

Lewis Furey's

## Night Magic

**N**ight Magic might have been a great film and musical, were it not for its music. Curiously it was directed by the same man who wrote the music, Lewis Furey, and his work behind the camera is flawless and fascinating. But in the end, Furey's score defeats him and an audacious attempt at a rock-opera fantasy filmed on Montreal's most famed strip of decadence, St. Lawrence Blvd., succeeds only as a showcase for the film's director and his screenplay co-writer Leonard Cohen. As 94 minutes of entertainment, as a captivating movie, **Night Magic** works not as well.

A Canadian musical is a relatively rare commodity, but **Night Magic** is especially noteworthy for the forum it gives two of the country's most intriguing artists, Cohen and Furey. And although **Night Magic** is a simple tale, Cohen's lyrics and Furey's direction serve to make it refreshing and sufficiently complex.

The story is told in song, with only slight narration and dialogue. Cohen's lyrics make up the bulk of the script. A mine of wit, irreverence, candour, Cohen's words long to be savoured. But they come at the speed of a bass drum and with all the elements of the film that deserve attention — dance, sets, performance — a fundamental part of **Night Magic's** magic is lost. Cohen is best digested at one's own speed. Or with the option of laying the needle down for another listen.

Furey's music, on the other hand, tends to obscure rather than enhance.

The crispness and control he exhibits behind the camera seems to disappear in the score. Perhaps one is either a Furey fan or not, but his stuttered, almost tango-like rhythms, and his quiverous vocals become tiresome. Worse, halfway through the picture the score becomes redundant, almost aggravating.

As a director, Furey's performance is more stimulating. The film is a fantasy that flits from scene to scene, playfully crossing and recrossing the thread of reality. Here Furey displays a keenly light touch and it works surprisingly well.

Nick Mancuso deserves kudos for his role as the leading, if heavily tormented, light of a travelling musical that has just hit Montreal. His screen presence as a man tortured by desire and doubt, is impressive. In a role where words are few, he has pulled off a powerful and emotional performance. Carole Laure as his angel-wife, woman of his dreams and mother of his child, fares less well. She spends a lot of time skulking behind staircases and chimneys. Her dancing is seductive but as the riveting ingénue, a role she perfected in earlier films, she is not quite up to scratch. Here, Laure comes off immensely less memorable than her leading man.

Mancuso's Michael is on the prowl for fulfillment, happiness, peace of mind. Neither the show nor its unexpected success is enough to dampen the turmoil. Visited by three angels and granted anything he wants simply for the asking, he succeeds only in bringing on greater destruction. If there's an answer to the question does the showman's life provide too little or does the showman demand too much, **Night Magic** points toward the latter.

Eddie Toussaint's choreography is well-matched to the film. Stark, well-

paced and evocative, it fits beautifully with the sets — the rooftops and sidewalks of St. Lawrence. The dancing of Frank Augustyn is similarly impressive — carefully controlled and understated, yet beautiful.

**Night Magic** is an interesting and original film and will best be remembered not as a curious musical but for Mancuso's performance and Cohen's lyrics. It should be seen loud.

