



• Riding to heaven on a Harley

is an evangelical movement for bikers. The characters in the movie are a subculture within a subculture.

Stavrides, who once made a film about Inuit teenagers, approaches his subject like an ethnographic documentarian. He records a tribe – the Christian Riders Motorcycle Club – as the band members go about their daily business, attend their rituals, and talk about their lives. Stavrides keeps a certain distance, framing his subjects (the cinematographer was James Crowe) in cool, uncluttered shots that allow us to observe and evaluate – or simply observe out of interest, and not even bother with judgments. The movie has no narrator, and most of it is not cut in a way that makes editorial points, or turns your head with biting ironies.

However, the picture often induces you to sympathize with the Christian Riders. Not only does their thirst for salvation seem genuine and reasonably un-sentimental, they display eccentric individuality and a sense of irony. At a revival meeting, one of them grins and describes the way he sees Jesus's face. The Lord's long hair is crowned by a motorcycle helmet, and he's wearing shades. God is motorcyclist. And naturally, he rides a Harley.

The ex-outlaws in the film have cast off all their former ways, except for one: they haven't stopped being bikers. Images you expect to see in any motorcycle movie, whether it is called *The Wild One*, *The Wild Angels*, *Easy Rider*, or *Satan's Choice* (the first Canadian biker picture, which was, not surprisingly, also a documentary), appear in *God Rides a Harley*. Stavrides gives us the close-ups of boots, buckles, and chains; he pans across icons stitched into jean jackets and leather vests. The images are familiar, even though crosses and 'Jesus is Lord' have replaced skulls and 'Born To Lose'.

The Riders are still bikers, not self-righteous prudes who have renounced all their pleasures. Stavrides cuts regularly to liquidly edited shots of the club enjoying the feel of their big choppers on the roads of southern Ontario. How-

ever, they don't swarm aggressively. Accompanied by gospel rock on the soundtrack, they float peacefully past autumnal trees, through dark tunnels, and back into the light. A run is both a sensual and a religious experience. When the Riders approach us, a filter on the cameraman's lens turns the beams of their headlights into rows of spectral yellow crosses.

The Christian Riders Motorcycle Club is compelling because its members convince you they have gone through real turmoil and because they are a striking cross-breed of born-again and biker. However, near the end of the film, you might worry a little about them. A preacher who only borrows bikes now, and who would not be out of place on a TV evangelist's show, delivers a real fire – and – brimstone sermon. It is the first time in the picture that we hear so much disturbingly violent religious rhetoric. And some of the Riders – dressed straight, no colors – don't look like bikers anymore.

The fact that *God Rides a Harley* rolls toward this scene suggests that Stavrides is implying the film's characters could become something other than what they are now. But then he cuts away from the revival meeting and back to the highway, to the Riders on their bikes. He repeats a travelling close-up of a female biker in a black leather jacket. In profile, she smiles serenely, taking pleasure in the sensation of being up there on that motorcycle which is carrying her toward Heaven's gate.

Maurie Alioff •

GOD RIDES A HARLEY d. Stavros C. Stavrides p. Andreas Erne, Stavros C. Stavrides assoc. p. Michael Wainwright story consult. Spencer Frazer liaison Janet McCreadie d. o. p. James Crowe film ed. Steve Stephenson sd. Peter Sawade add. m. by. Carlos Lopes, Adian Mason m. "Are You Ready" (Charlie Allen and John Hill), performed and arranged by Ben McPeck and Jerome McPeck, synthesizer programming by Don Baird; "Questions" (Justin Hayward) performed and arranged by Ben McPeck and Jerome McPeck, synthesizer programming by Don Baird, "Gospel Plow" (Bob Dylan), performed by Paul James. colour 16mm running time 81 min. An Arto-Pelli Motion Pictures Production distributed by Creative Exposure (416) 690-0667.

Jacques Godbout's **En Dernier Recours**

When Quebec labour minister Pierre Laporte was kidnapped and murdered in 1970, news spread quickly across the country. Overnight, the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) and the issue of Quebec's independence were thrust to the forefront. Newspapers labeled FLQ members terrorists and the public branded them murderers.

But was it really murder and terrorism? Was the FLQ not fighting, perhaps, for a legitimate cause? Quebec filmmaker Jacques Godbout grapples with these questions in his latest documentary *En Dernier recours*. In it, he explores terrorism in Canadian society, analyzing events like the FLQ years, the Denis Lortie assault on Quebec's National Assembly and the actions of the 'Vancouver Five'.

