

FILM REVIEWS

Dennis Zahoruk's

Brethren

d. Dennis Zahoruk, asst. d. Bill Corcoran, sc. Dennis Zahoruk, ph. David Ostriker, sp. ph. effects Paul Appleby, ed. Dennis Zahoruk, sd. Jerry Jest, sd. ed. Steve Humble, p. designer Marlene De Genova, m. Michael Snook, l.p. Tom Hauff (Ted), Ken Welsh (Ralph), Richard Fitzpatrick (Lucas), Sandra Scott (Mrs. Wimwood), Larry Reynolds (Jonas), Candace O'Connor (Kim), exec. p. G. Chalmers Adams, p. G. Chalmers Adams & Dennis Zahoruk, p. manager Pierre Sarrazin, p.c. Tundra Film Co. Inc. in association with Clearwater Films Ltd., 1975, color, 16 mm., running time, 94 min.

premiere C.F.A. public screenings, Toronto Dominion Cinema, Oct. 21, 1976.

Dennis Zahoruk's independently made first feature is a brave venture which, to a praiseworthy extent, delivers the dramatic goods. It was shot over a five-week period, on locations in the Toronto area and on a very strict budget. The result is not impoverished either in production values or ideas. If anything the film is a little *too* ambitious, so that both the acting and the dialogue become rather strained at times – but that may be accounted a “good fault”.

The story – of three brothers called home to their father's funeral and the various stresses and resentments that mark their family relationships – is reminiscent (consciously or otherwise) of David Storey's play *In Celebration*, which Lindsay Anderson directed on screen for the American Film Theatre series. It is, in any case, a good, meaty situation and is here developed with considerable poignancy, wit and ironic observation. As suggested, the scenes (most often dialogues) sometimes play close to the style of TV soap opera but, to be fair, there are frequent stretches which

rise way above that level and suggest instead a good, naturalistic Canadian play such as one might enjoy at the Tarragon or Centaur Theatres. The character of the “quiet” theology student brother is especially well drawn – and nicely acted by Richard Fitzpatrick. He is one of those unfortunates (?) in life to whom people turn, vampire-like, for one-way comfort. The other sons of this unhappy family are more conventional – a drop-out and a frenziedly “successful” executive; Tom Hauff and Kenneth Welsh flesh them out well but can't avoid uneasily melodramatic moments. Welsh, in particular, is an actor who should make more Canadian films. He has proved his worth on Canadian stages in roles all the way from Hamlet to Stanley Kowalski and could have handled half a dozen parts I can think of in recent pictures all perversely cast with Americans.



A modest Denis Zahoruk accepts his Etrog for *Brethren*

The film is not uncinematic, in spite of being heavily loaded with dialogue, and Dennis Zahoruk, as writer-director-editor, has included some well conceived scenes of purely visual impact, such as the funeral and its aftermath for one of the brothers. Excessive praise for a qualified success does nobody any good but in this case a new director on the feature front certainly deserves high marks for aspiration and medium-good marks for achievement. *Brethren* may in fact make a modest impact on television – that seems to be its fate, for better or worse – but one day a Dennis Zahoruk film just might jolt and excite us all.

Clive Denton

William Fruet's

Death Weekend

d. William Fruet, sc. William Fruet, ph. Robert Saad, ed. Jacques Jean, sd. Dan Goldbert, m. Ivan Reitman, l.p. Brenda Vaccaro, Don Stroud, Chuck Shamata, Kyle Edwards, Richard Ayres, Don Granbery, exec. p. John Dunning, André Link, p. Yvan Reitman, p.c. Dal Productions, 1975, col. 35 mm. running time 95 minutes.

Death Weekend is an ugly, vicious, downright shitty movie which will leave you in need of a shower. Brenda Vaccaro is wasted, Don Stroud should be, Chuck Shamata deserves better. William Fruet, by putting his name and his once sympathetic talents to this mean-spirited garbage, has exiled himself from reasonable consideration for a long time to come.

End of review? That's tempting, but not quite.

Mr. Brian Ferry, a fairly new reviewer for *The Toronto Star*, inadvertently played into the enemy camp. He made clear that he disliked and disapproved of the film but provided a chunk which could be extracted for the ads, to the effect that the film had been brilliantly made and was a Canadian equivalent to *Straw Dogs* or *Death Wish*. Mr. Perry will quickly learn to be wary of the jokers who do this kind of thing.

The film is adequately (not brilliantly) made. We *do* hate the punks who pursue and terrorize Brenda and Chuck on their country weekend, just as we're supposed to. We want Brenda to get her revenge, as the only likely way to end the movie (as soon as possible). A slightly similar recent picture, *The Clown Murders*, is less repellent because more inept, which is not the strongest kind of recommendation. After *The Clown Murders*, you only need to wash your hands. As for a Canadian *Straw Dogs*, can't we be first in *anything*? Proof that Canadian junk can be marketable is really no longer enough.

Casting around desperately for something that might have interested the author of *Wedding in White* in all this – dramatically, not just financially – one stumbles on the germ of

Film Credit Abbreviations: d.: Director, asst. d.: Assistant Director, sc.: Script, adapt.: Adaptation, dial.: Dialogue, ph.: Photography, sp. ph. eff.: Special Photographic Effects, ed.: Editor, sup. ed.: Supervising Editor, sd.: Sound, sd. ed.: Sound Editor, sd. rec.: Sound Recording, p. des.: Production Designer, a.d.: Art Director, set dec.: Set Decorator, m.: Music, m.d.: Music Director, cost.: Costumes, choreo.: Choreography, l.p.: Leading Players, exec. p.: Executive Producer, p.: Producer, assoc. p.: Associate Producer, p. sup.: Production Supervisor, p. man.: Production Manager, p.c.: Production Company, col.: Colour Process, dist.: Distributors, narr.: Narration.

an idea. Shamata is really as evil as Stroud, it seems, for taking the girl out of town for you-know-what. (She doesn't know, for a while, being the most naive heroine since Lillian Gish.) Unfortunately, this idea is planted early and undeveloped. It is the one idea in the film, which from then on is full only of germs.

