

Julie Vincent was a co-winner of the best actress award at the Chicago Film Festival. One can't help but agree with the words of a Toronto educator quoted in a press release: "I wish the film were compulsory for all policemen, all lawyers, all judges. Mandatory, before they could pick up their first pay cheque."

Penelope Hynam

Harvey Frost's Something's Rotten

d. F. Harvey Frost asst. d. Bill Corcoran, Libby Bowden sc. Norman Fox cont. Nancy Eagles ph. Brian R.R. Hebb asst. cam. Dennis Rindsem boom op. Michael Morningstar clapper/loader John Hobson gaffer Frank Singers best boy Frieder Hochheim grips Jim Craig, Carlo Campana, Bill Heintz electrician Ken Smale gen. ops. Richard Allen, Greg Daniels, Peter Dawes stunt co-ord. Dwayne McLean ed. Brian Ravok asst. ed. Jeremy MacLavery sd. rec. Peter Shewchuk re. rec. Joe Grimaldi p. designer Edwin Watkins p. asst. Lee Knippelberg a.d. asst. Daniel Bradette set dec. Jack Bradette m. John Kuipers make-up Shonagh Jabour ward. Julie Ganton hair James Brown l.p. Charlotte Blunt, Geoffrey Bowes, Trudy Weiss, Christopher Barry, Cec Linder, Irene Hogan, Harvey Sokolov, William Osler, Charles Joliffe, Adam McCoy, John-Peter Linton p. David F. Eustace assoc. p. Nancy E. Stewart p. sec./account. Dorothy Precious p. manager Barbara Laffey.

If justice were to be done and Sweet Reason (to whose light all good reviewers aspire) were to be served, this review would be a full book — a primer on filmmaking filled with examples, most of them bad, all from **Something's Rotten**. Nothing less could hope to bring order and understanding to so chaotic a mess. But, as there isn't space, justice and Sweet Reason down the tube: instead, this series of assertions, more or less unsupported and unconnected, but pardonable, if only because I refrain from making jokes about the title; though, if ever a title begged and film deserved...

First, the plot summary: in a castle in a modern-day, unnamed European country lives the Queen (also unnamed, despite her central position) and her two sons, George, who will be king, and Calvin, who limps and practises ventriloquism to cure his stutter. There is also a Midnight Skulker who kills some bees. George's tutor lectures him on the likelihood of assas-



Charlotte Blunt and company in **Something's Rotten** — left-hand corner on the floor!

sination by members of his immediate family. The Prime Minister asks the Queen to step down, saying the people will be happier if a man is on the throne, to deal with the Americans and Arabs. The Queen refuses. The Prime Minister threatens her with budget cutbacks. The Skulker kills the castle cat. The Queen dreams that the sun is falling on her. The Skulker kills George's tutor. Calvin practises ventriloquism: when the dummy talks, his stutter disappears. The Skulker digs up the tutor and places him under the Queen's bed. The Queen begins to suspect her sons and has them examined by a psychiatrist who declares Calvin to be sound and George to be deeply disturbed. The Queen confronts George and tells him that he isn't in line for the throne, after all. Calvin is really the elder brother and will take George's place. George attacks the Queen, but Calvin kills him. The Queen goes to address Parliament, confident that, without a ready prince, she will face neither forced abdication nor cutbacks. Calvin retires to his study to gloat over the death of George, his successes as a Skulker and to plot the Queen's future doom. He leaves the room and the dummy's mouth drops open. The End.

The astute reader will already have noticed a lack of the connectives 'because' and 'but.' This is only because precious little happens 'because' of, or in spite of, anything else. As those words are the essence of tight plotting (try summarizing **The Maltese Falcon** without them), and since this is, according to the press release and most of the dialogue, a story about power, one might think a tight plot would be appropriate.

But the 'power' theme is largely unrelated to the plot (substitute 'heir to millions' for 'prince') and is handled with a degree of naïveté that far surpasses Joe Clark's bid to move our embassy in Israel.

The characters are even thinner than the plot. We learn nothing of their recreational habits, save that George likes falcons. The Queen's interaction with George consists of nagging him to do his studies and, while we do learn that she likes Calvin better, we never learn why. We see the Queen playing chess, too distracted to think. Suddenly, she pulls a last-minute victory. Is she a good chess player, or did her aide let her win?

When the Prime Minister asks the Queen to step down, she's more like a bitchy

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steno with her supervisor than the ruler of her country.

The dialogue is wooden and repetitious. The Queen to George: "Your studies are so important, especially those about when you'll be king." In two separate and distinct scenes, George's tutor tells him (with appropriate slides) that he's a candidate for assassination. The Queen tells us, at least five times, that she's worried about the skulking, the killing.