In choosing Canadian terrorism as a subject, Godbout opens the door on a

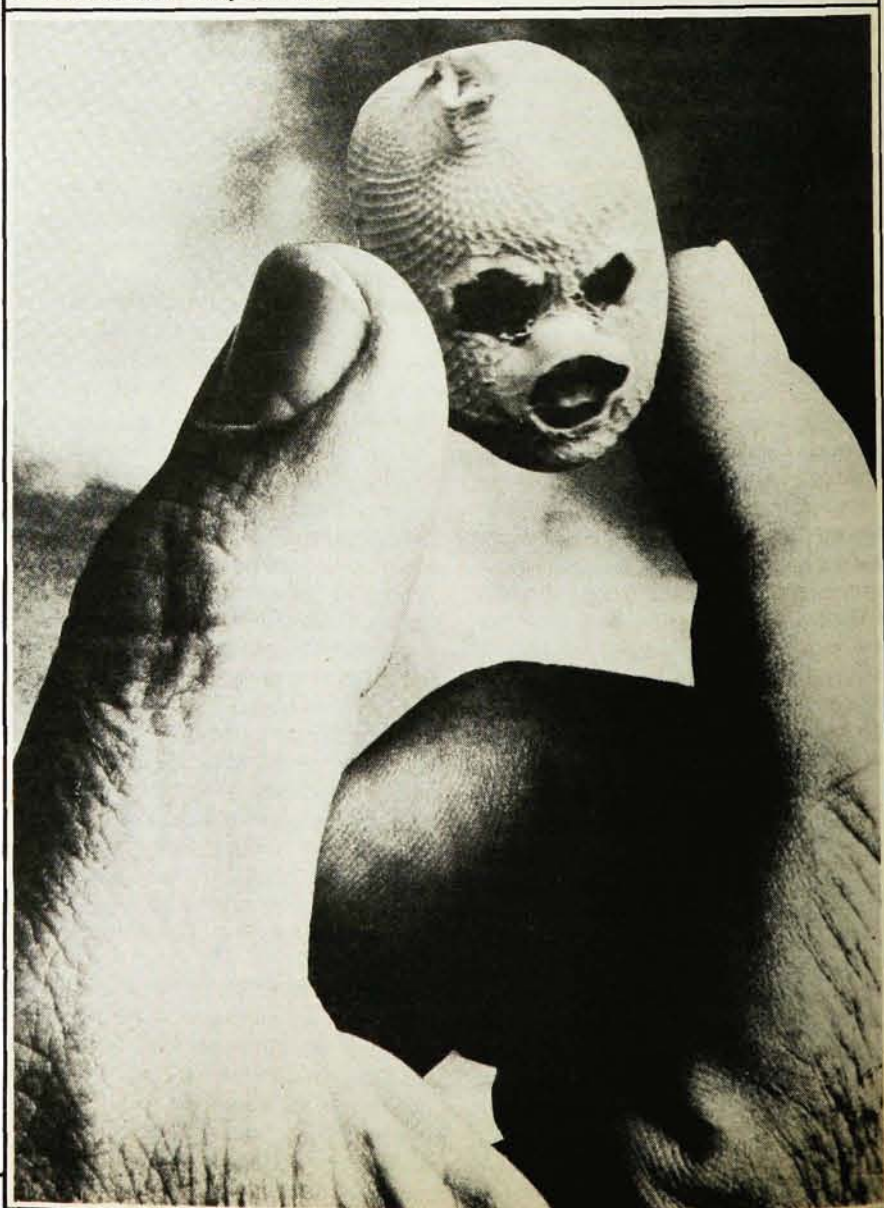
complex issue. He rises to the challenge by presenting views from a wide range of personalities: former FLQ activist François Schirm, Quebec writer Pierre Vallières, an ex-Red Brigade militant and a Montreal police officer. Throughout the 70-minute documentary, Godbout deftly juxtaposes their views to present the film's main themes.

The on-camera interviews form the structure of *En Dernier recours*. To complement them, Godbout relies on archival footage of the 1970 October crisis, the Denis Lortie affair, the Brigham bomb aimed at Pope John Paul II and the Cruise missile tests in Northern Alberta. In fact, there are very few scenes in the film shot by Godbout (the opening and closing scenes in which a bomb explodes on a barren airstrip are probably the best examples).

In the interviews Vallières and Schirm draw distinctions about terrorism. Schirm claims violence is justifiable if used for a popular cause. "Terrorism," he says, "becomes more than just an attack on innocent victims." Vallières adds to this view, asserting that armed struggles in South Africa, Northern Ireland or Central America are not terrorism, although opposing governments and the media label them as such.

In defining terrorism, Godbout fails to distinguish between democratic and

• Terrorism can blow your mind



non-democratic contents. To North Americans and European, most forms of political violence equate terrorism. But in Latin American or African countries, political violence is used to gain independence from a violent oppressor. Can the FLQ's call for an independent Quebec be fairly compared to the African National Congress' struggle against apartheid?

