

# REVIEWS

film, when he says, "Everything that you do is music." Director Ron Mann dramatically captures this belief, that music is everything and everywhere, as we see the musicians coaxing the music out of their instruments - Taylor on piano, Dixon on trumpet, Shepp on tenor and soprano saxophones, and Bley on piano. Bill Smith (co-producer with Mann) knowledgeably interviews the musicians, allowing each to speak about his music in a way which gives further credence to the basic idea.

Except for one scene, the film is shot in-studio. So as not to distract the viewer from the music, camera movement is kept to a minimum. The music is the figure, the film is the ground. Cinematographer Robert Fresco shows his understanding of this with an appropriate economy and restraint. Consequently, editor Sonya Polonsky is able to cut from interview to performance and back again in a very linear style, forcing the focus where it belongs - on the musician and his music. For each of the four performers the camera develops a different eye, the better to capture the nuances of each man creating his work.

It is Cecil Taylor who gives the camera the most to look at, what with the eccentricities and affectations of this man whom many consider to be a genius. Taylor is shot against a stark, white background devoid of everything but his black piano. The room is a tabula rasa waiting for Taylor to leave his im-

pression upon it. Both Dixon and Shepp, in their separate sequences, are seen in darker colours that generate a feeling of closeness by reducing the distance between the musician and the listener. Bley is filmed as if he is performing in a vacuum, suggesting that if music could be generated in a vacuum it would sound just like that which he plays.

In the course of the film, Taylor and Shepp both give readings of their poems in voices which substitute for their instruments. This interplay of art forms is hardly incidental. (On one of his recent visits to Montreal, Taylor performed at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.)

The music that these four musicians create has rid itself of melody and harmony, structures which often restrict the musician. *Imagine the Sound* successfully shows what results when a musician becomes unbound, just as the film itself stays out of the way. Mann makes no statements, nor does he attempt to convey his feelings about the music. Rather, he lets the music speak for itself, leaving the audience to imagine the sound long after the film is over.

Vadney S. Haynes ●

**IMAGINE THE SOUND** d. Ron Mann p. Ron Mann, Bill Smith art d. Sandy Kybartas d.o.p. Robert Fresco p. man. Salem Alaton creative consult. Emile DeAntonio gaf. Jock Brandis p.c. Onari Productions (1981) running time 90 min. dist. International Tele-Film Enterprises

ally to the horrific and macabre, several films, most notably the *Jaws* series have made the shark attacks seem even more hideous by casting these underwater predators as sinister villains, capable of plotting truly evil deeds on a scale almost human. At the height of this mania, many film-goers returned home much too frightened of the ocean to go swimming, and even nervous of freshwater ponds, populating them with imaginary, man-eating sharks.

John Stoneman, underwater filmmaker extraordinaire, knows real sharks. He must; they are a regular part of his filming environment. Like few other people, he sees them in their normal habitat, during literally every hour of the day and night. Unlike so many of the filmmakers before him, Stoneman is sensitive to the grace and beauty of these creatures. He knows they are not villains, but he also respects their power, and their mastery of that blue wilderness. It must, at least in part, have been a sense of outrage at the insult the early films flung at these majestic beasts that kept Stoneman at the task of creating what can only be described as a magnificent documentary film about real sharks.

That task was incredibly difficult, not only because it was exceptionally dangerous, not only because the animals are truly unpredictable, erratic, and positively frustrating in their behaviour, but also because to achieve the balance of accuracy and drama Stoneman has in *Shark!*, required blending a deftly honed encyclopedia of information, with what seems like an unending wealth of spectacular underwater footage of sharks and rays.

The film begins with a shark's-eye view of a bathing beach, and although no shark appears in this scene, the impending disaster is unmistakable. Symbolically setting the scene in the style of the "horror" films, Stoneman proceeds to destroy that image completely in the rest of the film, replacing this erroneous impression of the sea running red with the blood of innumerable shark-attack victims, with a picture of a group of

supremely successful aquatic animals. (Watch for a camp cameo appearance of Stoneman in the beach scene.)

