

forgotten: that simplicity is the apogee of grandeur.

The tragedy of old age is at the heart of this film. Its inevitable attributes are precisely those which tend to deepen at that late stage of life. One is the problem of solitude. Apart from being cut off from society, Rose and Armand have no posterity, having already lost their only child, whom we are reminded of in a particularly moving scene at lunchtime. Another is an emotional problem. Not that love has disappeared with time; on the contrary, it has become immutable. But love may not be as explicit with lost ardour, an afflicting situation summarized by Armand in these terms: "Pity we are too old to even exchange words of love." And death, the infallible outcome, is not the least of embarrassments to the couple. At one point, Armand has a heart seizure as he is working in the fields. Lying in bed, he will try in vain to recuperate. One morning, he gets up and walks to the veranda. Rose wakes up instinctively and follows him outside, sitting next to him. The time has come. They die as they have lived, together and in harmony.

A sad film? Not really. Rather a deeply moving film. In spite of its tragic implications, old age is not presented here tragically, but rather as a normal consequence of a fulfilled life — after all, they have loved each other for more than 50 years. In fact, the film looks so natural that the most alert *cinéphile* will believe it was achieved through the *cinéma-vérité* technique. But all is illusion here: *Les dernières fiançailles* is pure fiction, not a documentary (viz., Pierre Perrault's trilogy based on another old couple, the Tremblays.) Two main factors account for this effect: the impeccable acting, since everything said and done is *felt*; and the slow-paced rhythm of the film, well-attuned to the movements of the two main characters, by making constant use of static shots.

*Les dernières fiançailles* has the rigour, restraint and clarity of the French literary classics. Yet, it is emotionally dense. In that respect, director Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's touch is a beautiful blending of Jan Troëll and Robert Bresson. The film also evokes the purity of Bach. Its silences are priceless, only intermittently interrupted by the sound of a clock, a reminder of the erosion of time. Lefebvre's twelfth feature film is his most accomplished, and a normally refractory topic to a 33-year-old filmmaker is maturely rendered here. Shot in ten days with a budget of \$35,000,

*Les dernières fiançailles* proves that ideas, imagination and talent are still more important in films than money: the presumably essential criteria and guarantee of creation and quality. Lefebvre is profound, and a master of nuance and tenderness. This is a truly fine film and a memorable one.

René Rozon

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### Bingo

*Bingo* a film by Jean-Claude Lord, opened a year ago in Quebec and promptly became a big hit, drawing raves from the French and English press. It's easy to see why. *Bingo* has captured the elements of the October 1970 crisis and put them into a fast-paced, well-structured story. The story is not of the events of the period when the War Measures Act was in effect, but of the fabric and feelings of those events.

It's not necessary that Quebec produce the definitive, or any version of the October Crisis now; that's a tall order, and maybe not possible after only a few years. But dealing with the origins, effects, resonances of such a crisis is important, and it's entirely valid to invent a story as a means of presenting those ideas.

The father of a photography student, (Réjean Guénette) loses his job and the boy joins the strikers at the factory. The union leader persuades him to help the workers by taking pictures to publicize the cause. Before long he finds himself implicated in kidnapping, bombing, and other terrorist acts. Within this story framework we see his working class parents, the relationship with his girlfriend, his idealism and growing dismay at the extremism he is caught up in. What some may object to in Lord's script is its frequently obvious form. It's all there, laid out for us to see, almost academic in plot development, juxtaposition of scenes and climaxes. And there is a line or two that indicates all too clearly that it is more the director-author speaking than the character. It's a very "commercial" movie. Still, commercial values never harmed a good picture and this attention to craft and narrative is what we have come to miss in recent movies. There is a certain delight in seeing the form realized so well, like watching a good actor and being aware of his performance.

Making us believe in a variety of characters is pretty hard to do in any movie, and especially difficult where different political sympathies are

present. The characterization is excellent here. None of the people are simply drawn; their motives are mixed. We begin to understand why they behave the way they do, idealistic, frightened, bitter, or confused. At the end it really is an outrage to see the lovers killed, even though it's been made to seem inevitable. The movie has taught us to care about them.

*Bingo* is a melodrama, but it's a superior one. In a picture dealing with gunplay, idealism, and young love, there are surprisingly few clichés. Instead, there are little touches that make it a personal and moving experience: Denys Pelletier in a cameo role, playing the distraught wife of a kidnapped businessman, making an emotional plea on television for her husband's safety; the jobless father (Jean Duceppe) raging drunkenly in his disappointment; a bingo party coinciding with the climax of terrorist acts. *Bingo* has been called "the best Canadian film of international caliber". In as much as the film deals with Quebec experience and makes it accessible to a large audience in that province and the rest of Canada, that judgement may well be accurate.

