

John Gray  
& Andrew Gosling's  
**The King  
Of Friday Night**



• A taste of another generation: Andrew Rhodes and Sheree Jeacocke in a quantum leap for TV, the *King of Friday Night*



Consider this another rave review for Canamedia's *The King Of Friday Night*, which recently won the "Best Performance Special" Award at the Banff Television Festival. The production is so universally fine that it's hard to know where to begin.

"Culture!" deapans one of the characters, "that's something found in your fridge every couple of months." In this spirit, *The King Of Friday Night* blasts its way past colonial cultural hang-ups and elitist taboos to revel in and fuse the two most popular art forms of a generation: TV and rock 'n roll. Like the best rock music, its energy seems barely containable in its framework. Like the best television, it takes us right to the edge of what the medium can do. And like the best rock videos, it intelligently plays with surreality in order to illuminate rather than obscure. The result is a fine TV-rush that sets a new standard for creative work in North-American television.

It's rare enough to find an original stage-play ably translated into another medium, especially in ways that fully honour the capabilities of the new medium. But here, John Gray's stage musical, "Rock and Roll" has become innovative television of the most exciting kind. *The King Of Friday Night* is the first TV-feature shot in Betacam 1/2" video format, the first TV-feature to use colorization (a computerization process that turns black-and-white video into colour), and the most extensive use of multiple-layer chromakey ever seen in North-American television. Co-director Andrew Gosling and chromakey-designer Graham McCallum developed these video techniques at the BBC and have won numerous international awards for their efforts.

But what's fascinating about *The King Of Friday Night* is the astonishing degree to which the techniques are so completely

right for the tone and spirit of John Gray's music and script. The basis plot-line is so familiar as to be archetypal — which is precisely why the chromakey sequences work so well. Set in the small, fictitious Canadian town of Mushaboom, the story begins in the present, but quickly does an extended flashback to 1961 to follow the rise the glory of The Monarch — a local rock band inspired by Screamin' John (Eric Peterson), a burnt-out rocker who instills them with the Spirit of Rock 'n Roll. After four years of wild success, the band breaks up when Parker (Frank Mackay), the lead singer, decides to go solo. After this crisis, the story resumes in the present with a reunion concert bringing together the ageing musicians who have each gone their separate, "normal" ways.

Gray has infused this plot-line with an intricate blend of witty irony, self-parodying nostalgia, sincere emotion and a mythologizing ethos that is matched visually, moment by moment, with such painstaking care that the whole work seems charged with a transcendent honesty. Through the magic of multiple-layered chromakey, the band can appear to be singing from within the confines of a bubblegum card, or atop a car. Shirly (Sheree Jeacocke) can bemoan her fate — "Girls don't sing rock 'n roll!" — while wandering like a tiny doll among the clutter of combs, shaving materials, etc. on a guy's bureau. In such sequences, the chromakey techniques are not gratuitous but instead convey a strange edge of mixed emotion — as though the image captures some potent psychological layers of experience.

At the same time, *The King Of Friday Night* is exuberantly playful in the fullest sense. It feels loose and spontaneous, rolling across the screen like a seemingly effortless guitar riff. Almost casually, it takes up the archetypal moments of a gen-

eration's life: teenaged dreams, first romance, rebellion, leaving home, the taste of success, and then the end of youth and the apparent death of youthful dreams. The witty, ironic tone covers an underlying empathy in which there is no sense of detachment. Rather, the spirit of the work is that of a shared vitality, a pop heritage held in common.

In this sense, *The King Of Friday Night* is clearly the opposite of nostalgia. Through its deceptively simple structure, it re-vitalizes the present with the energy of the music. The re-united Monarchs haven't lost their touch. Neither has their ageing audience which, on-screen and off, still contains the spirit of Screamin' John deep in their souls. The staid portrait of the Queen overlooking the dancehall turns into the rebel trickster rocker laughing with devilish glee. As the music says: "When the situation's outta control, you better rock, you better roll."

