

REVIEWS OF SHORT FILMS

Rose's House

d: Clay Borris. **p:** Clay Borris, John F. Phillips. **sc:** Paulette Jiles. Based on a story by Clay Borris. **ph:** John F. Phillips. **eds:** Clay Borris, John F. Phillips, Arla Saare. **sd:** Chris Lerry. **m:** Willie Dunn. **l.p.:** Rose Maltais-Borris, Albert Borris, Ronald Maltais, Garry Borris, John Brown, George Martell, Paulette Jiles. **p.c.:** Cabbageroll Prod./NFB, Challenge for Change, 1977. 16mm col: **Running time:** 58 minutes.

After seeing Allan King's **Warrendale** in 1967, Jean Renoir, the great French director, remarked, "How can fiction, animated by professional players, compete with this recording of real emotions?" If Renoir were to see **Rose's House**, I suspect he would repeat his statement. Unlike the actuality dramas of **Warrendale** and **Married Couple**, however, Clay Borris's film is a re-enactment of events in his mother's life with non-professionals playing themselves or their close friends, or relatives. Rose Maltais Borris plays the part she has lived - that of a hardworking Acadian mother who has recently immigrated to Toronto from New Brunswick and who takes in boarders in order to support herself and her family.

From the opening sequence when Rose, wearing a gas mask, is spraying bugs in the kitchen, to the closing shot of Rose and Albert discussing the party they have just had, we don't only observe, but we enter into the life of Rose Maltais Borris.

The plot of **Rose's House** revolves around three interwoven incidents in Rose's life, which, with her regular cooking, cleaning, washing, child-caring and boarding house duties, add up to a remarkably eventful drama. One of her sons, P'tit Jean, steals a bike, spends the night in jail, and Rose must go down and talk to his social worker, played by the family's real life social worker, George Martell.



Albert and Rose having an argument at Rose's house.

Her unscripted confrontation with Martell poignantly illustrates the relationships between working class life and the superficiality of 'support' offered by the social system. Finally, after listening to what seems like an endless pattern, Rose asks the social worker if he has children and then displays a knowing smile when he answers "no". In another incident, a boarder, Madge, steals \$50 from his employer. Rose finds the money which Madge had hidden, packs his bag, and kicks him out of the house. As far as we know, she keeps the money which Madge owed her in back rent, and doesn't tell her husband about it when he asks if she was paid. Through acts of self-preservation such as this, we see Rose's shrewdness and astuteness. These qualities are further evidenced in the way she handles two of the other boarders, Albert and Tony. After a lover's quarrel in which Tony stabs Albert, Rose evicts them, but not until she has blackmailed them into giving her the stolen beer and wine they were selling, as well as their back rent. As soon as she has the beer in her possession, she plans a party.

One of the most touching and beautiful sequences in the film takes place as Rose attends to her morning chores of cooking, doing the wash in an ancient wringer washer, and getting the children off to school. She then takes a short break with a new boarder, played by Paulette Jiles (who wrote the script) and reminisces about her courtship with Albert and their move to Toronto. Rose takes out the family picture album. Then, in a flashback with stills, freeze frames, and black and white footage, we see a different

Rose, playing in the snow with Albert, discussing the possibilities and problems of moving them from New Brunswick to Toronto, and finally leaving in the old car to the slow motion waves of Albert's parents. This lyrical interlude is accompanied by the haunting song "I'm a Dreamer", written and performed by Willie Dunn.

Clay Borris has chosen to make a personal statement about growing up and living in Cabbagetown, about things and people he knows and loves instead of opting for a polished, slick product. This results in a film rich in reality, feeling, and sensitivity. To some, **Rose's House** may seem rough around the edges. Improvised in part, with a small and relatively inexperienced crew and a cast of family and friends, this low budget film concentrates its attention on sensitivity and honesty rather than technique and glossiness. Although lighting is sometimes harsh, lines muffled, and acting self-conscious, these "rough edges", rather than distract, remind us we are not watching a Hollywood or Canadian big budget rendition of a working class family, but are involved in a personal, reflexive process.

