

MINI - REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

TRANSPLANT

"I bet you don't recognize me, do you? I'm George Angus - or at least, I was." The man rises from the operating table - a scar slashes across his forehead. "I'm going to tell you all about it" ... and the credits start to roll for a neat, low-key half-hour.

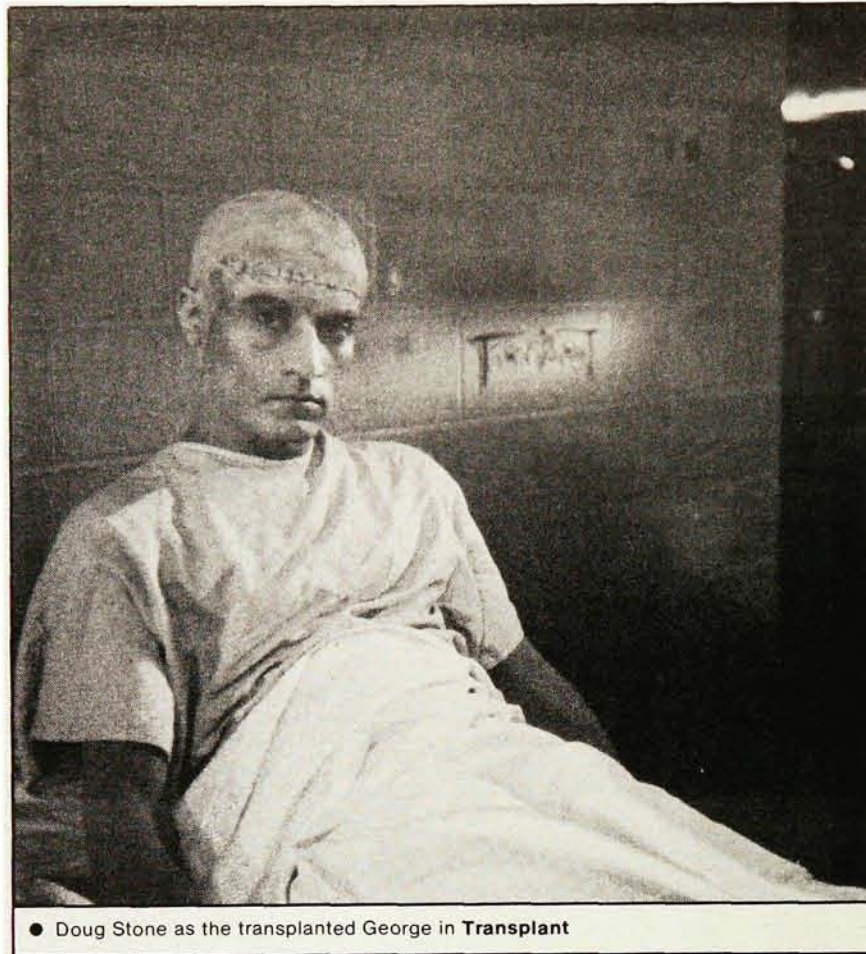
George is a hardened bank-robber, and every cop is looking for him. His wimpy henchman, Frank, arranges for a secret operation. It's a dark night for the cottage rendezvous, a man with a lamp opens the door, and there are strange noises in the woods.

At an exploratory consultation, the sinister surgeon with the dragging foot demands a fee of \$50,000 and that a transplant donor be provided. Frank finds a suitable body (a big guy, as requested by George) and drugs him for transportation to the cottage field hospital. Poor squeamish Frank then gets some rudimentary training in order to assist the dotty doctor with his strange experiment.

The success of the bizarre operation turns to ashes, due to unforeseen non-medical complications relating to the new body acquired by George!

Transplant is obviously made for TV, and its economical style is patterned on Hitchcock and *The Twilight Zone*. Creepy moments, hints of black humour, dark shadows, and a generous helping of suspense are all enhanced by some wonderfully mean and moody synthesizer music.

The straight acting reinforces the believability of a far-out premise. The bombastic George and the medical man (54 years with a limp that has twisted his mind...) work well, but this drama surely boasts a 'first' in Canadian film history. The wimpy henchman (Frank) is played most convincingly by Eugene Amodeo, the



● Doug Stone as the transplanted George in *Transplant*

vice-president & general manager of Universal Films (Canada)! This little treat receives its theatrical premiere at the Fourth Annual Vancouver International Film Festival on June 5, 1985.

p./d./sc. Steve DiMarco **assoc. p.** Benu Bhandari **cam.** Brian Hebb **l.p.** Doug Stone (George), Eugene Amodeo (Frank), Irving Dobbs (Doctor), Andy Adach (Alfred), **running time:** 23 mins., **Col.** 16mm. **Availability:** Steve DiMarco (416) 757-4955 (With the assistance of Telefilm Canada and the Ontario Arts Council).

RED ROCKET

A tiny perfect look at Toronto's streetcars. The manufacturers called them "streamliners," to some they were PCCs (the work of the Electric Railway Presidents Conference Committee); but the public nicknamed them 'Red Rockets.'