Gosling, Gray and McCallum have truly fused every aspect of performance in this work: the tremendous acting and singing of Eric Peterson, Frank Mackay, Sheree Jeacocke, Geoffrey Bowes, Andrew Rhodes and Alec Willows; the 24-track recording of Gray's fine rock lyrics; the location-shooting and the extraordinary visual "performance" of the in-studio chromakey all come together to create a production that's as tight you could want. Don't miss the repeat on CBC-TV.

Joyce Nelson •

**THE KING OF FRIDAY NIGHT**

d. John Gray, Andrew Gosling exec. p. Jane Harris p. Les Harris chromakey-des. Graham McCallum sc./mus. comp. John Gray l.p. Eric Peterson, Geogrey Bowes, Andrew Rhodes, Sheree Jeacocke, Frank Mackay, Alec Willows, running time: 88 mins., colour, 1" video p.c. & disc. Canamedia Productions Ltd., Toronto

Giles Walker's  
**90 Days**

Twice the National Film Board has had its feature-filmmaking vocation quashed: the first time with the government's 1968 decision to create a private film industry; the second time, also by government order, in the shot-gun marriage of forced feature-film collaboration with that same private sector. So it's truly something of a miracle to see that the Board has, for the third time in its history, managed to generate its own distinctive kind of genuinely Canadian feature. Yet *90 Days* is not just miraculous; more importantly, perhaps, it's a film that works.

Hilariously funny, brilliantly done, impeccably acted, Walker's sequel to the problematic *Masculine Mystique* cuts through the stylistic and thematic ambiguities of that first skewed attempt at contemporary social comedy and fearlessly leaps into the fictional terrain to produce an authentic, unembarrassed Canadian soap-opera that deserves the widest possible distribution. It's as if, out of the limbo of perdition into which the Board has been cast, Giles Walker has stumbled upon the elixir of an antidote to the Canadian feature film problem. And happily, the solution consists of a massive dose of laughter.

It's a truism that Canadian humor naturally gravitates to the self-deprecating, Canadian humor that doesn't harbor at least a germ of self-satire is rare, or, as TV

comedies like *Hangin' In* or *Snow Job* or movies like *Porky's* indicate, at best puerile. What Canada has never had is mature humor — humor for adults — and that's the most distinctive aspect of *90 Days*: it speaks directly to, and affectionately from, the bewilderment of contemporary adult experience.

Walker clearly loves his characters but the original fumbling foursome of today's male muddle who first surfaced in *Masculine Mystique* have here been cut to the two strongest: the endearingly blue-eyed Blue (played by Stefan Wodoslawsky with all the disarming confidence of knowing he's a heartthrob) and the wonderfully, painfully dead-pan Alex (Sam Grana). The inability to make cuts is probably the single, most over-riding problem of Canadian cinema. Yet *90 Days*' ability to do just that and its visible improvement as a result confidently testifies to this film's belief in itself. And the comedic power displayed by both leading men that results from exactly the right combination of acting talent, strong direction, and a well-written story is simply something to behold.

The counterpoints to Blue and Alex are two antinomical women — the brilliantly all-business Laura (Fernanda Tavares) and the delicately dependent Hyang-Sook (Christine Pak). Between these four poles of the human condition — Alex thrown out of his home by a wife who'll no longer stand his infidelities; Blue having decided he wants to marry a mail-order bride from Korea; Hyang-Sook who, despite the pre-

cariousness of her position, manages to maintain an impressive dignity; and Laura, as the attractive businesswoman with the proposition that just can't be refused — the plot unravels with flawless naturalism. There's little point giving away the story here: suffice it to say it all revolves around everybody's favorite topic — sex and its discontents.

