

Clarke Mackey's
Taking Care



Kate Lynch as Nurse O'Donnell – a work of Genie?

Taking Care is something special for the Canadian film industry. It marks a return to feature filmmaking from one of its near-forgotten sons. His first feature, *The Only Thing You Know*, was critically acclaimed for its innovative production and performance style. He won an Etrog (pre-Genie) at the Canadian Film Awards for 'Best First Feature', and his star, Anne Knox, received the 'Best Actress' award. The year was 1971.

Now Clarke Mackey is back. 16 years between features is a long time by any standards, and at one point Mackey was determined not to return to filmmaking. However, documentaries and recent short dramas for TVOntario pulled him inexorably back to producing and directing his own material.

Mackey developed the script for *Taking Care* with Rebecca Schechter, the sound recordist and assistant editor on *The Only Thing You Know*, over a period of two years. TVO, in its first venture into feature-length drama, backed the project, as did Don Haig, guardian angel to so many independent producers. Other financing was provided by Telefilm, the Ontario Film Development Corp., the Canada Council and the Ontario Arts Council, making *Taking Care* a truly co-operative effort. Obviously, it is a labour of love for executive-producer-and-director Mackey.

The story follows the events on the maternity ward of a big-city hospital. Three seemingly healthy mothers have died shortly after childbirth, all within a two-week period. We are told that the odds of this happening are next to impossible. Something, or someone, appears to be killing the women deliberately. Suspicion immediately falls on the nursing team, one of whom (Janet Amos) is formally charged with murder. The hospital administration covers up vital evidence that would clear her, and she becomes the victim of police harassment and public humiliation by the media. The charges against her are "stayed" in court, due to a lack of evidence, and a coroner's inquest is held. She is eventually cleared by the diligent detective work of a second nurse on the team (Kate Lynch), who discovers that the three women died of different causes, and concludes, correctly, that their deaths are unrelated.

If the story sounds familiar, it is supposed to be. The baby deaths at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children are the direct source material for the film. However, for Mackey, the true events only provide a springboard for his fictionaliza-

tion. His stated intent is to explore the notion of "loss of innocence" in an institutionalized setting and the role the nurses have in the hospital hierarchy.

Mackey's approach to his subject is sympathetic and sincere, but, unfortunately, *Taking Care* is something of a disappointment. The film is very ordinary TV fare and even a bit dreary at times. By contrast, the "real" Nelles case had many elements of great tragedy and immense personal loss.

The major problem is an uneven and clichéd script that defines a very complex situation in simplistic, "good guy vs. bad guy" terms: the innocent, crusading nurse (Lynch) vs. the corporate system, represented by a two-dimensional hospital administrator (Barry Flatman); the caring, overworked nursing team vs. arrogant, career-obsessed doctors. The chief obstetrician (Allan Royal) is given the film's most condescending dialogue, when, at the coroner's inquest, he announces smugly that he "allowed a vaginal birth." His character is only believable at the level of *General Hospital*.

Lynch, together with her husband, played by her real husband, Saul Rubinek, have the best scenes, and it is in these moments that *Taking Care* shines. Sean McCann plays a close friend caught up in the web of deceit, and Janet Amos does an excellent job as the falsely accused nurse. Her pain, loneliness, and shock are deeply felt.

Taking Care is rough around the edges, revealing its low-budget origins. Mackey is very cautious here, and there are no visual fireworks or innovative pretensions. Indeed, some of the scenes lose their focus and, at times, the dialogue is halting. It is, however, on the whole a taut, well-acted docudrama that deserves a measure of success.

Clarke Mackey should be welcomed back into the business of making features. His compassion and commitment to filmmaking are refreshing. With a continuation of the favourable climate for independents, it is hoped that he doesn't have to wait another 16 years for his next one.

Wyndham Paul Wise •

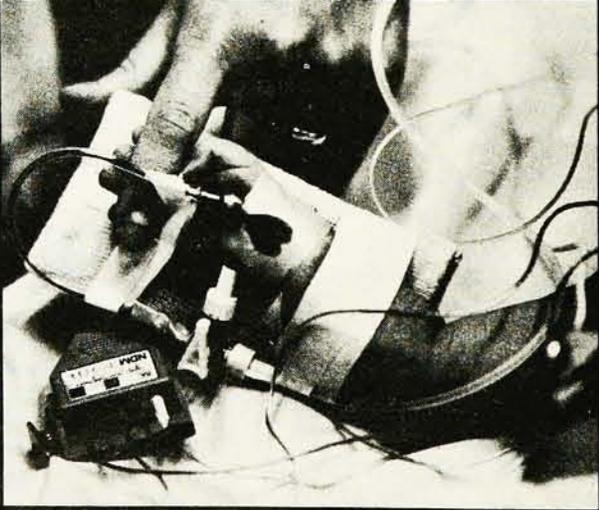
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Donald Martin stills Elisabeth Feryn comp. guarantor Film Arts prod. lawyers Alexandra Hoy, Elise Orenstein, Heather Mitchell prod. acc. David Weinberg insurance broker Jane Mason cam. and light equip PS Prod. Services post prod. Film Arts lab and sd. facilities The Film House Group l. p. Kate Lynch, Janet Amos, Saul Rubinek, Allan Royal, Sean McCann, Bernard Behrens, Jackie Richardson, Beverley Cooper, Maja Ardal, Peter Jobin, Stuart Clow, John Friesen, Wendy Thatcher, Barry Flatman, Wendy Springate, Ron White, Sharon Rochelle, Ted Simonett, Arnie Achtman, Marc Gomes, Silvia Bonet, Carl Ritchie, Brian Stollery, Wayne Law, Irene Pauzer, John Lefebvre, Gordon Jocelyn, Simon Rakoff, Ann Pappert, Peter Oliver, Barry Stevens, Ted Woloshyn, Richard Mills, Pauline Lee, Rose Cullis, Laura Lyford-Wakefield, Vince Metcalfe, Alan Rosenthal, Martin Donlevy. A Telltales Ltd. presentation produced with the financial participation of Telefilm Canada, Ontario Film Development Corporation, TV Ontario, Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council. Distributed by Norstar Entertainment Inc. colour 35 mm. running time 98 min.

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<p>Cinematographer Sound Recordist Editor Original Score by</p>	<p>Jim Aquila Ross Redfern Cathy Gulkin Patrick Godfrey Gail Bradshaw</p>
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Members of the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus,
John Tuttle, Music Director

with thanks for their enormous
effort, care and support.

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Laura Sky
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