The camera slides over abandoned streetcars with their beautifully archaic fittings, and then the film moves on at a smart clip to the present-day transports roaming the city rails. There's some lovely old footage from the Toronto Transit Commission's files with ghostly historic voices over the images. The acetylene cutting torch, showering cinematic sparks, finally brings the sad realization that, like most things dearly loved, the streetcar is slowly passing away.

An affectionate and well-wrought tribute to the Red Rockets, put together with style and professionalism by a filmmaker with a number of TV credits - *the fifth estate*, *The Journal*, et al. CBC-TV has purchased this little film - some may happen upon it during spring or summer.

p./d. Colin Strayer **cam.** Dennis Rindsem, Bill Dunn, David Staton **ed.** Steve Munro **p. asst.** Karen MacDonald **p.c.** NFB Ontario Region, **Col.** 16mm **running time:** 10 mins. With financial assistance from Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Transit Commission, Toronto Sesqui-centennial Board. **Availability:** Empire Pictures of Canada (416) 360-7813/Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (Toronto) and West (Vancouver).

NOTE: Colin Strayer has put together an hour-long videotape, VHS and BETA, for "serious rail enthusiasts" comprising *Red Rocket*, *Transfer* - a day in the life of a "streamliner" made in 1974, and *PCCs of North America*, footage shot by John Prophet between 1938 and 1949 in twenty-eight American cities where PCCs operated.

SCANLINES

by Joyce Nelson

Games people play

and respectful, emitting proper applause according to cue. The voices of hosts, panelists, and participants remain calm - even somewhat flat - with never a whoop or groan, unless it be a sympathetic sound uttered by host Jim Perry on *Definition*. On the American game-shows, bells, buzzers and everything but whoopie-cushions accompany the goings-on, while the hosts whip up the suspense and the contestants and audience alike shriek and wail in the agony or ecstasy of the moment.

Of course, this emotional tone has something to do with the nature of the prizes at stake. Big bucks and big-ticket items characterize the American game-shows, while on *Definition* a prize-winner is going for something like an electric back-massager, a watch, or a water filter. And on *Front Page Challenge* there simply are no prizes: panelists Pierre Berton, Fred Davis, Betty Kennedy, and Allan Fotheringham are clearly beyond such indignities.

All these aspects relate to the nature of the games being played, which are also decidedly different in

the two cultures. *Front Page Challenge*, Canada's oldest TV show still-running, is really an educational program thinly disguised as a game. Its focus is clearly informative, with its panelists revealing their historical/current affairs acumen by guessing the front-page issue connected to a "hidden challenger." Actually, it's all a ruse for educating the viewer, who is not only let in on the identity of the challenger, but also given a little mini-documentary on the subject once the panelists have guessed the item. If that weren't enough, the panelists then add to the lesson by interviewing the challenger, thereby raising the finer points about the particular event. Fortunately, there is no quiz to test whether or not we have retained the material.

Similarly, CTV's *Definition* has a slightly serious and purposeful tone, depending on word-skill and familiarity with puns in its variation on the old game of Hangman. In both Canadian shows there is an underlying belief in the value of words, logic, and mental skills. On *Definition*, viewers themselves are invited

to submit the items of word-play, and are given no more clues than the contestants. In both shows, a certain amount of skill is assumed.

American game-shows, however, long ago abandoned any pretense of intelligence. No doubt as a result of the quiz-show scandal of the '50s, American game-shows instead focus on luck. Participants generally match their luck against the random play of a machine - the "Tic Tac Dough" board, the "Bulls-Eye", the "Wheel of Fortune", the "Family Feud" board, etc. If Canadian game-shows suggest a belief in human mental prowess, U.S. shows convey the sense of technology reigning supreme, and even that human effort and skill are largely irrelevant. All a contestant need do is push a button, make a decision to activate or not activate the technology, and the American Dream may/may not come true. Luck is, for all purposes, the decisive factor.

If game-shows differ so distinctly in the two cultures, perhaps one could relate them to the very different values promised the two peoples in their ruling constitutions. This may sound too far-fetched, but only consider for a moment that the repatriated BNA Act promises "peace, order, and good government," while the U.S. Constitution endorses "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." That difference is enough to send me back to the tube for another round.

National identities have a way of exposing themselves in the most surprising places. Like TV game-shows. I recently took a look at CBC's *Front Page Challenge* and CTV's *Definition*, two Canadian offerings in this genre, and for comparative purposes, tuned in on a couple of U.S. game-show reruns. In a way, you wouldn't ask for nicer analogies of the two nations. The game-shows say it all.

The first obvious difference is in the studio-sets. Standard iconography in American game-shows includes a set full of flashing lights, gigantic game boards, intricately turning doors and panels, and an array of astounding gadgets and gizmos. The technological environment tends to dwarf the few humans inside it. By contrast, the sets for *Front Page Challenge* and *Definition* seem tastefully sedate. On *Definition*, nothing more elaborate than the letters and word-blanks board, always shown as a cut-away and thereby never in the same shot as the contestants. In other words, in the Canadian game-shows the studio-set does not diminish the human participants.

In keeping with the iconography, the sound of the shows is remarkably different. On *Front Page Challenge* and *Definition*, there is nothing louder than a polite bell to indicate that a contestant's time is up. Even the audiences are remarkably quiet