The acting is atrocious. Charlotte Blunt, as the Queen, clearly lacks aristocratic charisma. Christopher Barry, as George, does nothing but scowl. Cec Linder, playing the Prime Minister, is too much the professional to look or sound bad, but for a man asking his queen to resign, he seems curiously uninterested.

Geoffrey Bowes, as Calvin, is the high point of the movie. In engaging scenes with the dummy, his speech and gestures are delivered with skilled timing. And Trudy Weiss, as the Queen's aide/lady-in-waiting, exudes a critical, almost sinister intelligence behind her banal lines.

Unfortunately, the suspense sequences

are not suspenseful. The Queen enters the cellar to look for the cat. The music rises. She turns on a light and comes face to face with a mirror. Shock! The music peaks and drops. She comes back down the hall, looking in rooms. Behind a door we see, lying on the floor, a glove belonging to the Skulker. The Queen peeks in, looks around, the music climaxes, but she does not see the glove and leaves. In no way could that glove have given her any useful information or threatened her. Where then is the suspense? Or consider the idiocy of a Skulker who wears luminous-green editing gloves that have no psychological or practical significance for him. They are there only for the audience.

In some scenes, over-exposed shots cause cheeks to disappear in glaring hot spots. But despite lighting continuity problems, there are several fine compositions. However, one can't escape the dreadful blocking, that results in scenes played out with characters standing in the middle of rooms as if they'd been warned

not to touch the furniture. (Considering that the film was shot in Casa Loma on, reportedly, \$200,000, that may be the case.) On occasion, the soundtrack distorts to the point of incoherence.

The list goes on, but space runs out. If you believe all this, you may be wondering how such a monumental piece of dreck ever made it to the screen. Some of the blame must go to producer and president of Hazelton Motion Picture, Inc., David F. Eustace. Eustace, I've heard, is an insurance man who sold his business and bought the Canadian rights to *It's Alive!* — and with the profits from that, made *Something's Rotten*. This makes him a beginner so, he should not be judged too harshly. Certainly not as harshly as Norman Fox, the writer, or F. Harvey Frost, director.

If you don't believe what you've read, go and see for yourself. Then come back and apologize; maybe next time you'll listen!

Andrew Dowler

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SHORT FILM REVIEWS

Young and Just Beginning — Pierre

p.c. Ruth Hope Assoc. p./d. Ruth Hope, Mark Irwin cam. Mark Irwin, Robin Miller sd. Bryan Day, John McGill mus. Gary Gegan, Clive Parks, Gord Paton, Mark Irwin ed. Ruth Hope assist. ed Gary Gegan dancers Pierre Quinn, Talitha Arndt, Kevin Pugh, Kim Glascock pas de deux John Alleyne, Kim Glascock choreog. Deborah Bowes, Barbara Forbes piano Ronald Raymond, Trevor McLain col. 16 mm length 25 min. year 1979 dist. Kenetic Film Distributors.

Young and Just Beginning — Pierre, the award-winning documentary produced by Ruth Hope and Mark Irwin is a beautiful tour through the National Ballet School of Canada, and an insightful look at the rigorous life of children aspiring to be artists. It is not however, what its title implies it will be: a specific, in depth study of Pierre.

The title of a work is an indication of its purpose. The film does indeed focus on eleven-year-old Pierre Quinn — a young Quebecer who has left his family and friends behind, to train at the Toronto school — but not strongly enough. Granted, an eleven-year-old who is "just beginning" to learn the technique and feel the spirit

of his chosen art is obviously not going to be the most articulate and sophisticated of subjects; but, if you put the film beside any of the episodes in the CBC's *Spread Your Wings* series (films about children which are trying to do exactly the same thing as *Pierre*), you realize that Pierre himself borders on being an excuse to study dancers in general, instead of being the film's *raison d'être*.

Still, *Pierre*, and the young dancers as a group, present a powerful and definite point of view. Their faces, reflecting earnest concentration, or the sudden fun of a mistake, are irresistible. Their gangly arms and skinny ankles working toward grace and strength give us a clear sense of where the technique of art comes from. The editor adeptly portions out these elements with a rhythm that is both elegant and truly evocative of the studios atmosphere.

The dance-class setting, with the bars, the mirrors, the patch of light on the middle of the bare floor from a window, and of course the dancers, is a photographer's delight. Fortunately, Irwin doesn't get carried away, but uses his camera with commendable restraint to create apt images of a place where something difficult, with a beautiful reward at its end, is being learned.