Not that he avoids the subject of shark attacks; indeed he interviews several shark-attack victims, who surprisingly, bear no malice to their attackers, and in fact seem to feel they need to defend the shark as having made a mistake which was the fault of the victim! All of them are back to their respective hobbies which got them into trouble, such as surfing and spearfishing. They have, however, changed their styles to avoid making the same mistakes. Even Stoneman realized it would be a lie not to show what a shark can do to a person, but instead of dwelling on the wounds, he uses an effective technique of appearing to take a snapshot. In this way, the audience is forced to view the damage and realize that the shark can be a fatal attacker, but the images are fleeting and last no more than a few seconds in total on the screen. In various parts of the film, he returns to the subject, but now always from a positive point of view: What can the swimmer do to avoid a shark attack? What are the most effective measures that beach authorities have used to minimize attacks? In one scene, a shark that has attacked the divers while they were filming it during a feeding encounter is destroyed using a powerhead, demonstrating that in the rare instances when it is "you or the shark" it is possible for a cool diver to defend himself. Finally Stoneman attempts to put shark attacks into a true perspective. Over the last many years, on a worldwide scale, the number of attacks is fewer than one-hundred per year, and of these fewer than a third are fatal encounters. This means the shark is far less of a hazard than lightning, for instance.

The rest of the film is devoted to what the shark is. A narrator explains something of the amazingly accurate senses of sight, smell, and sound detection. He also explores briefly two senses which humans do not possess: electrical field disturbances, and a sense of "distant touch." Choosing the blue shark to illustrate the eye, he provides a close-up view, taken in the wild open ocean off California, which must have had the shark almost touching the camera. It is both a beautiful and heart-stopping image which he freezes on the screen. Then a picture, which to an experienced diver is frighteningly impressive, he follows a huge hammerhead shark as it slowly throws its head from side to side demonstrating both the weird adaptation for extreme binocular vision, and the technique it uses for increasing the range of its already remarkable sense of smell.

An experiment with Canadian marine biologist Dr. Richard Winterbottom illustrates the sense of hearing. Playing a pre-recorded, pulsing, low-frequency sound they draw sharks from the apparently empty ocean. With remarkable success, Dr. Winterbottom actually replicates a shark-calling instrument used by the natives of Polynesia, who worship the shark as a God, to call them to the side of a boat. During the experiment, the sharks are also fed chopped fish to keep them in the area. Hidden in one of the fish is a "bite meter" which demonstrates the power of the jaws, which can transmit forces of tons per square inch on the tips of the teeth. A hint of the shark's mounting excitement is seen when the scientists attempt to exit their protective underwater cages and suddenly a shark attacks the men.

## SHORTS

John Stoneman's

### Shark!

Some years ago, Dr. Perry Gilbert edited a book on a subject about which very little was known. "Sharks and Survival" attempted to summarize all of the little

knowledge in a way both scholarly, and yet understandable to any informed person. A veritable avalanche of books, articles and novels about sharks written by experts, non-experts and downright charlatans followed.

One horrifying aspect has transfixed the attention of everyone - sharks eat people! The attacks come slashing out of mysterious ocean depths and are terrifyingly gory. Capitalizing on the fact that people are drawn almost hypnotic-

● *Shark!* "... a wealth of underwater footage".