Godbout is clear, though, in making one point – terrorism, like most events depend on communications and a mass audience. Journalists, he explains, become key players in its transmission. Without them and a powerful media system, terrorism has less of an impact. Godbout twists this point in one sequence probing two Canadian journalists who witness a destructive Paris bombing. The two are perplexed when Godbout asks if they thought first of their photo assignments or of helping the burning victims.

En Dernier recours is an analytical documentary raising a number of subtle issues. In one sequence, former Parti Québécois minister Bernard Landry is asked if he felt threatened during the Denis Lortie assault on Quebec's National Assembly, an incident in which seven people were killed. Landry answers a blunt no. "We are all hostages of terrorism... the arms race is an ongoing form of violence." Godbout makes a clear point of this to highlight American and Soviet militarism.

The film's final sequences cover a Vancouver-based group who have bombed and sabotaged Canadian military-industrial targets. But unlike other forms of terrorism or armed struggles depicted in the film, the Vancouver group raises an interesting distinction – their targets, rather than people or innocent victims, are military installations and weapon sites. As Godbout illustrates, are these anti-war militants really terrorists?

Today, military arms and production have become the world's largest industry (\$800 billion annually). Governments, many of them democratically elected, actively promote and support wars. The American Constitution, itself a much-heralded example of justice, guarantees the right of individuals to bear arms. This mass proliferation of weapons has made violence an intrinsic tool in relations between people and states. Unlike the title of Godbout's film, arms and violence have become more than just a last resort. Rather, as **En Derniers recours** effectively depicts, they've rapidly become an effective first choice for those both in and out of power.

Robbie Hart •

Don Shebib's The Climb

Don Shebib has come a long way since his triumphs with **Goin' Down the Road** and **Between Friends** in the early '70s. Since that time, **Goin' Down the Road** has consistently been listed as one of the 10 great Canadian films, and Shebib carries it around with him rather like Orson Welles used to carry **Citizen Kane**. It has become both a blessing and a curse. A source of pride for those committed to the notion of a distinctive Canadian cinema, **Goin' Down the Road** lingers as a reminder of a great talent gone to waste.

In over a decade, Shebib has directed only four features, the last one being **Running Brave** with Robbie Benson in 1983. Disputes with the producers caused Shebib to withdraw his name from that film, which had only limited theatrical release. Since then, he has been active in TV, mostly directing episodes of **The Edison Twins**, **Night Heat**, and **Danger Bay**. Shebib's struggles with the Canadian industry and the CFDC (now Telefilm) have become as famous as his earlier successes.

The Climb, his latest foray into feature filmmaking, is an old-fashioned piece of macho action-drama. It stars Canadian-born Bruce Greenwood from TV's **St. Elsewhere**, with a Canadian supporting cast that includes Kenneth Walsh, Ken Pogue and Tom Butler. However, there is nothing Canadian about **The Climb** subject matter, and in many ways it harks back to the bad old tax shelter days when the deal was more important than the film. It has none of the freshness and vitality of recent English-language Canadian productions, and suffers from a thin, one-dimensional script.

The film is based on the true story of a 1953 German expedition to conquer Nanga Parbat, a treacherous Himalayan peak, described in the film as "the most beautiful mountain in the world". Although not as high as Everest, Nanga Par-

bat became an obsession with the Germans after it claimed the lives of 31 members of a German climbing party in 1932. The script concentrates on Hermann Buhl (Greenwood), a famed mountaineer whose reckless and determined ambition leads him into conflict with the team's bureaucratic leader, Dr. Karl Herrligkoffer (James Hurdle). Whereas Herrligkoffer is climbing for the glory of the German nation, Buhl climbs for himself and the mystical challenge of the mountain.

As they proceed slowly up the icefields, news arrives of Hillary's conquest of Everest. Disappointed and confronted with rebellious porters and dwindling supplies, Herrligkoffer decides to retreat before making it to the top. Buhl disobeys orders to return to base camp and makes the final assault alone, without oxygen or support. After a full day's climb, exhausted and hallucinating, he makes it to the top. Unable to climb down in the dark, he has to spend the night there, keeping himself awake in freezing temperatures. His survival is a credit to his fierce determination, and in the context of the film, miraculous. The ghost of one of the dead climbers helps him down the mountain the next day!

Shot by Richard Leiterman, Shebib's brilliant cinematographer for both **Goin' Down the Road** and **Between Friends**, **The Climb** does manage to communicate some of the mystical allure of mountaineering. The scenery (**The Climb** was filmed on location in Northern Pakistan and the Columbian icefields in Jasper National Park) is glorious and there is plenty of man vs. landscape imagery. Much of it is repetitious, but it is stunning nonetheless.