Rose's House, made at a cost of \$30,000, was partially financed by the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, and John L. Brown. The film was bought and slightly re-edited by the National Film Board for use as part of their Challenge for Change program. It is encouraging to see these institutions fostering personal, documentary style filmmaking. On the other hand, it is discouraging to note that **Rose's House** was nominated for four Canadian Film Awards: Best TV Drama Film, Performance by an

photo by Bruce Skinner

Actress (Rose) and Supporting Actress (Paulette Jiles), but won none. **Rose's House** is a film of which John Grierson would have been proud, not only for its unique 'creative treatment of actuality', but also for the way it represents the working class - with dignity and affection.

John Stuart Katz is Chairman of the Film Department at York University.

John Stuart Katz

The Doll Factory

d: Annette Cohen, sc: Barbara Boyden & Annette Cohen, p: Barbara Boyden, pc: ABC Productions, lp: Jayne Eastwood, Color Running time: 20 minutes.

The Doll Factory, to quote the press handout, is "a fable which comments on the obstacles, real and imagined, which interfere with a contemporary woman's career aspirations." An unknown woman is on her way to the 18th floor of an office building for a very important 2:00 p.m. interview. She has taken the advice of every job hunter's manual and arrived early. Once she enters the elevator, her misadventures begin.

Do not allow yourself to be put off by the theme or the plot. **The Doll Factory** is far from dogmatic. It is both enjoyable and humorous and makes succinct comments concerning this woman's difficulties in rising to the top. The theme is now terribly year-before-last, but Ms Boyden and Ms. Cohen present it in an original and skillful manner. They avoid the hysteria which can, and often does, accompany feminist works. The film's intent is quite obvious, but its handling is restrained.

The film takes the form of several vignettes with each giving life to Murphey's Law - whatever can go wrong, will go wrong. Most of the obstacles confronting our heroine are of men's doing.

In spite of its tremendous humor, **The Doll Factory** is quite sad. Our heroine does not make it. Granted that it is difficult for anyone to succeed in life, it is still more difficult for women to make it in a man's world. Contrary to the cigarette ads, we have a

long way to go before we can make the grade as easily as men can.

With the exception of Jayne Eastwood's character, all the roles are caricatured in order to more fully make the points. Although all the pieces are excellent, I took particular, masochistic delight in one about a sophisticated director who has a penchant for strong, assertive women and who is going to help her make it. As someone I know flashed into my mind, I squirmed in my seat and thought "how true." Other women, I am sure, experienced the same thing with other characters.

The Doll Factory has an extremely large cast. Since everyone did so well, it is hard to single out any one person's performance. People that struck particular chords with me were the director, the female hostage, the hooker, and the guru.

A fraction of the camera work is a little awkward, but nothing unnerving. One or two of the shots are either overlit or were badly developed in the lab. In a couple of spots, the music is, at first, somewhat overbearing. On the whole, the production values are good and do not interfere with the unfolding of the story.

Ms. Boyden and Ms. Cohen are to be congratulated for their sensitive handling of a now, hoary feminist theme. This film demonstrates that they have what it takes to do a good job with their next project, Marian Engel's *Bear*, a novel which will require a great deal of taste and restraint in order to turn it into a good film.

I can only hope that any other feminist films I may see will be as successful and as satisfying as **The Doll Factory**.

Sheila Paterson

Where Shipwrecks Abound

d:, sc:, ph: John Stoneman, ed: Bill Carter, m: Walter Carlos, Jim Bearden, n: Chris Wiggins, p.c.: Mako Films, Toronto, 1977, col: 16mm.

10,000 shipwrecks, by themselves, don't make a film. Incredibly, at least that number define the bottom of Canada's Great Lakes, products of late 1800's, early 1900's storms. Still, the



John Stoneman getting ready to go under

subject fairly guggles promise, like the head on a glass of good stout. Why then, I wondered, during a recent screening of Mako Film's **Where Shipwrecks Abound**, have we seen so little on the theme? Books yes, there are numerous editions available, but films to date have been sporadic, brief, and scratchy for the most part.

