



photo: Trikat Media Prod.

Vietnamese refugee Garry Sun Hoan with director Eugene Buia and his son — putting on a brave face in a new world.

freighter which took him to a Malaysian refugee camp. From there he came to Canada.

It would have been impossible for Garry to actually send an ordinary letter to his parents. He did not, after all, know his parents' whereabouts back in Vietnam. In fact, at the time the film was made, he did not even know whether or not his parents were alive.

For those of us who have never experienced refugee status, the plight of those from Vietnam — or any other war zone — is exceedingly difficult to comprehend. Yet, in *Letter to Vietnam*, director Eugene Buia — who is himself a political refugee, a native of Romania, where he gained extensive experience as a director and producer of feature films — manages to communicate, forcefully and clearly, the enormity of the refugee's struggle.

Buia achieves this through a voice-over narration of Garry's comments to his parents on life in Canada, newsreel and documentary footage from Vietnam, and silent footage of Garry exploring his new Canadian environment.

Buia's 'letter' format encourages viewers to make that leap in imagination of placing themselves in Garry Sun Hoan's position: of witnessing a Santa Claus parade for the first time, of visiting a typical Canadian supermarket, of en-

countering a newborn Vietnamese baby in the alien setting of a Canadian hospital, of sitting in a Canadian classroom, of reminiscing about a childhood spent in the streets of Saigon.

Technically, the film's stock newsreel footage, and the Toronto sequences, both exhibit, at times, a somewhat disorienting camera jitter and a very frequent use of the zoom lens, which some viewers may find disconcerting. On the other hand, for many, the powerful content of *Letter to Vietnam*, and the confident, burgeoning quality of the editing (many of the newsreel sequences are repeated several times, to good effect, will make up for any of the film's minor, technical shortcomings.

**Jaen Pill**

## Star Ways

p.c. Mekanique Productions (1979) p./d. Larry Moore p. asst. Ontario Arts Council cam. op. Fred Guthe, Nicholas Kendall cam. asst. Janek Corydon, Stewart Miller, Keet Neville ed. Bruce Annis m.comp./pref. David Grimes spec. effects/rigs Janek Corydon, Mark MacCammon l.p. Robin Hayle, Marc Kyriacou, Mr. Bink, Andrew Kilgour col. 16mm run. time 5 min. dist. Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

In Larry Moore's first film, a young boy with his *Star Wars* comic book runs to the front window of a subway train and pretends to pilot a spaceship out of the station and into the black of space. The lights of the tunnel zip by, transformed into red, green, and yellow galaxies, as the boy hits the controls like a pinball machine. Abruptly, Darth Vader looms up and the boy fires at him. When the boy steps out of the ship, Vader chases and catches the boy on the platform — and turns into his mother.

It's a five-minute miniature with a \$700 million set built by the Toronto Transit Commission. Moore co-opts the architects' 'modern' effect for his film, and does so successfully; since, for most of us, a house may be fact, but a subway is still science-fiction-becoming-fact.

With similar economy, Moore creates galaxies using another fiction already established by others in the big league — notably by Trumbull and the million-dollar special effects people of cinema-sci-fi. Abstract filmmakers diddled colors and patterns with sound, but were long out-of-work, until movies like *2001* created jobs. Deep space is mysterious, and so are abstract films: ergo, spaceships in deep space travel through colors and patterns with sound. It's a fine convention, and for the first little while, *Star Wars* creates the right, headlong rush with its simple running lights.

But the convention is well enough established that viewers are wanting something more to happen, while Moore himself is still just speeding along.

In a small and precious miniature, there's precious little room for confusion. The mother who switches places with Vader at the end is the same woman seen in an opening shot, where she appears to be waiting to the board the same train at the same time. So the audience faces some logical discomfort when Vader/mother appears on the platform ahead of the boy as he enters the last station. The problem is small, but so is the film, and the interference it causes seems large.

On the platform, the boy runs as though the fantasy has become too solid, and one momentarily remembers the rush and flash of a kid's mind and the strength of its healthy psychosis. When, after all, the boy recognizes his mother, Moore is alert enough to show us the warmth between them, so we won't go home wondering what villainy the woman actually represented.

As the boy runs from Vader, the camera swings in line with the accelerating train.

The match of both motions seems to fling the actor forward by the craft and timing of his maker. It's an exciting moment that promises more to come.