However, the film is curiously lacking in any real suspense, and the acting is uneven, at best. The oddity of having the Germans speak in accented-English while carrying a German-inscribed plaque to their dead comrades strains the credibility of all the performances.

Shebib's direction is conventional and somewhat stilted. He relies too heavily on the drama of the inert mountains to compensate for the lack of drama in the performances. The conflict set up between Buhl and Dr. Herrligkoffer seems strained and all too predictable. **The Climb** is a film that certainly will have tremendous support from those who

take this sport seriously, but it does very little to enhance the declining reputation of Shebib as a director of merit.

The Climb was produced by Wendy Wacko, an emerging, Alberta-based independent who has become an adept deal-maker. The film was originally financed by CTV, the BBC and Telefilm as a 60-minute drama. By stretching things, Shebib, Wacko and Leiterman produced a feature, but the material and direction still suggest a 60-minute drama.

Wyndham Paul Wise •

Marquise Lepage's Marie s'en va-t-en ville

Marie s'en-va-t-en-ville sounds like the title of a fable or a folktale. And indeed it is the story of a country innocent who comes to the city.

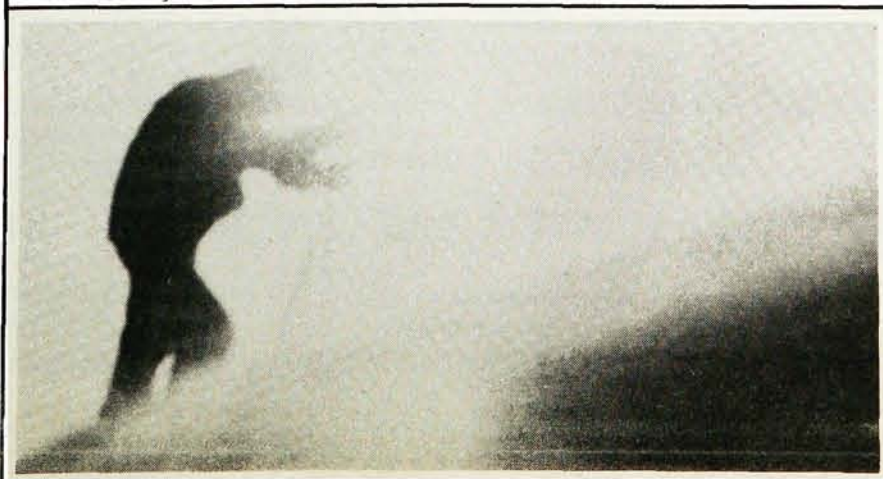
In the folktale, the youngest son or, in this case, daughter leaves home and goes to seek her fortune. After many trials and tribulations she wins out and obtains her heart's desire. In this first feature by Marquise Lepage, we have the story complete with wicked sibling – a brother who sexually harasses our heroine – and a mother who is too busy with the other children to give her youngest adequate love and protection.

In Québécois culture, the country usually represents simpler and more wholesome values than the city. But in this film some sort of reversal of this traditional structure is taking place. Maybe it is because Marie only comes from the suburbs. For, as in the folktale, the innocent finds true love and happiness when she leaves home. There is none of the *misérabilism* of the Québécois films of the '70s here; everything is up-tempo.

In some ways, **Marie s'en-va-t-en-ville** is a gem. It has tight scripting, good acting, nice visuals and nice music. For a first feature, this is quite an achievement. And yet the film disappointed me. Even though I believed in the two main characters, the situation itself seemed incredible and robbed the film as a whole of credibility. Maybe I'm too cynical, but it's hard to believe in the old stereotype of the whore with the heart of gold; would a prostitute (Sarah) really take on the responsibility of caring for a 13-year-old runaway (Marie)?

Once one gets past this incredible situation one can see that the film is dealing with themes that are preoccupying many women filmmakers at present. The relationship between an older and a younger woman is recurrent in many of these films. In **High Tide**, an Australian film by Gillian Armstrong, a nightclub singer comes across the daughter she abandoned 14 years before. Painfully she comes to a realization of the sterility of her present existence and decides to

• Because they are there, mountains cause frostbite and death



EN DERNIER RECOURS A Jacques Godbout film with the collaboration of Janine Krieger and Werner Nold d. Jacques Godbout sd. ed. Roger Boire sd. mix. Adrian Croll admin. Joanne Gallant, Monique Lavoie, loc. man. Michael Dandavino d.o.p. Jean-Pierre Lachapelle assisted by Serge Lafortune sd. Richard Besse sc./ research Janine Krieger sc. ed. Werner Nold m. François Dompierre titles Louise Overy cam. Jean-Pierre Lachapelle asst. cam. Serge Lafortune sd. Richard Besse spfx Louid Craig p. Eric Michel. A National Film Board of Canada Production. colour 16mm running time 70 min. 40