As in *Masculine Mystique*, various NFBers get in for the cameo-roles: Daisy de Bellefeuille as Blue's mother is so good you can just smell the clouds of perfume she gives off, and executive producer Andy Thomson has a nice, brief part as a male nurse. Diane Le Floch's music editing highlights a concern with sound which is another of the unsung glories of Canadian film tradition. But unlike *The Masculine Mystique*, *90 Days* has entirely stepped aside the problem of the docudrama. This film is clearly fiction and in a landscape as parched as ours for Canadian fiction that isn't didactic (or stupid or flawed), it's a wondrous sight indeed.

For *90 Days*' Canadianisms are there (as they should be), but they're unassuming, just part of a particular landscape. For one, it's Anglo-Montreal, a small corner of the Canadian film universe that doesn't appear enough onscreen; it's winter (of course!); and it's the omnipresent state, with its police and its bureaucrats, as always prying its unwelcome nose into the citizenry's private business.

But, above all, *90 Days* is simply a very fine piece of work. Festival-goers can

catch the film at the Montreal and Toronto fests, and since there's more turnout for those two events than Canadian film in this country gets in a decade, this is a film you don't want to miss. So move over all the Petes, Joeys, Duddys, and other losers of Canadian cinema, 'cause here comes a winner. *90 Days* is a film you emerge from with just one question: when's the sequel?

Michael Dorland •



• *90 Days*' brilliant foursome: Stefan Wodoslawsky, Christine Pak, Sam Grana and Fernanda Tavares

## MINI - REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

*Rhombus Media Inc. is Niv Fichman, Barbara Willis Sweete, Larry Weinstein, and its main output is sponsored films. With a leaning towards music, this group produces what Canada is internationally known for — the polished, civilized documentary. Rhombus films are crisp in execution, good to look at, and have a great feeling for people. The following trio premiered individually on TV during the past year.*

### A SENSE OF MUSIC

A visual demonstration of the value of a good music program in schools. No blatant preaching, just a number of very involved and sincere people getting the point across in an entertaining but emphatic manner.

The various ways and methods of music teaching and appreciation are well demonstrated. A visiting music teacher works with the classroom teacher to continue a co-operative project, while another painlessly imparts both music and movement to a gaggle of young kids, busily singing soft and loud with lots of flailing action. The joy of creating musical instruments from familiar articles ranges from students organizing a steel drum band, to a bunch of tiny tots banging and clanging anything they can get their little paws on.

The upper end of the scale is the school show band, and a choir for which there are no auditions and anyone can get in and sing away. These two elements combine in an on-camera performance given with great verve, and to which the audience responds with a standing ovation.

This is a film designed for a specific purpose, but the message is easily and persuasively presented. A student compares music to sports — in both, a

commitment is made to practice and to improve. A teacher says simply, "I go out there — having fun and making music."

**Awards:** National Educational Film Festival, Oakland, CA (1st place, Teacher Education) and 1984 American Film Festival (Red Ribbon, Teacher Education cat.)

**d./ed.** Niv Fichman, **p.** Barbara Sweete, **Babs Church, cam.** John Walker, **sd.** Brian Avery, **p.man.** Larry Weinstein; **Running time:** 28 mins., Col. 16mm, **Availability:** McNabb Films (416) 226-3060. Produced in association with TVOntario and Ontario Music Educators Assn

### COWBOYS DON'T CRY

A portrait of the filmmaker's grandfather, Gurney Willis. Barbara Sweete hasn't seen her childhood "western movie hero" for 20 years. She comes from the city to his ranch in Alberta to recapture her memories and to update them.

She interviews him, and follows him with a camera — he's 85 years old, semi-retired, and "a stranger to me." There's a charming collage of Gurney Willis's life — snapshots at youthful rodeos and with his cowboy cronies; memories of the Fraser Valley flood of '94; and he even met Bill Miner, the first Canadian train robber (shades of *The Grey Fox*...). Friends reminisce — "the toughest guy I ever seen," "full of jokes," "a real old true horseman."

