

FILM REVIEWS

Peter Bryant's

The Supreme Kid

d. Peter Bryant, sc. Peter Bryant, ph. Tony Westman, ed. Sally Paterson, sd. Larry Sutton, m. Howie Vickers, l.p. Frank Moore, Jim Henshaw, Don Granberry, Helen Shaver, Bill Rieter, Gordon Robertson, Terry David Mulligan, Paddy White, Claudine Melgrave, p. Peter Bryant, p.c. Seventh Wave Film Ltd., 1974, col. 16 mm blown up to 35 mm, running time 90 minutes, dist. Cinepix, release Festival of Festivals, Canadian Film Awards, Karlovy-Vary Film Festival.

Peter Bryant's *The Supreme Kid* is a pessimistic yet amiable film that follows the trek of two young hoboes across the B.C. terrain, two lonely dreamers creating adventure wherever they can.

The leader, Ruben (Frank Moore) sees himself as a Clint Eastwood loner seeking a fistful of dollars, gold at the end of a rainbow, a promised land. The bristly visage, nasal drawl and spaghetti western lingo fit him uneasily. His childish cowboy behavior expresses defiant frustrated rage at Them, the rooted folk with civilization their front.

Wes (Jim Henshaw), the young disciple, blindly follows Ruben, lured possibly by the need to break out of his lifestyle. "Stick with me, kid. Ruben takes care of you. Keeps you out of the rain." Wes, however, is disturbed at Ruben's actions, particularly when he refuses to aid a girl hitchhiker who is certain to be raped by bikers. After sharing the road with her, Wes cannot comprehend why he feels nothing for her, why he feels that each person lives his destiny and one shouldn't try and change it. Wes



The Supreme Kid by Peter Bryant

is so troubled that he attempts to go on his own but winds up with Ruben again, having slowly cultivated an amused detachment.

They meet a motley assortment of civilized people, including a homosexual con man who, upon having his advances rejected, proclaims them saints for having resisted temptation. Upon convincing them to kneel in prayer in a refuse dump, he goes back to the car on the pretext of retrieving his Bible, only to drive off with their meager possessions. "Jesus, they're smart," remarks Ruben. "No wonder they're taking over."

They also meet Wilbur, a small-time thief, and become attached to his rather endearing qualities. A shaggy-haired version of Huntz Hall in the Bowery Boys' era, Wilbur lives in a room decked out in bric-a-brac of the past. Being so determined to pull off the big one, it is inevitable that he will meet his dog day afternoon.

Frank Moore registers well in the transition from Man With No Name impersonation to an all-too-human

scared loneliness. Jim Henshaw's interpretation of Wes seems to be that of a wide-eyed innocent, his values breaking under a growing awareness of what the American/Canadian dream is all about.

Don Granbury as Wilbur has the wide sad eyes and bewildered facial expression that are ideally suited to such a tragicomic victim.

Director Bryant constructs the film around episodic encounters with stereotypes. A pervading aura of absurdity prevails both in the Wertmulleresque opening in which Ruben beds an obese woman and in *Freebie and the Bean* fistfights, one triggered when Ruben and Wes kick in the headlights of a car.

In the climactic scenes, provoked by a confrontation with the police and Wilbur's senseless end, a sense of humanity comes out strongly. Wes and Ruben dance a wild comradely jig, a sort of celebration of man's capacity to survive despite all. Then they disappear from the frame as if they never were.

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.

There are some contrived moments as in the broad daylight robbery of armored truck guards. By coincidence, the guards are inexperienced bunglers and no passersby are in evidence. Also Ruben brings on his problems with the police through abusive language and literally peeing all over one of them.

The Supreme Kid should appeal to those who, having their dreams forever frustrated, just carry on the best they can.

J. Edward Fox

Jean-Guy Noël's

Ti-Cul Tougas

d: Jean-Guy Noël, **asst. d:** François Labonté, **sc:** Jean-Guy Noël, **ph:** François Beauchemin, **ed:** Marthe de la Chevrotière, **sd:** Hugues Mignault, **m:** Georges Langford, **l.p.:** Micheline Lanctôt, Suzanne Garceau, Claude Maher, Gilbert Sicotte, **exec. p.:** Marc Daigle, **p:** René Gueissaz, **p.c.:** L'Association Coopérative de Productions Audio-Visuelles, 1975, **col:** 16mm blown up to 35mm, **running time:** 83 minutes.