Access is success. A film, any film on the topic, is blatantly thin without good wreck footage, and in the case of Great Lakes wrecks there are no conveniently sited museum pieces, no foreshore sentinels. Getting it into the can means going 'down there' where they lie, up to 100 metres underwater. The truthful answer to my self-imposed question is: there are few competent underwater filmmakers on the continent, fewer yet in Canada. This film clearly shows that John Stoneman is one of those few.

Where Shipwrecks Abound is an hour-long documentary-type television film. Stress 'type' here because it is at once documentation and entertainment, containing a major component of dramatic reconstruction, already evident in an earlier multi-award winning short, short, **Wreck**. Stoneman pushes the technique much further in the new film, mixing underwater, surface, land, and studio sequences to good effect. The whole is in turn informative, amusing, dramatic, well-paced, and evocative of past and present inland maritime environments.

Seventy to eighty per cent of the film is shot on, about, and under Lake

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Huron and Georgian Bay, probing many 19th-Century wrecks interned there. But it is also more than a film about shipwrecks. Stoneman documents the contemporary aquatic action and projects the sense of underwater adventure which make these waters a central Canadian boating and diving Mecca. Land sequences at the jump-off point of Tobermory clip along merrily to the music of Walter Carlos (*Clockwork Orange*), while the sepulchral voice of Chris Wiggins (CTV's *Swiss Family Robinson*) presages the dramatic re-creation of past events and underwater sequences.

Where *Shipwrecks Abound* is a something-for-everybody film – necessary, obviously, as TV fare. Nowhere is there a hint of the shallowness, however, that can haunt be-all productions. Stoneman is sincere and empathetic with his subject in all its dimensions. (The proverbially mandatory three to five second slung-assed bikini shot is a personal objection only.)

Problems associated with this motion picture, if they can properly be described as problems in the usual sense at all, are those inherent in any underwater production. There is a spiritually exhilarating but physically limiting and ungrateful world down under. Tenacity and stamina are the chief demands on director and crew. Added to the usual problems with which every director must cope, they make the normal difficulties with the creative component of a film pall in comparison. High summer can find a swimmer refreshed by 18°C surface water, but down below ten plus metres – and down the filmmaker eventually needs to go, if he wants the best there is – the water is a mind-numbing 2°C or 5°C at best. Most critically, vision is peripherally limited by suspended particles in the water, despite intense lighting. Establishing shots are out of the question, and a measure of the film becomes the way in which the director works within and manipulates the fabric of the physical environment.

Stoneman provides his audience with a verbal and topside frame of reference for each wreck, then clarifies and sets it by using great sound and archival still clips of the ships as they once flew before wind and storm. Underwater, the camera moves in brief, wholly acceptable, crab-like dollys, as a man might work his way forward hand-over-hand on board a ship battling incoming seas. For a

change of pace, he has the camera aggressively probe, or alternately float mystically over the memory bones of this long past era. Still again, he indulges the audience in the wonder of underwater life for its own sake, pulling off a number of sequences to satisfy the appetite of even a veteran diver, and does it as a compliment rather than an intrusion to the greater subject matter.

It is a film of many elements this **Shipwrecks**: contemporary, historic/re-created drama and storyteller/

still, very fluid / above and below the surface/ living and dead/ fact and folklore (Jim Bearden wrote two memorable sea shanties to complement the theme)/ documentary and entertainment, yet it holds...well.... exceptionally well. It is a film whose time has come. Happily, someone had the courage and creativity to tie it all together and make the film. Happily too, it was made here in Canada.

Edward Lynas

Flora: Scenes from a Leadership Convention

d: Peter Raymont, **sc:** Peter Raymont, **ph:** Douglas Kiefer, **ed:** Peter Raymont, **sd. ed.:** Les Halman, **sd. rec.:** Jacques Drouin, **exec. p.:** Arthur Hammond, Roman Kroitor, **p:** Mike McKennirey, **p.c.:** National Film Board, **col:** 16mm, **dist:** NFB, **narr:** Peter Raymont, **running time:** 58 minutes, 33 seconds.

