

Niv Fichman's
World Drums

"Through his life, percussionist John Wyre dreamed of gathering drummers from around the world to play together on one stage. At Vancouver's Expo 86, John's dream came true."

— from **World Drums**

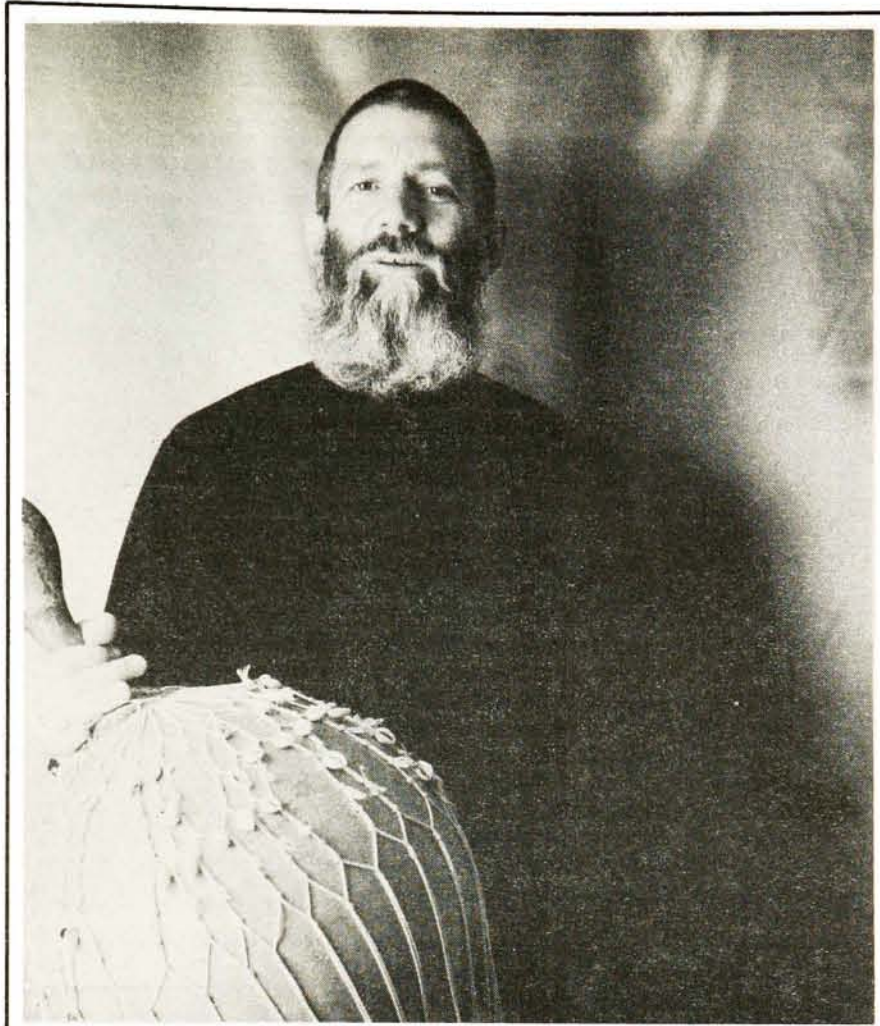
This stunning film catalogues the truly marvellous over-realization of one man's dream. Word-of-mouth has been building since **World Drums** premiered at this year's Festival of Festivals in Toronto, and the hum should soon become a roar of approval.

In a quietly deceptive opening, the camera roams over a variety of drums, soft percussion pervades the soundtrack accompanied by close-ups of hands thrumming. Then John Wyre, founding member of Nexus (Canada) and artistic director of the World Drum Festival at Expo 86, welcomes all participants — 150 musicians and 23 ensembles from around the world.

World Drums is artfully constructed to climb to a terrific climax. The fascinating groups that have come together for this singular event are sampled, and enticing chunks of the various performances are interspersed with candid backstage stuff and glimpses of John Wyre rehearsing and working towards the Grand Finale.

The Harmonites Steel Band (Antigua) kicks off with a lively mellow sound and a fast beat. An invigorating singer gets everyone (literally) jumping — the band leaps and plays and the audience bobs up and down.