Jean-Guy Noël's second feature film is a witness to the fact that a very good young cinema is hard on the heels of the Carles and the Jutras of Quebec's film community.

Ti-Cul Tougas has much of the happy-go-lucky charm and the irresistible humor that has marked Quebec's cinema over the years, but its strength is really in the tightness of an extremely sensitive plot and in the scope of the actors' performances.

The story doesn't sound terribly appealing, although it caters to the young Quebec student's wildest dreams. Ti-Cul Tougas is a young man who wants to get on with things, see the world, have a real "trip." He has heard that California is heaven on earth, the place where the action never stops. But when the film starts, Ti-Cul Tougas is in transit, hiding out on the Magdalen Islands with his girlfriend, hoping that their friends back home will give up on hunting them down.

But one of them does track them down. He knew better than to keep pounding away in a Local Initiative brass band while Ti-Cul and the secretary were running wild with the band's monthly \$5,000 worth of cheques.

Very quickly, and quite smartly, Noël puts the LIP grant and the robbery aside to zoom in on Ti-Cul's dreams and particularly on the interplay between four adorable characters.

Ti-Cul Tougas (let's call him the "bum" Tougas) is played by actor Claude Maher. The friend who comes to track him down and who worms his way into the small-time adventure is played by Gilbert Sicotte. Both of them are already experienced actors. Sicotte was in *Les vautours*

and *Je suis loin de toi mignonne* and Maher has played extensively on television and on stage. Ti-Cul and his pal may be the first two actors to trigger the female moviegoers' imagination since the Pilon brothers stepped out of *Les mâles* and kept walking away from fame.

Maher and Sicotte know the real balances between fine comedy and over-played slapstick, between believable and sensed emotion, and schmaltz. Their performances bring the best out of a script that deals with young people's restlessness, and their search for something special. Like most young people, the bum Tougas and his friend settle for love and friendship, and find the funny side to a hard time.

Actresses Micheline Lanctôt and Suzanne Garceau are older and tougher than their adventurous companions. They know more about life and they become that much better companions for these two freshies without a cause. Lanctôt is an engaging as ever. As for Garceau, we can only hope to see more of such mature and delicate emotions.

Noël's film has amazing quality, holding the edge between dream and reality and their troublesome presence in the lives of those who know only too well that you're only young once. It's a film to enjoy, as entertainment and as philosophy.

Carmel Dumas

Ed Hunt's

Point of No Return

d. Ed Hunt, **asst. d.** Holly Dale, **sc.** Ed Hunt, **ph.** Mark Irwing, **add. ph.** Jack Brandis, **ed.** Holly Dale, **assoc. ed.** Wally Woloszczuk, **sd.** Victor Gamble, Suzanne Depoe, Janice Cole, **l.p.** Nicky Fylan (Mike), Susan Petrie (Diana), Eli Rill (Professor Lime), Cec Linder (Professor Jones), Gary McKeehan (Dave), **exec. p.** Nicky Fylan, **p.** Ed Hunt and Amie Hatcher, **assoc. p.** John Edwards, **p. manager.** Kenneth Gord, color, **running time** 85 minutes.

Whatever limitations there may be to the impact of *Point of No Return*, one thing you can say for it right away: it isn't boring. In fact, it fairly zips along for 85 minutes. And,



Lanctôt and Maher (*Ti-Cul Tougas*) talk about getting away from it all

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though the story it tells is basically unlikely, it *seems* more plausible while it lasts than did a slightly similar recent Canadian shot at a thriller, **Sudden Fury**.

Ed Hunt has directed with some flair. The location shooting in and around Toronto (the ferries and the island, Buttonville airport) is effective and the film decidedly benefits from the presence of a young leading actor who *has* presence, Nicky Fylan. He possesses an aggressive charm and an ability to make even far-fetched situations convincing. With more controlling direction he might later on be, in his slightly John Garfield way, very good indeed.