With the television media entering the inner sanctum of the Canadian House of Commons, Canadians are becoming more aware of the nature of their hallowed political institutions. *Flora*, the National Film Board's

candid look at convention politics, and a woman's struggle to become leader of the Conservative Party, further expands our awareness of the Canadian political process.

The title of the film is deceiving. It is, in part, about Flora MacDonald's attempt to become the first woman leader of the Conservative Party, but it is also a behind-the-scenes investigation of convention politics, from its idealism to its wheeling and dealing. Actually, the film might have been more aptly called "A portrait of 'Fast' Eddie Goodman." Eddie is the party's chief fund raiser and a Flora supporter. He is seen addressing a group of campaign workers, and he reassures them that they are running an honest and frugal campaign by stating that "we're not here to buy it." Juxtaposed to this is a scene where Eddie is meeting with the campaign staff, and he reassures them



Do It With Joy

d: Nicholas Kendall, ph: Nicholas Kendall, ed: Robert Seright, sd: Robert Seright, m: Simon Kendall, p: Nicholas Kendall, p-man: Doug Cowell, col: 16mm, running time: 54 minutes.

Occasionally a film appears to grow directly out of an actual experience or milieu. Much of the strength of Flaherty's films, for instance, depend on a viewer's apprehension of that filmmaker's enthusiastic response toward a human lifestyle, evolving out of his direct contact with it. **Do It With Joy**, Nicholas Kendall's documentary about a reforestation project in the Nass River Valley of northern British Columbia, depends on a similar apprehension for its strength.

Foregrounded throughout the fifty-four minutes of this film, are the giant stands of spruce and Douglas fir, indigenous to the Canadian northwest. These provide mute testimony to the huge clearing of their numbers by repeated inclusion in a camera angled ostensibly to capture only the vast acreages emptied by loggers and ready for reforestation. Despite this observation, there is no hazy attempt at anthropomorphic metaphor, and the filmmaker's sensibility is less that of pointing an accusing finger at a logging industry, than it is to show the process of reforestation and, referentially, the reaction to the life-generating process of the planters themselves.

that he can get co-operation from a certain individual because "I've done everything for his brother - that guy owes me something", making his previous promise empty rhetoric. He seems to be everywhere there is a crisis. Eddie appears on the scene during a development that might take votes away from Flora. Premier William Davis and his cabinet had decided to remain neutral and not show public support for any of the candidates. A rumor circulates on the floor of the convention that Roy McMurtry, a member of the Davis cabinet, is showing open support for Brian Mulroney. Eddie quickly locates Roy McMurtry and persuades him to put his Mulroney badge back in his pocket.

Flora sees Eddie as a morale booster, but Eddie is incapable of boosting Flora's morale when she places a disappointing 6th after the first ballot. A tight close-up on Flora shows a shocked and disillusioned woman. Again, Eddie becomes a key figure in the drama by assuming the role of persuader. He tries to persuade Flora to give her support to Joe Clark since she would need at least 300 votes to be in contention. With the second ballot Flora receives 234 votes, and she finally concedes her support to Joe. Flora's response to the political necessity of the decision "You are continually accepting compromise."

Using what I would call an eavesdropping style of cinematography, director Peter Raymont sensitively captures the human responses to political gamesmanship. The personal drama of political defeat is caught in a close-up of a dejected campaign worker with his head buried in his hands responding to a question about what he thought of politics by saying, "I don't know if I like politicking very much." This was the response of one of Flora's workers who represented one of a group of idealists on her team. Her team wanted to bring about a renaissance in Canadian politics by getting a woman elected as party leader, and couldn't comprehend the defeat since Flora had such popular appeal. A tangible proof of this appeal was evident when she asked for individual donations of one dollar to support her campaign and she received more money than was given to the Conservative Party in the previous year.