Why, somebody might conceivably ask, do I so object to **Death Weekend** when years ago I enjoyed the likes of Joan Crawford being menaced by the likes of Jack Palance in the likes of **Sudden Fear**? Perhaps because Joan was provided with more character, more nerve and more resourcefulness to get out of her predicament — not just a handy bit of broken glass. Further, she was placed in a screenplay full of interesting detail, believable minor characters and clever plot twists, as opposed to one gross situation dwelt on, literally ad nauseam. And when Joan was bothered by the young Cliff Robertson in Robert Aldrich's very humane **Autumn Leaves**, it transpired that he was mentally disturbed and she ended up more pitying than scared of him. But then, of course, these were only Hollywood program pictures, not the work of our

national film millenium, supported by kind words and government funding, so that the mere fact of having a film ready for release is lauded as amazing in some circles.



Richard Ayres and Brenda Vaccaro share a terrifying moment

Of course, it's a discouraging world where **Goldenrod** is pulled from Toronto theatres after one week, while this and other schlock plays merrily on. It may be suggested that William Fruet has to earn a living. Couldn't he drive a taxi or, as Mel Brooks suggested in **The Critic**, maybe make a shoe?

Clive Denton

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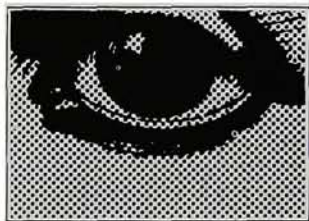
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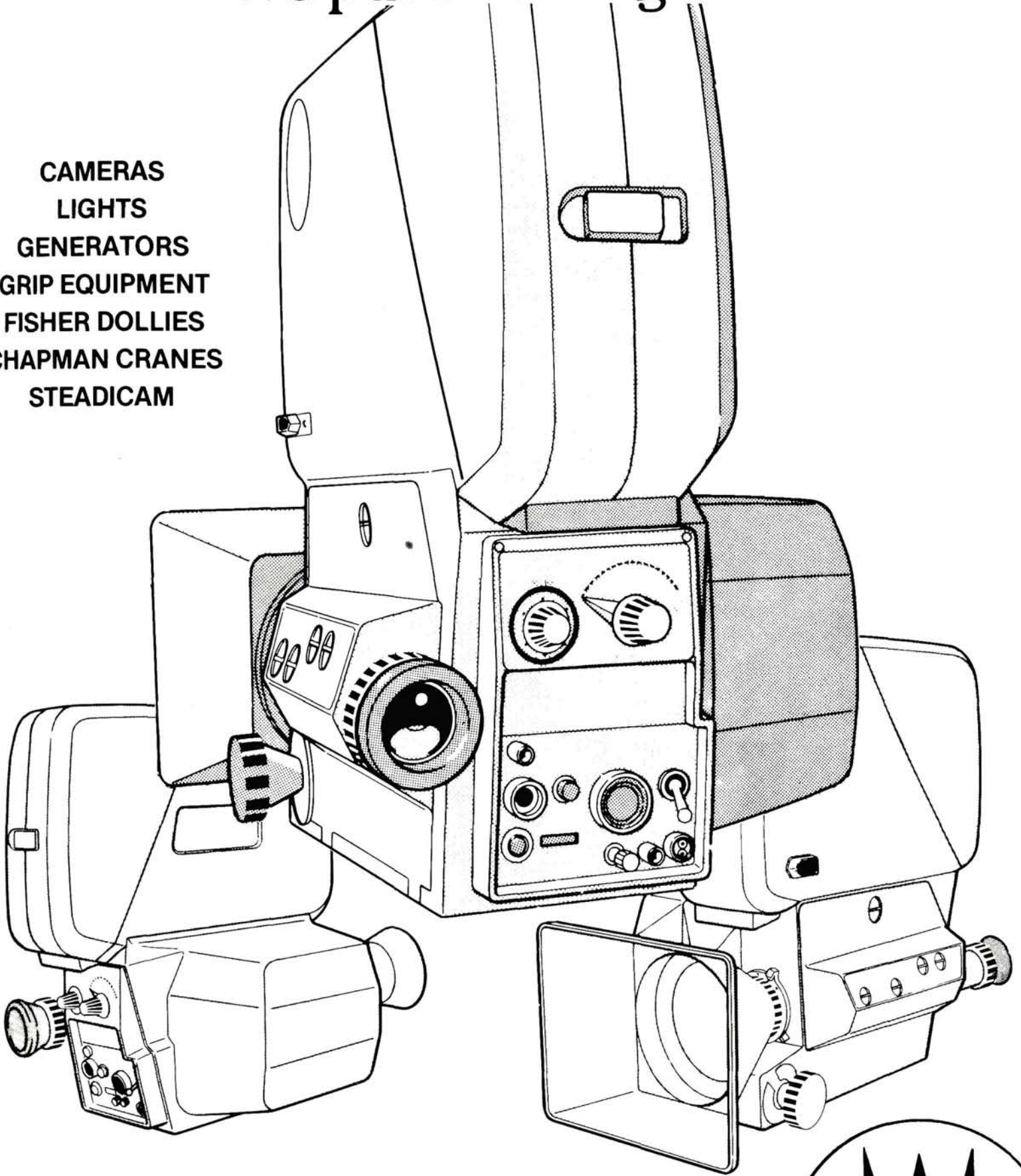
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Toronto
April 14, 1976

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