At the time of filming, Gurney Willis had been asked to lead the annual cowboy parade through his town of Keremeos. So he bought a new and frisky horse which threw him, right on-camera. Four months later he'd reco-

vered from a punctured lung and broken ribs and was out of hospital and telling stories again. At the end of the film Sweete asks, "Did we miss anything about you?" and her grandfather replies, "An awful lot, but I can't explain it."

This very personal tribute started with a shoot in the late '70s, with another after a two-year interval, and was finally edited and finished in 1984. It's a sturdily sentimental look at a real live pioneer who, by no stretch of the imagination, fits the 'senior citizen' mould. And Gurney is still here — 92 years old now.

**d.** Barbara Willis Sweete, **Nov Fichman, Larry Weinstein, sd.ed.** Tony Sloan, **orig. mus.** Bill Skolnik; **Running time:** 28 mins., Col. 16mm, **Availability:** Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (416) 593-1808 and West (Vancouver) (604) 684-3014. Produced with assistance from the Canada Council/The National Film Board of Canada

### MAKING OVERTURES

The story of a community orchestra, the Northumberland Symphony Orchestra (together with the Northumberland Philharmonic Choir), and all the elements that go into its enduring popularity and survival.

From auditions for musicians and singers, to rehearsals, to fund-raising projects, including a "Bach-Yard Sale" and "An Evening in London," a black-tie affair with roast-beef dinner and a Gilbert & Sullivan sing-along — the drive and enthusiasm of everyone involved is evident.

The orchestra members and a legion of supporters are firmly convinced that it is absolutely essential for a communi-

**90 DAYS** **l.p.** Stefan Wodoslawsky, Christine Pak, Sam Grana, Fernanda Tavares **d.** Giles Walker **p.** David Wilson, Giles Walker **sc.** Walker, Wilson **d.o.p.** Andrew Kitkanuk **ed.** David Wilson **orig. mus.** Richard Gresko **sd. ed.** Bill Graziadei **mus. ed.** Diane Le Floch **mus. record.** Louis Hone **re-rec.** Jean-Pierre Joutel **exec. p.** Andy Thompson **p.c. and dist.** National Film Board of Canada **Color.,** 16mm, 3/4", VHS, Beta **running time:** 99 mins.

ty to have an orchestra, just as it should also have a swimming pool or a hockey arena.

The mixture of young and old within the orchestra works well, and they talk with much feeling of the pleasure and relaxation, the exposure to experience, and of "coming home refreshed" after playing. "It's something I can do on my own without my husband or kids," adds a young housewife.

There's a particular charming visual touch while the orchestra plays. The camera roams over its members and dissolves to their everyday occupations — feeding the pigs, woodworking, the housewife tuning her piano with the kids around.

The enormous rapport within the orchestra and choir is nurtured and encouraged by conductor Philip Schaus, an ebullient, lively and expressive man who obviously loves what he is doing. Whether meeting guest soloist (violinist Barry Shiffman) at the train-station and giving him a swift and funny background of the orchestra members on the drive to his home; urging choir and orchestra to greater heights during rehearsal; or scuttering through a Gilbert & Sullivan patter song in white tie and tails, his effervescent enthusiasm bubbles from the screen.

(An interesting aside: Seagrams, one of the patrons of *Making Overtures*, made a contribution to the Ontario Federation of Symphony Orchestras, and paid for fifteen prints of the film which were distributed free to public libraries in Ontario.)

**d.** Larry Weinstein, **p.** Barbara Willis Sweete, **Babs Church, cam.** John Walker, **esc.** Douglas Kiefer, **esc. sd.** Brian Avery, **ed.** Anthony Sloan, **Running time:** 28 mins., Col., 16mm **Availability:** McNabb Films (416) 226-3060. Produced in association with TVOntario, with support from The Samuel and Sadye Bronfman Family Foundation, Floyd S. Chalmers, Woodlawn Arts Foundation, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, Ltd