Peter Raymont's intimate and revealing camera work and editing is reminiscent of Richard Leacock's filmic style in the classic political

documentary **Primary** that recorded the Kennedy-Humphrey primary that led to John Kennedy's being elected to the U.S. presidency. Both Raymont and Leacock use the language of film creatively to frame the truth as they see it. Both films show the politician's tendency to use contradictory rhetoric - that is, making promises that sometimes conflict with previous promises. In **Flora** the politician is Eddie Goodman, and in **Primary** the politician is Senator Hubert Humphreys. Both films allow the audience to be in the middle of the action with the camera in the crowd on the floor of the convention in **Flora**, or in the crowd engulfing a charismatic Kennedy in **Primary**.

Although the film's title does not reveal the main theme of the film - a study of convention politics, it most certainly concerns itself with Flora's valiant struggle to gain the leadership of the Conservative Party. In a scene from the film, Flora is talking to a group of supporters about women and leadership. She explains why women tend to shy away from positions of leadership by stating that, "women do not perceive themselves as leaders, but, as more leadership positions are given to women, that myth will explode." Flora, by her own example, is doing her part to explode that myth.

Robert Hookey



A communal meal under a plastic tent after tree planting

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Kendall's film treats of a creative community in isolation; gathered, outfitted, transported to a work site and abandoned for the several months of a spring planting season. Once arrived, the crew assembles and builds its own living and cooking quarters. Here, the blaze from a wood stove and an absence of electricity register a Spartan atmosphere. Unlike a logging crew, the tree-planters live at the site, and are of both sexes. The work is shared equally and a flat rate of ten cents a tree makes arduous labor nicely remunerative, if one considers an average daily planting to be in the area of 400 to 1000 trees by a single individual.

Most of the planters are west-coast young people and they are from widely different backgrounds. They are (or have been) musicians, artists, loggers, transient construction workers. These reflective individuals, each in their fashion, tend to describe tree-planting as a "feeling" act - a positive and necessary work. Their concern for the trees they plant is whether they will thrive - whether, in fact, there is sufficient mineral in the soil of a burned-out site to enable a sapling to take root. They are the 60's generation with some of its metaphysics scrubbed off. For all of them, tree-planting is a source of dependable income, just as for all of them these few months in a wilderness appear to provide an opportunity to stretch themselves, for a time, away from the rest of their lives. "Do it with joy" sings one of the crew as he strums a guitar at the work site. They do.

Nicholas Kendall's documentary employs a kind of filmic text of the trees. His camera habitually seeks out those elements necessary to the nurturing process, and that is what this documentary is all about. Implicit, of course, is the contrasting function of the logger. Beginnings (not endings) are highlighted in this film, and an initiatory process is juxtaposed, at least by implication, with a logging operation's terminal aspect. Visually, elements essential to gestation and growth take precedence in Kendall's selective imagery. In such a context, even the planters' comparative youth and search for lifestyle contribute to a "beginnings" motif, paralleling, strengthening - indeed framing the film in terms of its ideas. Its title, **Do it with Joy**, correctly gauges Kendall's tonal approach to his material, while at a more obvious

level, it serves to indicate the tenor of this tree-planting subject, alone.

A well-articulated work, the film prominently features the spacial reality of the site itself, the river bordering it, and a wide expanse of sky - a constant backdrop to the timber stands edging the valley in which the work progresses. The motions of planting are closely observed and their rhythm is noted - hand: to dig in the earth, foot: to seal a planted sapling. Again and again - eight feet apart - these motions are repeated through the long days. The camera adopts and retains the planters' rhythm. Its lens, reluctant to give up its focus, trains once more on hand foot and earth, no matter that the planter rests for a time from his work. His physicality, no less than the topography of his work site, is a thing to be observed in contemplation of the nature of both.

It is a Bazinian notion that for the cinema reality must consist of those things that are tangibly, physically real - things like Kendall's B.C. saplings and the planters that tend them. Their growth, like Bazin's ethos, is contained by this physical reality, but too, elements of reality's transcendence are present. **Do It With Joy** mirrors these.

