

François Labontés

Henri

François Labontés's *Henri* is about the reunification of a family after it has been split apart by tragedy. The story is a good one, filled with emotion, humour and a laudable sort of righteousness, i.e. the good guys *do* come out on top, love and caring *are* important, and things *do* work out in the end.

The story revolves around Henri (Éric Brisebois), and his relationships with a despondent father, younger sister, teachers, classmates, and in a sense, the world at large.

Henri's mother has recently been killed in a boating accident that forced his father, Joseph (Jacques Godin) to choose between saving his nine-year-old daughter, Liliane, and his wife. He managed to rescue Liliane. That choice haunts him, adding to the emotional loss he is suffering, making him morose, irritable and seemingly indifferent to life. Logically, the family has fallen apart, with just Henri struggling to maintain some semblance of continuity in family life.

Symbolically, Joseph has locked the door to the bedroom he shared with the dead woman, turning it into a kind of shrine no one may enter. He sleeps on the couch in front of the television, drinks and broods. Liliane has been in the hospital since the accident, more for emotional reasons than physical. Believing she will die before her father will reclaim her, at one point she explains her feeling to Henri -- that their father looks at her as though she has no right to live. For his part, Joseph, unable to cope with the reminder Lili embodies, has resigned himself to the thought that she is better off in the hospital.

The outcome of the film and the resolution of this situation is fairly transparent from the outset. The agitation between Henri and his father must reach a peak, and it does, which snaps Joseph out of his stupor.

The turn-around comes as a result of Henri's passion for running. He runs everywhere -- not for competition, not for sport, just for the sake of running. Our first glimpse of his character, in 'real-story' time, is his daily early-morning run across the picturesque village of Ste-Marie de Beauce to visit Liliane at the hospital. Henri is apparently a loner who needs to run as a kind of catharsis. Roch Chabot, (Claude Gauthier), the local garage-owner/mechanic, is Henri's surrogate-father/friend, and recognizes in Henri something of himself at the same age as he explains that Henri runs because he is just "too full".

Henri ultimately defies his father to run in the village marathon, beats his arch-enemy, the school principal, and proves himself a hero. The night before the race, after the crucial confrontation between Henri and his father, the shell Joseph has built around himself cracks, somewhat too quickly to believe. He appears at the race with Lili, and as

Henri stumbles across the finish line, the family reunites in a joyful embrace.

The ending is too conveniently fortuitous, but forgivable because the film has carefully built enough identification between viewer and character. We really want Henri to win, so it doesn't seem so important that, when he does, it is rather silly.

Henri is a visually pretty film, adding to the story's entertaining quality. The camera concentrates on faces, and the film is full of fascinating ones. It also plays up the beauty of the village of Ste-Marie de Beauce and the Chaudière valley which in themselves become another character.

The opening scenes are a recreation of the accident, giving the viewer the needed background information with a pleasing change from such drastic filmic conventions as strange dissolves or fish-eye distortion. From a very long wide shot of the village, the camera tracks in very slow as the scene blanches from stunning autumn colours to black and white, then cuts to the people talking and pointing at the river. The event is acted out minus colour and voices, just a musical score that punctuates the sense of trauma. When the men dragging the river finally locate the body and begin to haul it up, the action cuts back to colour and 'present' time. It is an effective and visually interesting way of flashing back.

Much of *Henri*'s solidity arises out of its truth in its creation of personalities and relationships. Some of its most appealing moments occur between Henri and his peers. The scenes in the classroom, locker-room, and on the school

bus which Henri ends up racing against, are credible representations of high-school life and the interactions it fosters.

While I enjoyed this film and believe it is a sample of solid, straightforward movie entertainment, I think it has some inherent problems. There are some uncomfortable incongruities between what *Henri* portends to be and what it is.

The central character, the hero, is undoubtedly Henri. The viewer is drawn into his life, his teen-aged world. In its story-line and characterization, *Henri* is a teen movie. But there are certain production elements that do not uphold this orientation.

It is full of picturesque long takes and is shot mostly with a slow-moving, at times even lyrical camera that will probably pass right over a teen audience which, generally speaking, has been raised on rock videos and space-invaders. For example, when Henri and Rock take to the dunes in an off-road vehicle, the camera keeps a leisurely pace and distance. Rather than a gritty, fast-paced active and exciting moment that would be more appreciated by a young audience, it induces a feeling of a moment out of time, with the emphasis falling on the sense of union between the two friends.

I had the same feeling about the musical score, -- while it is enjoyable, it feels all wrong for the film. At times it connotes a humour that is inappropriate and acts like the voice of an adult looking upon an adolescent situation that mustn't really be taken seriously.

These are serious flaws if the film was

intended for a teen-aged audience, and with a 15 year-old protagonist, it's difficult to imagine who else it was intended for. In other words, the *style* of *Henri* seems to contradict its *content* to its detriment.

Hopefully, *Henri* will prove me wrong and find its audience, because, despite some hokeyness and a tendency towards sentimentality, I like the characters, the story and visual quality Labonté has produced.

Jamie Gaetz •

HENRI p. Claude Bonin assoc. p. Suzanne Hénault. Jacques Bonin d. François Labonté sc. dialogue Jacques Jacob d.o.p. Michel Caron art d. Jean-Baptiste Tard ed. André Corriveau music Denis Larochelle sd. Alain Corneau musical d. Marcel Pothier 1st a.d. Alain "Lino" Chartrand 2nd a.d. Norbert Dufour casting d. extras Richard Vachon cont. Monique Champagne trainee Sandrine Fayos 1st asst. cam Daniel Vincelette 2nd asst. cam. Christiane Guernon gaffer Marc Charlebois elec. Jean-Marc Hébert asst. elec. Stéphane Picard key grip Serge Grenier grip Michel Bertrand musical rec. and mix Studio Jean Sauvageau boom Philippe Scultety sd. ed. Marcel Pothier. Claude Langlois asst. sd. mix Myriam Poirier. Antoine Morin post-synch co-ord Marielle Gaudreau post-synch assts. Normand Bélanger, Maude Jacques. Daniel Vincent set dec. Michèle Forest props exterior Jean Labreque set props Daniel Huysmans ouvriers Clément Dulac, Raymond Dulac cost design Blanche-Danielle Boileau ward. Pierre Perrault, Francesca Chamberland dresser Luc le Flaguais make-up Diane Simard add. sd. Dominique Chartrand asst. add. sd. Louis Marion sd. re-rec. Jocelyn Caron mix. Joe Grimaldi, Dino Pigat p. man. Suzanne Hénault asst. prod. man. Ginette Guillard loc. man. Mario Nadeau prod co-ord Micheline Cadieux sec. Nicole Bernier, Diane Gagnon prod. assts Lucie Bouliane, Martin Dubois, Pierre Guillard prod. acc. Daniel Demers asst. prod acc. Louise Dupré pub. Danièle Papineau-Couture et Communipresse stills. Bertrand Carrière add. photog Philippe Scultety l.p. Eric Brisebois, Jacques Godin, Lucie Laurier, Marthe Turgeon, Claude Gauthier, Yvan Ponton, Julien Poulin, Kim Yaroshevskaya colour 35mm running time: 91 min. 20 sec.

•Yvon Ponton, Claude Gauthier and Eric Brisebois as Henri

