen Chesley

Clément Perron's

## Partis pour la gloire

d. Clément Perron, asst. d. Robert Blondin and Jacques Benoit, sc. Perron, ph. Georges Dufaux, ed. Pierre Lemelin, sd. Joseph Champagne, set dec. Denis Boucher, m. François Dompierre, cost. Louise Jobin, l.p. Jacques Thisdale (Pierre Dodier), Jean-Marie Lemieux (The Mayor), Rolland Bédard (The Priest), Claude Gauthier (The Vicar), André Melançon (The Lieutenant), Rachel Cailhier (Nicole Dodier), Serge L'Italien (Claude Moreau) and Jean-Pierre Masson (Clovis Nadeau), p. Marc Beaudet, p. manager, Michel Dandavino, p.c. National Film Board of Canada, 1974, color, 35mm., running time 103 minutes, dist. Films Mutuels.

Clément Perron's new film, **Partis pour la gloire**, is a tender, aggressive story. It brings us back to the summer of 1942, and to the lives of a few young men and their women, faced with the consequences of a distant war. It's an international and everlasting theme, full of possibilities. Unfortunately, the sloppiness of the direction and of the editing is simply too distracting, and **Partis pour la gloire** had a short and discreet life in Montreal theatres.

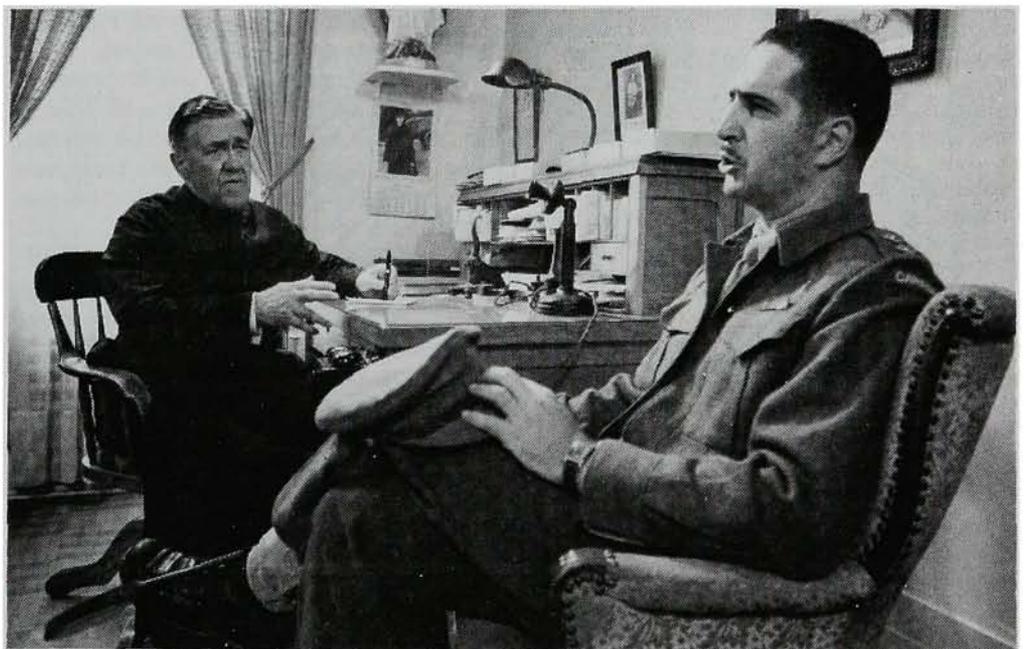
Perron's subtle sensitivity, which gave its soul to **Mon Oncle Antoine** and its spark to **Taureau**, is more beautiful than ever in this feature. He lets rip with caricature and humour, creating an overall image of wild youth

and country in Quebec's rural Beauce county. But he can also stop the folly and draw the spectator into the intimate feelings - gentle or harsh - of his favourite characters. He illuminates clearly the interior struggles of people fighting illogical powers and laws, of youths debating whether or not to obey conscription. The scene between the mayor's wife (Yolande Roy) and the parish priest (Rolland Bédard), when she delivers a touching feminist plea through the confessional bars, is one of the best in the film.

Perron was fortunate in a sense to have these experienced actors, along with Jean-Marie Lemieux (the mayor) and Jean-Pierre Masson (well-known for years on television as Quebec's scrooge Séraphin, he appears as the people's exploiter playing both sides of the fence). But wasn't Perron too confident about this well-established acting talent and a bit soft as a director? Certainly, his directing lacks harmony and coordination.

It is the young actors who bring his film to life. Not only because they feature in the main roles, but because of the impulsive energy they put in their interpretations. If Perron had held a tighter grip on the whole production, pushing his actors to greater precision and giving them better dialogue to work with, he would have given a meaning to what is now an excess of gut feeling, a feature which seems unfinished.

Serge L'Italien, Rachel Cailhier and Jacques Thisdale make a good trio, sympathetic and believable. Their romances and their illusions could have



The Priest (Rolland Bédard) tries to reason with Lieutenant Laroche (André Melançon) in **Partis pour la gloire**

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resembled those of the youths in masterpieces like the *Garden of the Finzi Continis*. But Perron laughs at his own talent as if he didn't dare admit to it. With remarkable presence, for example, André Mélançon (*Tau-reau*) comes back as the army recruiter. The actor builds up a terrifying "bully" image, with strong undercurrents of a young man trying to do his duty. But Perron has him telling his superior in Quebec that he will play things "straight". Surely that expression reached French Canadian army lieutenants a bit after 1942!

And it's this sort of constant neglect, not making the technical effort needed to carry the emotional story, which is obvious in dialogue, camera direction and editing. It deserves severe criticism.