Alice Smith

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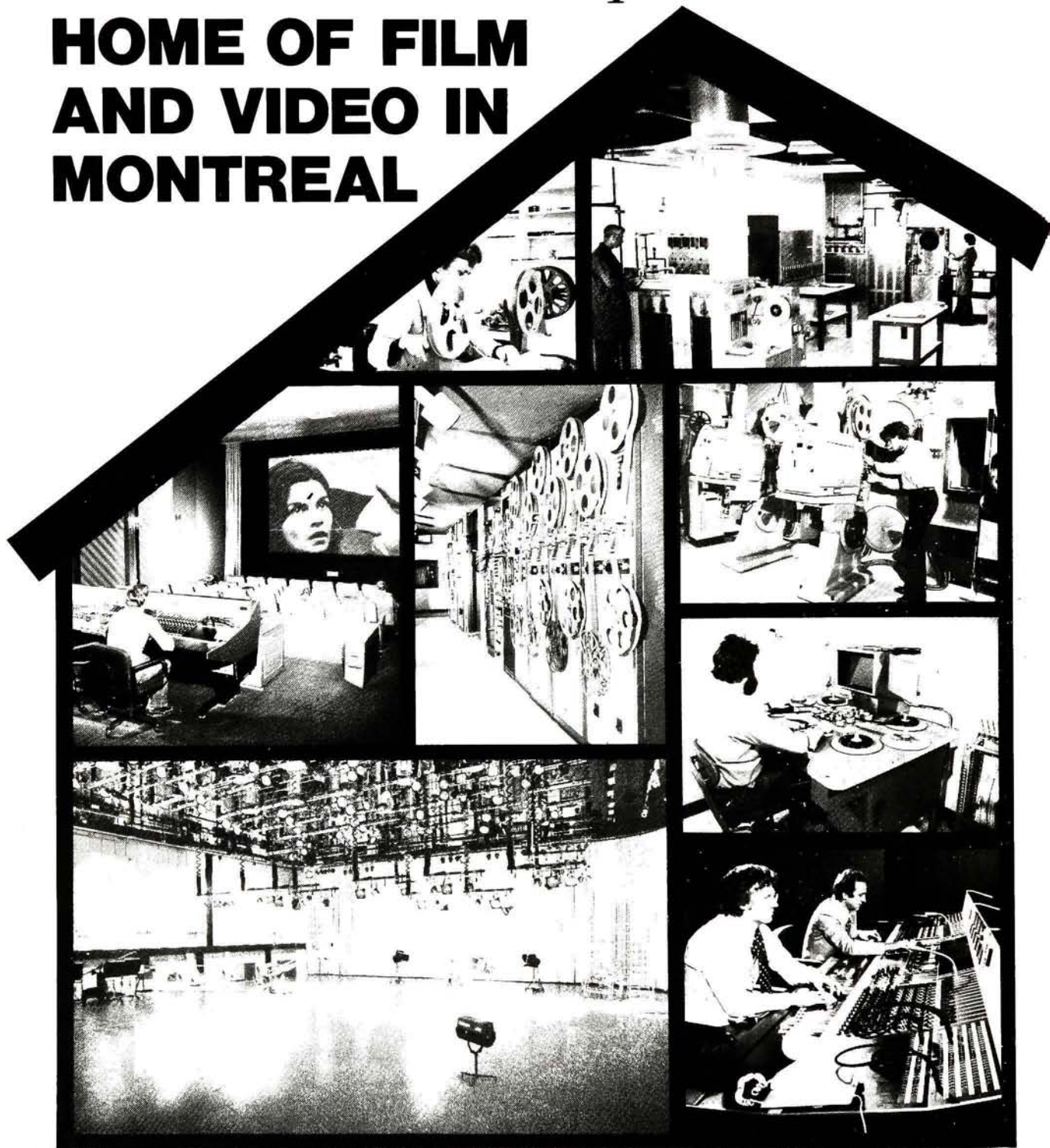
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