David Roche

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### Janis

Remember the days when you used to get so high, man, that you couldn't help but boogie along with whatever psychedelia was blared at you on underground FM? If not, chances are you don't fully remember Janis Joplin, either, the first lady of San Francisco rock (sorry Grace, but premature death *does* add a certain kind of mystique), who used to blow her own and our collective minds with Southern Comfort fumed gut music, delivered straight from her non-Presleyan pelvis. Of her black forebears, Aretha, Billie and Bessie, only Franklyn is around, the other two immortals are with Janis in that Big Blue Soul in the sky, their ball and chains dropped forever.

Janis' throaty sounds and soul linger on, most recently in the Canadian produced feature documentary, *Janis*. Budge Crawley deserves credit (see elsewhere in this issue for more details) for spending close to a quarter of a million over a four year period securing rights to the choicest available footage of her performances. The best concert scenes in the film are those captured by Clarke Mackey and other local cameramen along the 1970 Festi-

val Express trek across Canada. This footage brought on rushes of recognition in those of us fortunate enough to have experienced at least one of those hard-driving shows.

Co-directed by Howard Alk and Seaton Findlay, and completely edited by the gifted Alk, *Janis* is a credit to Crawley Films of Ottawa, both on a financial and (ahem) the ol' artistic level. (That's the one that those who look for stiffs never care about.) The film does not attempt to eulogize, it merely relies on the singer herself to unfold her own story through performance and some interviews. The nostalgia trap of endless associates telling of knowing her when, is blessedly absent.

Concert footage for the most part is skillfully blended with Joplin interviews in various parts of the world, which work on both the superficial level ("You came from Port Arthur, Texas, didn't you?") as well as allowing us intimate glimpses of what stardom was doing to this free spirit and how she was riding the wave to the very end. We see her audiences briefly, but meaningfully, as in the very powerful closing sequence, filmed in Germany, where short haired GI's with peace medallions around their necks get on stage to form a grotesque yet thoroughly American tableau of dancing figures around her, completely fitting to a small town Texas girl turned superstar.

Sprinkled with humourous and insightful anecdotes from Janis' own lips ("If you wanna get a piece of . . . talent, you gotta start hustling your ass early in the morning. . ."), enough free language to earn a restricted rating in the States (seven "fucks" by Budge Crawley's count) and catching her off-guard many times during the long hours of rehearsing, recording, performing, the film *Janis* is itself a hard driving show, its pace being set from the outset by the rollicking Joplin beat. The three supporting bands she had at various times during her skyrocketing career (Big Brother, Snooky Flowers, and the Cozmic Bluez Band) were all composed of very high if not superb musicians, and some of the guitar solos are remarkable, as is Janis' soulful duet with Snooky at Woodstock.

Being a compilation documentary, *Janis* does have its shortcomings. That happens whenever footage from various media are mixed to produce a final film. Heads get chopped due to the different ratio between 16mm and 35mm theatrical image and the unity of the experience is jeopardized. Yet



2-inch colour videotape from an old Dick Cavett show is blown up to 35mm with excellent results. The sound on any rock film tends to cause problems with theatre management reluctant to install a good sound system, but Budge is following the movie around making sure that enough decibels reach enough perceptive ears through professional quality speakers. (How long have we to wait for quadraphonic sound on all rock films?)

Janis' own philosophy of a life without bullshit permeates this capturing of her heart and soul on celluloid, most memorably in the sequence showing her triumphant return to Port Arthur to attend the tenth reunion of her high school graduating class. Once a reclusive student with hardly a friend, she makes the most of rubbing in her success and chuckling at the storm created by her contagiously explosive presence. "What do you like about Port Arthur?" she is asked by the local TV reporter. "Er . . . no comment," replies the living legend with glee, adding later: "I'm glad to see that Port Arthur has loosened up a bit. There are even signs of . . . drug use. But I prefer to live in San Francisco, because what place could be looser?"

She even has a funny story about a member of her band being busted in "Vancouver, England. Oh, no! Canada, but it's part of England, right?" and laments the "assholes" who would hassle a human being for such a minor triviality as dope in a hotel room. These linear interviews are kept short in the film, and Janis the woman grinding her liberated pelvis with the maniacal striving of an amphetamine freak for satisfaction, her hip clothes and feathers, her outrageously colourful frills and jewellery, are allowed to dominate the film, and the viewer has Crawley, Alk and Findlay to thank for it. We just boogie along with "Try," "Cry, Cry, Baby," "Cozmic Blues," "Summertime," "Ball and Chain," "Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz," and "Me and Bobby McGee," without a single morbid reminder of her death, as if she had never died and we were all back in San Francisco slugging Southern Comfort with a truly remarkable lady.

—George Csaba Koller

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## Janis

With the current fascination of pop stars, (last year's film of Jimi Hendrix and this year Dustin Hoffman's interpretation of Lenny Bruce) Crawley