David Sherman •

**NIGHT MAGIC** exec. p. Stephen J. Roth, Michelle de Broca p. Robert Lantos, James T. Kaufman d. Lewis Furey sc. Lewis Furey, Leonard Cohen music Lewis Furey lyrics Leonard Cohen d.o.p. Philippe Rousselot choreographer Eddy Toussaint p. man. Daniel Louis art d. François Séguin film ed. Michel Arcand prod. exec. Andras Hamori sd. Yvon Benoit cost. des. Michelle Cerf 1st asst. d. Jacques Wilbrod Benoit 2nd asst. d. Monique Maranda unit man. Denis Normandeau unit loc. man. Blair Roth asst. choreographer Jean-Marc Lebeau lip-sync supervisor Zander Ary choir master Gilbert Patenaude cast. Nadia Rona, Vera Miller, Elite Productions props Patrice Bengle asst. props Ian Lavoie prop buyer P. Karen Langshaw set dec. Dean Eilertson ward. Martine Fontaine art d. Tina Boden make-up Micheline Trépanier Foisy hair Danielle Vuarin gaffer Kevin O'Connell elec. Jean-Marc Hébert, Marc Charlebois, Bernard Arseneau key grip Robert Lapiere Jr. grip Philippe Palu, André Ouellet 1st asst. cam. Michel Girard 2nd asst. cam. Michel Bernier cam. appr. Howard Schrier sd. asst. Esther Auger asst. ed. Alain Belhumeur, Teresa de Luca, Catherine Martin exec. prod. asst. Kris Michaels asst. d. Marge Bruineman stills Ronald S. Diamond asst. prod. Lucie Bouliane, Guy Normandeau, Alain Bougie asst. admin. Jean Pelletier l.p. Nick Mancuso, Carole Laure, Stéphane Audran, Jean Carmet, Frank Augustyn, Louis Robitaille, Anik Bissonnette, Jean-Marc Lebeau, Jean-Hughes Rochette, Lyne Tremblay, Danielle Godin, Barbara Harris, Catherine Greenway, Michelle Stennett, Sophie Bissonnette, Jean-Marie Benoit, Carlyle Miller, Don Alias, Margarita Stocker, Micheline Giard, Yolande Husaruk, Joan Henney, Nathalie Buisson, Brigitte Vallette, France Deslauriers p.r. David Novek Associates unit pub. Martine Provost, Kevin Tierney, David Novek Associates p.c. RSL Entertainment Corp. **Night Magic** in a Canada-France coproduction, produced with the participation of Telefilm Canada, TFI, the Canada-France fund for the promotion of coproductions, the Société générale du cinéma, Radio-Canada and the Skyld Group. dist. (US & Can.) Spectrafilm, (Qué.) Vivafilm. colour 35mm running time: 94 mins.

Ron Levine & René DeCarufel's

## Bread and Puppet Theatre: A Song for Nicaragua

*"The first thing I would tell the American people is to read about our history. There is no East-West conflict. There is a longstanding conflict between the United States and Nicaragua that goes back to before Marx's Manifesto"* — Padre Uriel Molina

**W**hat with a recent American court decision upholding a 1983 U.S. Justice Department ruling that the National Film Board's **If You Love This Planet** was "foreign propaganda," here's this year's documentary contender, produced with the NFB's assistance, for the Foreign Propaganda award.

A charmingly simple documentary of the old school (handheld camera, grainy footage), **Bread and Puppet theatre: A song for Nicaragua** is a metaphorical account of a Vermont-based radical theatre troupe's tour of Nicaragua in January 1985.

Since the 1960s, Bread and Puppet Theatre, then based in New York City, has been at the forefront of alternative culture. Inspired by the rise of liberation theology throughout Latin America in the '60s and '70s, Bread and Puppet, now based in Glover, Vt., evolved a mystico-political update of the medieval miracle play through an extraordinary use of tree-sized puppets.

The troupe's tour of a modern miracle play about the nativity, crucifixion and resurrection of assassinated Salvadorean archbishop Oscar Romero informs the bulk of Montreal photographers Ron Levine and René DeCarufel's hour-long documentary.

"Puppetry," explains Bread and Puppet founder Peter Schumann, 52, "is a simplification device." So, one might add, is cinema. And so too is revolution. **A Song for Nicaragua** thus becomes an ingenious meditation upon the triple system of simplification of the politics of revolutionary culture.

Nicaragua, whatever its particular reality (and an interview within the film with Padre Uriel Molina, one of many Catholic priests who have rallied to the revolutionary régime, is insightful as to that reality), Nicaragua has become a leading current site for the deployment of symbolic power, and so the power of symbols. And this whether one views Nicaragua as a revolutionary David against the Goliath of U.S. imperialism, as an underdeveloped and impoverished nation struggling out from under continued subjection by a militant consumer empire, or as a social laboratory for new popular cultural models of expression. Nicaragua today poses

• **Night Magic:** Nick Mancuso is simply outstanding, while Carole Laure plays the angel-wife



photo: Ron Levine