A first film must be a shout across a canyon, so wide and deep are those first technical and logistical problems. Wisely, Moore has kept his shout simple.

David Sharpe

## For Elizabeth

p.c. York University and Richard Zywockiewicz (1979) d./sc. Richard Zywockiewicz p.man. Aaron Lo ph. Robin Campbell light. Tony Sloan sd. Richard Irvine sd. ed. Richard Zywockiewicz ed. Clint Young l.p. Maureen Brown, George Belsky, Ron Wolosyn, Ron Hughes acknowl. Theatre Ontario (STEP), Ontario Multicultural Theatre col. 16mm run. time 22 min. dist. Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

Good intentions don't count for much in art. However well-meaning and earnest the filmmaker, the final product may be just plain bad: **For Elizabeth**, a 1979, York University, student production, written and directed by Richard Zywockiewicz, is a case in point. Despite the feeling and commitment behind this film, the end result is still corny and pretentious.

Zywockiewicz described it as "the haunting story of an immigrant widower and his daughter, in a sensitive portrayal of two lonely people, isolated, longing for the past when the family was whole. Although ambiguous and impressionistic, the film explores the breakdown of family relationships within a threatening society."

Sympathy is a tiresome justification for interest in a film character; but it is the only one in this film — and it doesn't work. Elizabeth and her father are presented only as victims, so the drama comes too easily, and is inauthentic.

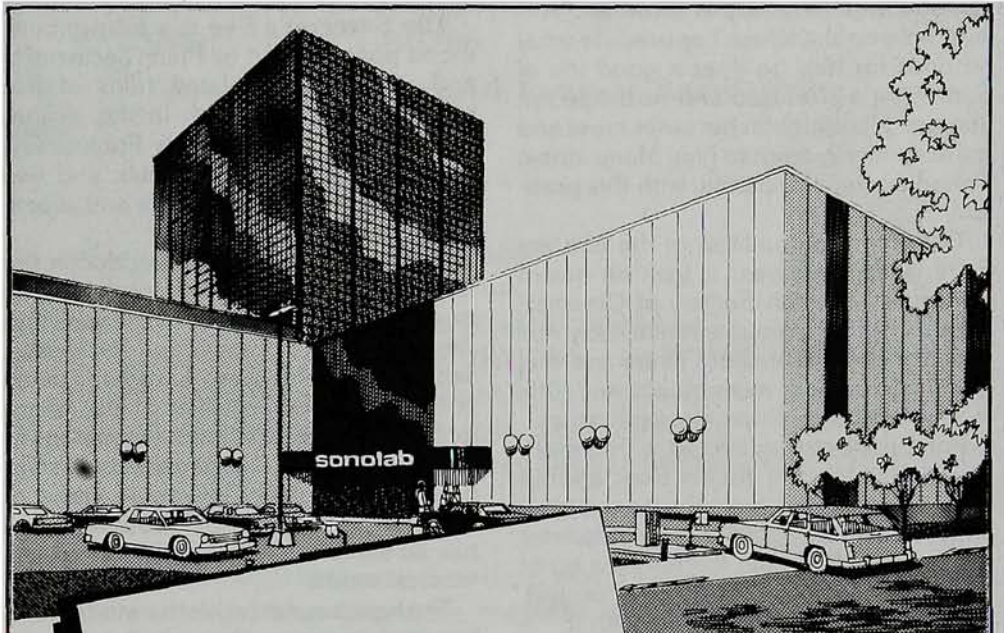
Elizabeth is shy, seemingly friendless, and treated as a sex object by inconsiderate males. Even the 'nice' boy she meets suddenly abandons her to go overseas. Her adolescent, or post-adolescent pangs, are real enough, but they are certainly not tragic; hence, they should have been treated in this film (if at all) with much understatement.

The dialogue is less at fault than are the situations. Elizabeth is shown running wildly along a frozen beach. She falls, and lies there until a young man (Prince

Charming?) comes to her aid. After an argument with her father, she falls asleep in her room, and is awakened by a ringing phone, probably her new male friend. Instead of answering it, Elizabeth stands in front of the mirror and combs her hair. Not only is the scene unrealistic, but one

later concludes that it is a script device, used so that the girl might receive bad news in person instead of over the telephone.

Since there is no evidence to suggest that Elizabeth is actually mentally disturbed in a clinical sense, her catatonic-



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