The plot of **Point of No Return** concerns two brothers. They have some eccentric traits, such as a strong belief in flying saucers and a loyalty to the Toronto *Sun*. They are, otherwise, likely Canadian lads and the one brother (Fylan) is understandably peeved when the other is murdered, thrusting him (still Fylan) into what used to be called a "web of strange and baffling mystery". The film's makers also seem fairly sure that UFOs do exist and that they visit Ontario regularly, to the extent that this intriguing possibility is only a side issue of the story. What it really revolves around, not to give away too much, is the building of a "small but effective atom bomb," as the chief villain rather Goonishly describes his pet project.

One feels some goodwill towards this film, compared to altogether too many past Canadian features which have been more ambitious and serious but also more pretentious and dreary. Were the producers wise, however, (to be very realistic about marketing) to make their content fairly decently "Adult Entertainment" rather than blatantly "Restricted"? This inhibits fashionable swearing — the *worst* words having to be bypassed — and cuts off lovemaking at a discreet fadeout. (In compensation, the hero's covered crotch is often literally in focus). The film would pass the fairly tough scrutiny of audiences at theatres like (in Toronto) the Yonge or Odeon Coronet. But "Adult Entertainment" movies can only fill the *lower* half of an exploitation double bill.

As often happens, there seem to lurk ideas behind the commercial facade of **Point of No Return**. Its hero has been to jail, he has extreme

violence pent up within him and yet he is vaguely trying to live a reasonable life, if left to it in peace. Such issues could be made a little clearer, dwelt on more maturely and interestingly than they are. It's possible within a thriller movie framework. Remember **The Big Heat**, **Cry of the City**, even **On the Waterfront**. (Sorry, there are no Canadian counterparts in existence yet.) **Point of No Return** suffers from either too much characterization (on one, purely saleable, level) or not enough (on a higher, more promising plane). To this higher plane, Ed Hunt — to his credit — surely aspires.

Clive Denton

Rex Bromfield's

Love at First Sight

d. Rex Bromfield, sc. Rex Bromfield, ph. Henri Fiks, ed. Allan Collins, sd. Douglas Ganton, a.d. Tony Hall, m. Roy Payne, l.p. Dan Aykroyd (Roy), Mary Ann McDonald (Shirley), George Murray (Frank), Jane Mallett (Mum), Barry Morse (William), Jim Barron and Charles Northcote (Niagara cops), p. Peter O'Brian, exec. p. John Trent and David Perlmutter, p.c. Quadrant Films, 1976, color, 35 mm, running time 85 min., premiere Festival of Festivals, uptown Toronto, Oct. 22, 1976.

Answers to Questionnaire distributed at the Festival Showing

Did you enjoy the film?

Yes, thank you, to a moderate extent, partly because the audience was

enthusiastic and seemed genuinely surprised that a Canadian film could provide light-hearted fun.

Did you find this film offensive in any way?

No, not really, although it does tread on slippery ground in showing a blind man as a figure of fun. He's drawn with a certain sympathy, and played with a nice line in self-mockery by Dan Aykroyd, from Toronto's "Second City" troupe. Also, some of the sighted characters are even dumber than he is. On second thought, Barry Morse was curiously repellent as a gay birdseller but maybe the producers thought so too for his role shows signs of having been, mercifully, pared to the bone.

Would you recommend it to your friends?

Which friends? My best friends are used to anything by now but maiden aunts might not be *quite* attuned to absurdist comedy.

What scenes did you particularly like?

The early ones which establish a rapport between the young blind man and his kooky but warm-hearted new girlfriend. Also, the parodies of the blind hero's impossible resourcefulness as in **Butterflies Are Free**. And every brief appearance of gorgeous, wise Jane Mallett as the grandmother who keeps going to see **Gone With the Wind** at the Roxy.

Would you describe this film as a COMEDY? sort of, DRAMA? scarcely, LOVE STORY? partly, and rather touchingly, OTHER? yes.

Clive Denton



Roy (Dan Aykroyd) and Shirley (Mary Ann McDonald) finding their way home

Clarke Mackey's

A Right to Live

d. Clarke Mackey, ph. John Clement, sd. Doug Berry, m. Glen Johansen and Trevor Owen, p. assts: Laura Taylor, Richard Spiegelman and Laurie Graham, Note: Made with the full participation of the Union of Injured Workers in the planning, scripting and editing, col. 16mm (1976), running time 63 minutes, dist. DEC Films, Toronto.

