It's become obvious to even the most casual observer of the Canadian Student Film Festival that the actual technical ability to put on the screen a well exposed, focused image sync'd with sound - one which could appear in any movie theatre - has been achieved.

Of course, student filmmakers work under certain obvious disadvantages that do not beset the professional. The student is at the mercy of whatever actors he can find. The same goes for the crew, the music composition and a hundred other more or less important details.

Even so, or perhaps because of these disadvantages, the student filmmakers try to ape the Hollywood masters by using every cliché travel shot, fade-in, camera angle and special effect they can remember. Instead of aiming for simple themes that are all around them in a society showing signs of decay, they retreat into horror-adventure thrillers or "deep" introspectives.

As if denying the existence of the real world, they build their own fantasy land. Here they have a free hand. Cutesy shots through tree branches of a child "discovering" the world (Mon âme) make one wonder if a filmmaker has to go through some honest suffering to make decent films. Documentaries like Rick Taylor/The Frozen Moment - on a suburban artist who paints sad paintings that don't sell - because he makes people think too much, yet personally thinks life is great - leave one with a distrust of all "artists".

Undeniably, trying to break new frontiers of film technique has its positive side. But the obsession with gimmickry, trick photography, with studio-style cinematography, which is obviously being encouraged by the festival, is also destroying the youthful creativity that used to make even badly edited films worthwhile.

Instead professionalism reigns supreme with all its negative aspects. Instead of new exciting insights from young minds we have gimmicky rehashes of old themes. In the tradition that whatever is popular is fodder for the camera, this year's enlightened "artists" exploited sex and homosexuality to the limit. Hung up by not being hung up by sex, they've built their own prison of the mind.

Professionalism also puts the filmmakers in a strait-jacket of technical considerations that hamper their ability to see the entire film. For instance, in one escapist film this year, Daughter of the Vampire, the filmmaker produced some beautifully filmed and lighted interiors that recalled those of Bergman's Cries and Whispers. However, he not only wasted his effort on a cheap thriller, which is per-
haps excusable, but insults the intelligence of his audience and puts his own into question by leaving in the plot some totally impossible occurrences.

Over and over one is amazed by these filmmakers’ total disregard of the real world around them. As “artists”, are they not bound to have a consciousness even more developed than that of the public? Is theirs not the duty to prod, push, analyze, question?

Documentaries, the Canadian tradition built upon the work of Grierson and others of the early years, have been long buried. The “stars” of those films used to be miners, mailmen, soldiers. Today the Canadian “avant garde” that these students supposedly represent finds its truth in homosexuals, failed suburban painters and chess players. Instead of reaching for new insights, the documentaries blatantly emphasize the stereotypes.

While progressive filmmakers the world over complain of the stereotyping and constraints of the film industry, young student “artists” eagerly embrace the Hollywood mold and continue the myths that are maintained by the big industries like Dupont (United Artists) and General Motors (MGM) that financially control the film industry.

The film is a success, such a success that it had absolutely no competition from any other film at the festival, because of its simplicity, reality and attention to details.

In a semi-documentary style using the girl’s voice to explain a lot of the detail and inner thoughts that would have otherwise taken too long to get across, the film builds a reality that is reinforced by the documentary feeling. Over and over we hear the girl explain what she does and feels, one forgets that this is fiction. On the other hand we aren’t treated to the cluttered sound or unsteady camerawork of a documentary.

The Winners

Norman McLaren Award
La nouvelle vendeuse by Mario Bolduc
Scenario, B/W, 40 m., York University

Scenario
First Prize
Blanc de mémoire – souvenir rouge by
Yvan Girouard
14 m., Color, Concordia
Second Prize
Small Real Estate Deal by Melvin Stone Kennedy
B/W, 10 m., SFU Film Workshop

Documentary
First Prize
Le monument by Daniel Louis and
Hélène Couture
Color, 22 m., Ryerson Polytechnical Institute
Second Prize
See How the Cat Walks by Rick Benwick
Color, 9 m. 30 s., Ryerson Polytechnical Institute

Animation
First Prize
Thought by Garcia Labrosse
Color, 4 m. 48 s., Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal
Second Prize
Hallelujah Darwin! by Robert William Gibbs
Color, 12 m., University of B.C.

Experimental
No prize

Special Jury’s Prize “Entertainment”
First Prize
Cœurs venus d’ailleurs by Franco Battista
Color, 20 m., Concordia, documentary
Second Prize
For Your Enjoyment... Bag Brown & His Orchestra by Jim Chohanik
Animation, Color, 3 m., Vancouver School of Art

Honorable Mention
Lady From Montreal by Andrew Adams,
for its cinematography
Scenario, B/W, 24 m., Conestoga College
November 3 by George Mihalka - Rodney Gibbons,
for direction of actors
Scenario, Color, 24 m., Concordia

La nouvelle vendeuse
by Mario Bolduc

La nouvelle vendeuse is a film of another genre. This is a story of a Levis, Quebec, salesgirl who decides the only way she can escape her work and stay home, while all her neighbors are working, is to get pregnant.

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As the longest film of the festival (40 minutes) and one with a seemingly simple theme, it is surprising that the film, with rare exceptions, did not drag. That it did not is thanks to both the actress who plays a most sympathetic and likeable salesgirl and the filmmaker, Mario Bolduc, who very judiciously attempted to create atmosphere and understanding from the shortest amount of footage he could.

Particularly on second viewing, one sees how little footage is used to convey a ferry boat trip, a visit to a doctor, or the fact that the husband’s shipbuilding plant is on strike.

Furthermore Bolduc has found a very natural way of juxtaposing humorous incidents and more serious material where neither suffer and in fact both are enhanced. By giving his characters real emotions and motivations against this backdrop, he creates very real situations.

There is, for instance, one scene where two friends at work stick a birthday present in the girl’s locker. She arrives, finds the present and unwraps it; everything is very nice and natural. As soon as it’s opened, one after the other the two friends rush off to work, because work is work and you’re paid by the clock. It’s a minor detail, but that’s what makes the film believable.

This care for detail is everywhere evident. When the girl talks about the birthday dinner she’s prepared, she wonders if her husband will notice the new sweater she’s bought for the occasion. Here again, it’s not the actual fact of the sweater but all that the thought of it implies that creates this fully developed character.

The girl’s acceptance that there is a hierarchy among the employees – as she puts it, secretaries are considered superior to salesgirls because they went to college and do much more interesting work – emphasizes better than any other means could the social awareness of the girl and her relation to her work.

The naturalness of the film, particularly in the relations between the girl and her husband, again underline the capabilities of Bolduc and the actors who worked for him.

For all the down-to-earth feeling of the film, it still remains a light airy tale with pleasant memories of a happy relationship rather than a dogmatic attempt to understand the position of “a worker” or “a woman”.

46/Cinema Canada