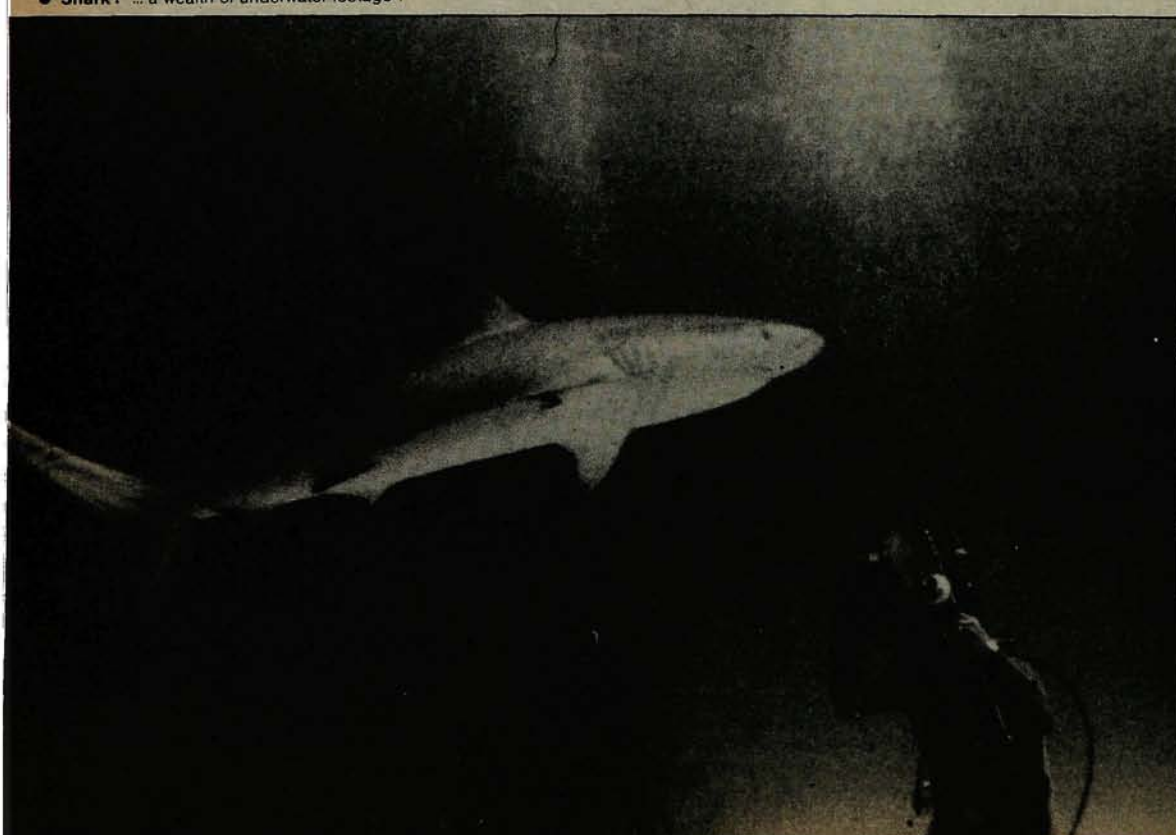


Photo: Barry Parker

As they climb out onto the ship, the shark actually bites the stern of the vessel.

Although I have never reviewed a film before, I am constantly asked to act as a formal reviewer for scientific papers - a process in which one attempts to find every possible error of fact, logic, or detail. It is impossible for me to resist using my sharply-whetted expert's scalpel, but I was unable to find much to bare to public view. Let me briefly catalogue what I consider to be the film's few errors of fact or detail: that many shark attacks have nothing to do with feeding is underemphasized, and the peculiar threat postures not well demonstrated; it is incorrectly implied that one shark lives entirely in fresh water (an understandable mistake because even scientists sometimes give the bull shark different names when it occurs in Lake Nicaragua, the Ganges River and other very large rivers - but it is all the same creature); one shark is incorrectly named (a slip of style more than knowledge: the "blacktip" is called the "reef shark," which is another species. Both species are typically found on reefs, so perhaps that is what Stoneman meant); and finally, copulation in the sex act (a fact of shark reproductive behaviour) is incorrectly attributed only to 'higher' forms of life other than the shark - whereas even the lowly worm is afforded that pleasure.

Certainly Stoneman has assembled an amazing number of species of sharks, from the immense, house-sized whale shark swimming with ponderous movements of its tail flukes, to the sleek and speedy silvertip, to the slow and bottom-loving nurse sharks, to the fusiform blues, and the most speedy of all, the mackerel sharks, including the warm-blooded and most deadly of all species, the White Death. Even this last is not depicted as a horror image. While there are positively terrifying images of the razor sharp two-inch replaceable teeth arming the jaws of the beast, nevertheless it is an animal of immense dignity.