*It don't worry me.
It don't worry me.
You may say that I ain't free.
But it don't worry me.*

—Nashville

After what feels like a steady diet of cupcakes for the mind, I found it a pleasure to see **A Right to Live** — Clarke Mackey's 63-minute documentary on the Union of Injured Workers and their struggle to change the Workmen's Compensation Act. The filmmakers obviously cared about the people who agreed to share intimate aspects of their situations with the camera, and they also cared enough about the film's larger audience to provide us with vital information in a clear, unsentimental fashion. We come away from the film with an understanding of the reasons for the union's demands: job security or full job compensation, cost of living increases, no board doctors, better safety conditions. While it's certainly true that "any one of us could be an injured worker," what I found most striking about **A Right to Live** is the extent to which it provides a microcosm for the larger world. I guess all of us are trying, in Dylan's phrase, to "keep on keepin' on", and this film cuts through some of the crap thrown down in our path from institutional windows on high.

In this sense, the film is a highly useful document for exploring and illuminating the mode of thinking which keeps the cogs of "the system" turning and grinding. Take, for example, one of the most shocking cases in the film: what happened to Sevario Vardaro after he was injured in 1963 when the roof under which he was working caved in on him. Mackey uses close-ups of newspaper photos taken just after the accident — the rubble, Vardaro in pain on the

stretcher. As well, there is a sequence showing Vardaro putting on the steel back-brace which he must wear for the rest of his life. In a way, this is all evidence for us, because ultimately the authorities in Vardaro's case tried to prove that his pain was all in his head. As the narration tells us, among some doctors responsible for diagnosing injured immigrant workers, there is a "theory that certain cultural groups — namely Italians — have a tendency to play the sick-role". When Vardaro complained that the pain made it impossible for him to work, he was sent to a specialist, without being told that this specialist was a psychiatrist. According to the hospital report, Vardaro was given a series of six injections of sodium amytol (truth serum) in order to "get at the root of the patient's problem". When this technique proved unsuccessful, Vardaro was moved to the psychiatric ward and given two injections of LSD. Then, apparently because Vardaro still maintained that his pain was physical, it was decided that shock treatments were in order — at which point the patient stopped cooperating. As Vardaro tells us, "I wasn't crazy then, and I'm not crazy now!" He could be speaking for each of us, vis-a-vis "benign" authority figures, when he says of the doctor, "You trust him... you're not allowed to ask questions."

Another extremely illuminating passage in **A Right to Live** deals with those injuries, such as amputations, which cannot possibly be labelled as "all in the head". In a reconstructed scene of a Compensation Board doctor examining an injured worker, we learn about the existence of a "meat chart". As the narration explains:

When a person is to be considered for a permanent disability pension, he is examined by a doctor who works for the Compensation Board. Because the Board pays these doctors, it is likely that they will work in the Board's interest and assess the extent of the worker's injury as low as possible. In calculating percentage of disability, these doctors often use a diagram sometimes called the 'meat chart'. ...It assigns every part of the body with a percentage. Thus, an amputated leg would be rated at something like 30%, while loss of a finger might be 2%. What this chart fails to take into consideration is

how an injury in one part of the body affects the whole person and his ability to get a job.

To its credit **A Right to Live** does attempt to consider the whole person in its examination of the plight of injured workers. It raises some questions in complicated areas, such as the effects of disability and loss of earning power on personal relationships, home life, and self-worth. The daughter of a disabled man tells about the gradual breakdown within the family, as the children began to turn away from the father for any kind of support. The wife of another injured man speaks directly of his jealousy for her earning power, for her ability to support the family. While it could be argued that **A Right to Live** does not go far enough in analyzing these dimensions, thereby making them seem secondary to more "practical" matters, I can understand that problems of budget, time and expediency called for certain priorities in the film. At least those areas are evoked in the film, material for further thought and discussion.

On the other hand, the complete absence of injured women workers from the film — through either images or narration — is less justifiable. Even if this absence reflects male chauvinistic thinking within the union itself, the film might at least have acknowledged that working women, too, get hurt on the job and suffer from the terms of the Workmen's Compensation Act. This is no moot point, I would argue, for the utter silence in the film on this point — in particular, the fact that the Union of Injured Workers includes few women is never mentioned in the film — lessens the extent to which **A Right to Live** can be used as an auto-critique in discussions. Unfortunately, to my way of thinking, this lack in the film furthers the very divisiveness which the system perpetrates.