From here on, it's just one delicious treat following another, and the film takes on a 'don't — let it — stop' magic about it. Many images still linger: Companions d'Akati (Côte d'Ivoire), with drums and shaken gourds fronted by an intensely acrobatic dancer, who gives way to a masked dancer who, in turn, is displaced by an incredibly whirling stilt-



• John Wyre with drum

walker. John Wyre says that the peak of percussion is exemplified by Indonesia, and who would disagree after experiencing the group Gamelan? Its expressive performers each have a large and a small red drum and, accompanied by flute, cymbals and gongs, they joyfully chant and shout and generally have a lot of fun.

The Dou Dou Rose Ensemble (Senegal), a drum group, is led by a wonderfully agile and theatrical conductor. In wild contrast is the Queen's Lancashire Regiment Drum Corps (England) in scarlet military uniforms and sporting black helmets with silver chin straps. In shiny boots they march out, and rat-a-tat-tat up a storm. A particularly eye-catching movement constantly brings the drumsticks up smartly to rest horizontally on upper lips — without a slip.

John Wyre remarks that rehearsals sometimes seem like a war zone, as ideas are put forward, exchanged, and then

translated into a number of languages. However, he appears remarkably cool while into the "third rewrite", trying not to be overwhelmed by the Grand Finale as he organizes the chaos, giving individual instructions and cues. As the great culmination approaches, there's lots of steam-ironing and general preparation in the dressing rooms, and backstage tingles with excitement and anticipation.

At the opening of the Grand Finale everyone lines up on stage, drumming rhythmically in unison as Wyre, an ascetic figure in black, conducts. Then, a lone Inuit elder progresses across the stage. [Backstage: everyone gyrates to the beat, including the boys in scarlet uniforms]. The Bomas (Kenya) now drum centre stage, seed-covered gourds shaking, and what looks like an elongated bicycle pump giving out some quivering notes as an incredibly athletic dancer bounds about. [Backstage: a member of

the U.S.S.R. group practices spinning; a statuesque woman in white looks on; the military boys take it all in, while a black girl imitates their "drumsticks to upper lip" routine; others mime movements of the performers onstage].

Everything shifts into high gear. Steve Gadd (U.S.A.) smashes through a complicated jazz routine, Oreno (U.S.S.R.) follows and four black-clad Cossacks glide through a routine with the woman in white, majestic and stately, hands concealed by the costume sleeves, all accompanied by drum and accordion. Nexus (Canada), with Wyre performing, delivers a whimsical syncopated xylophone number. The exotically costumed Samul Nori (Korea), is now front and centre. This four-man ensemble performs on drums and cymbals, constantly circling their heads so that the long streamers attached to their hats whirl continuously about them.

[The black-clad Cossacks laugh and dance backstage].

Then the vast troupe assembles on stage. Wyre leads the disparate elements — steel band, dancers, drummers, percussionists, singers — in a superbly orchestrated frenzied finale. After sustained drumming from the Dou Dou Rose Ensemble (Senegal), three strong drum beats...it's over. And the audience erupts with roars and cheers. No encores, nothing — just knock their socks off and end.

Talk about shake, quake and quiver — what a toe-tapping, body-writhing, downright movie that really moves! A fast, snappy performance film that more than captures the spirit of the dream John Wyre had of gathering drummers from around the world to "play together" It has all the earmarks of an award-winner and also of becoming a worldwide financial success. Bravos to Niv Fichman and the Rhombus crowd, and to the National Film Board.

Produced for National Film Board by Rhombus Media Inc. assoc.p. Larry Weinstein exec.p. Peter Katadotis. Barbara Willis Sweete p. Niv Fichman, Louise Clark. d. Niv Fichman. dop. David Geddes. ed. Margaret van Eerdewijk stereo sd. John Martin. sd.ed. Michael Werth running time: 60 mins. 16mm. 1 7/8" 4/3" vid-eotape. Availability: National Film Board. Made with the assistance of Expo 86 Corporation and the Dept. of Communications. Govt. of Canada.

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