But who can pin down Clément Perron? It may be said that he is not a director, that he is simply too sentimental or that he and Claude Jutra are in dire need of getting together again. But it may be easier for Perron to do a contemporary film, because although his passions belong to yesterday, his anger belongs to today. Somewhere within him, with all these hits and misses, there's the capacity to create a jewel.

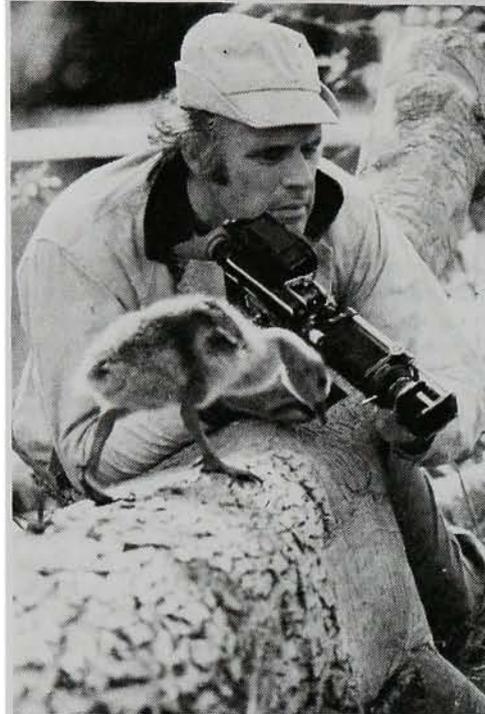
Carmel Dumas

### Robert Ryan's *Wings in the Wilderness*

**d.** Robert Ryan, **sc.** Martin Lager, **ph.** Robert Ryan and Dan Gibson, **sd.** Dan Gibson, **ed.** Lori Labatt, **m.** Ron Harrison, **l.p.** Dan Gibson and his nature family, **p.** Ralph C. Ellis, **p.c.** Keg Productions (Tor) 1974, Colour, **running time:** 95 minutes, **dist.** Wildlife Film Distributors Ltd.

I tried. I really tried. I was getting restless watching the new Canadian wildlife film, *Wings in the Wilderness*. I said to myself, think like a ten year old. It didn't work. I told myself, this is a Canadian movie. It didn't work. In the final analysis, the movie is tiresome when it's cute and tiresome when it's not.

Lorne Greene narrates this tale of Dan Gibson, a nature-loving photographer. The film follows Gibson as he rediscovers a family of geese, eggs



Dan Gibson with his friend in *Wings in the Wilderness*

just hatching. Two of the goslings, just born, are accidentally separated from their parents. They begin to follow Gibson. Goslings, being of sound mind and high intelligence, adopt the first larger moving object they see. The process is called imprinting and these two imprint on Gibson. They follow him and adopt him.

The relationship of man to goose grows into true parenthood, but not without the usual tribulations of growing up. The geese pass from cute childhood to careless adolescence to flighty maturity. The culmination of the relationship, the high point, as it were, is Gibson coaxing the geese to fly. They follow his voice via airborne transmitter into the skies, united.

I don't want to leave the impression that there is no drama to all this — threats abound in the form of wolves, poachers, waterfalls — all treacherous. But we are not to be denied our happy ending.

What's good about the picture? Well, some of it is nicely photographed, and the sound effects deserve the etrog they won. But in the end pretty pictures and sound are nothing more than pretty pictures and sound.

Conceptually it's very difficult to make 90 minutes of goose work. A goose is a goose. All it's got going for it is its grace in flight. That's good for about 60 seconds. We have had films about lions, bears, wolves, even ants. The subjects have commanded a certain respect, sometimes fear. Most importantly they have made good film framework. The goose is just not

a complex or fascinating candidate for filming.

On to the story. As presented, *Wings in the Wilderness* reeks of artificiality. There is a lot of topical talk of communing with nature, but the film never goes after the genuine feeling. We are told of impending danger by friendly Lorne Greene and then watch it fizzle on the screen. I guess what I'm trying to tell you is that the script stinks. As to the acting, Dan Gibson is no Olivier. The film makes a good case for banning amateur actors from the screen, Louis Malle notwithstanding.

I would recommend *Wings in the Wilderness* for children, young children, of relatives you don't like.

Ken Dancyger

### Deke Miles' *The Melting Pot*

**d.** Deke Miles, **sc.** Deke Miles from an original story by Romeo Jacobucci, **ph.** George Mather, **ed.** Miles and Jacobucci and Gretchen Gebhardt, **sd.** Michael Perrotta, **l.p.** Peter Jacob, Richard Fullerton, Camilo "Butch" Jularbal, Max Scheindel, Kimberly Smith, Gillis Paquin, Catherine Harris, Joe Bahr, Erne Hartman, **exec. p.** Romeo Jacobucci, **p.** Deke Miles, **p.c.** Joe's & Company Ltd., 1975, 35mm colour.

Manitoba has no real history as a film location. Manitoba stories like *Rachel, Rachel* have been effortlessly transposed to the States, or, in the few instances where the locales have been essential, Hollywood back lots have done the trick. Granted a few productions have used actual Manitoba locations, but never has a totally indigenous production been shot here in 35mm and colour. That is until *The Melting Pot*, a low-budget, non-CFDC, totally locally financed film reared its ugly head late in November.

The story revolves around two American draft-dodgers just passing through town, a few days before the Winnipeg Flood of 1950. They see a multiethnic town suddenly become a combined consciousness to divert the serious damage of the raging waters. But before the heart-tugging ending they meet some swell guys and gals, learn the meaning of friendship and harmony, hear a handful of songs and decide to do the right thing — help the people and turn themselves in. The production