Despite this one serious drawback in the film, I was greatly impressed with the many powerful images in John Clement's cinematography. The film reveals a keen awareness of the appropriate framing, angle and color tones which make a given shot "full" of all kinds of subtle "information". Also, there are many moments of just wonderful editing. For example, we

see Manuel Gouveia, former employee of a Toronto bedding factory for over 15 years, seated on his porch – unable to work because of a back injury on the job. Through his gestures he tries to show us the kind of work he did, which probably, over the years, caused the injury. We are sympathetic, but the full weight of his labor does not hit us until the film intercuts with his actions sequences of another worker in the factory, lifting the unwieldy 90-pound mattresses and throwing them onto a huge stack. The intercutting itself is almost painful for us because it forces us to compare this injured man's restricted gestures to a more able-bodied vision of what he once was. Perhaps the technique is a rather simple one in terms of editing, but the effect is what counts, and I found it quite powerful.

Space prevents me from saying more about this film. It clearly deserves wide distribution. **A Right to Live** is one of those rare films (these days) that can leave us feeling more knowledgeable, clear-headed, and human for having seen it.

Joyce Nelson

**Alex Cramer and
Stephen Franklin's**

The Last Cause

d: Stephen H. Franklin, Alex Cramer, **sc:** Stephen H. Franklin, Alex Cramer, **ph:** Stephen H. Franklin, **ed:** Ron Yowart, **sd. ed.:** Jim Hopkins, John Kelly, Gary Oppenheimer, **sd. rec.:** Austin Grimaldi, Joe Grimaldi, **p:** William Brennan, **p.c.:** Sandy McLeod Of Canada Limited, 1976, BW, 16mm, **narr:** Warren Davis, **running time:** 165 minutes.

History, Robert Payne reminds us, is a voice, a face, a bomb fragment, a child's crying in the night, and history's recorder – frequently a front-line cameraman whose films and tape recordings enable us to reach into a living past to retrieve the face and the voice. So serves **The Last Cause**, a



A scene from the Spanish Civil War

165-minute documentary film on the Spanish Civil War, written and directed by Alex Cramer and Stephen Franklin and produced by William Brennan.

The structure of the film is three-part, its divisions representing an attempt at exegesis of political complexities so mixed that, to date, no satisfactory history of the war has been written by a Spaniard. In its absence, one hears the voices of Toller and Malraux recalling the ghosts that walked over Spain. Some became palpable, and some died, and still others changed their shape and assumed new disguises. Though not overtly, **The Last Cause** deals with such configurations, and very successfully. But its effort to provide a perspective on chaos is never more than barely achieved. One wonders why. The political lines have been drawn (more precisely than history drew them), and the chronology of battle, from Madrid to the crossing of the Ebro, assiduously followed. Such corroboration as the individual interviews provide, on the progression of the war, substantiates the narrative sequences of newsreel footage and still photographs. But the film's concern is less with political complexity than with the human significance of the conflict. Picasso's *Guernica* forms a montage sequence, with newsreel and still, that is superbly crafted and central to the film's statement. The bombers of Hitler's Condor Legion

harried the civilian from the streets and strafing marked him as a military target. None was exempted from the horror and the film unflinchingly describes all of it. This spectacle of pain and of death is the more poignant because it was largely ignored by the Western democracies, for none had the courage even to dispense with the hypocrisy of a non-intervention policy – a policy flagrantly violated by Mussolini and Hitler. That the Spanish resistance was a sacrifice for more than Spanish freedom is obvious now. Had courage and nobility not been abandoned in Spain and cowardly appeasement sought so eagerly in Munich, fascism would not have tyrannized Czechoslovakia.

The film is not that rarity, a stylistic tour de force. Its self-conscious earnestness leans a shade too far in the direction of fact-gathering. Too much is defined and too early. For it is possible that we shall never know the full story of the Civil War in Spain, nor what exactly brought it about, nor how many died. Many of the people interviewed in the film appeared still to be grasping for significance of just this kind. **The Last Cause** enables us to see the faces of the men and women who struggled for the Republic, to see the war through the eyes of those who fought it, and finally, to be present when it ended, as many of them were not.

Alice Smith