In contrast to this dignity, Stoneman documents with a hilarious and deftly accurate gibe in the form of the music, a shark-fishing tournament. Potbellied, beer-drinking men swagger through piles of shark entrails in an obscene display of disregard for animal life.

The film ends with an ethereal series of pictures of a vast school of hammerhead sharks. Instead of being frightening or horrible, they are majestic beasts. Their strangely-shaped heads do not seem out of place in the underwater world. In a remarkable final look at these sharks, he shows skin-divers diving down, completely unprotected, into the school and asks the question which in my view sums up the whole film: "Can man and the sharks not share the ocean?"

*Shark!* recently took a Gold medal in the Festival of the Americas and, as well, was rated record high by the audience. It certainly deserved it.

Dr. Alan R. Emery ●

**SHARK!** p. John Stoneman, c.s.c., Stephen Zacks d. underwater cam. John Stoneman, c.s.c. se. John Stoneman, Michael Orr cam. Ken Post, c.s.c., John Stoneman mus. Bob Martin sd. Carolyn Bather, Steve Joles ed. Ivan Martin, Guido Koudrus addit. cam. Lance Carlson, Chuck Nicklin, Ted Rulison stills David Doubillet, Barry Parker mix George Novotny narration John Bayliss p.a. Mick Stoneman scientific consult. Dr. Alan Emery, Dr. Richard Winterbottom neg. cut. Catherine Rankin lab. Film House Ltd. p.c. Mako Films Ltd. col. 16mm dist. Mako Films Ltd. running time 50 min.

Laura Sky's

## Shutdown

"I'm a worker." So says one of the 125 labourers, now doubtful of their dignity or purpose, who are the subjects of Laura Sky's film *Shutdown*. They are used to adversity, but now, within certain new economic climates, hard work will get them nowhere.

Three days before Christmas in 1978, Prestolite, a manufacturer of electric parts, and a subsidiary of a corporation based in Toledo, Ohio, closed its 50-year-old operation in Sarnia, Ontario. Most of those who lost their jobs were over forty-five, and half were women. Prestolite officials refused to be interviewed for the film - which may have been a good thing for the film's appeal lies in the attention it pays to people, not in any economic explanations it might have offered.

Of a generation familiar with the Great Depression, some of these workers are faced again with an indefinite period of joblessness. This time, they're considered unemployable because of their age and/or sex. One woman, who had been working at "men's" jobs in the plant because of the better wages they brought, told Manpower that her only 'disability' was being female.

As one listens to the workers speak (theirs are the only voices heard in the film), it is possible to see, in retrospect, that the shutdown was the natural termination of a change, not just in the economy, but in attitudes as well. Long gone are the days when the Prestolite workers had several baseball teams, when everyone in the plant spoke to everyone else on a first-name basis, when they looked forward to going into work. It seems clear that the unceremonious and ungracious manner in which the workers were let go (pensions were slashed and promises of continued operation made in the past were reneged) was not solely a result of cold economic realities; corporate manners

went out when the efficiency experts came in.

What Prestolite managed to inadvertently do was to politicize a group to whom labour militancy was alien. Their solidarity is based, however, on their friendships more than anything else. These are not chronically-on-strike radicals, but merely people who resent being treated as a commodity that has become too expensive.

There is a school of thought which maintains that the documentary film is best suited to studies of people rather than issues. In *Shutdown*, much of the factual information is relegated to rolling titles at the beginning and end of the film. But its bias is clear and undisguised, and if *Shutdown* does not succeed as journalism, it nearly does so as drama.

Gerry Flahive ●

**SHUTDOWN** d. Laura Sky p. David Springbett cam. Nick Evedemon sd. John Megill ed. Conrad Kugler re-rec. Terry Cooke exec. p. Don Hopkins col. 16 mm running time 26 min. 57 sec. dist. National Film Board of Canada p.c. National Film Board of Canada, Ontario Regional Production Center.

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