

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, childcar-ing 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