earth with obscene enthusiasm, looking like a happy ox. The dead boy's father watches joyfully; the two men grin at each other under the pristine blue sky. We expect to hear a voice-off commissar exhorting a crowd to meet the quotas called for in the present five-year plan.

*Chasing Rainbows* has attracted a great deal of attention, not only because it is one of the most expensive, time-consuming television shows ever made in Canada, but also because it is – as all the entertainment media have trumpeted – the first TV series in the world shot with HDTV (High Definition Television) production equipment. (A recent American feature, *Julia and Julia* was made with HDTV and transferred to 35 mm.)

Even video haters, who have watched HDTV tape played back on big high-definition monitors, rave about the brilliance and resolution of the image. Naturally, the home audience that followed *Chasing Rainbows* wasn't seeing the show in HDTV, because a few years will pass before home equipment is available, and longer until networks like the CBC broadcast with the new technology.

The home audience saw a video production shot movie-style with $5 million-worth of Sony equipment. The series (photographed by John Galt, sometimes directed by William Fruet, who made the legendary *Wedding in White*, is more fluid and cinematic than ordinary commercial video work. The camera moves and shifts into relatively interesting angles; the lighting isn't department store garish. At the same time, however, you often feel traces of the over-immediacy, the rawness characteristic of video – especially when real grass looks as if it's been painted with day-glo paint.

*Chasing Rainbows* is no masterpiece about the Jazz Age – like the long version of Sergio Leone's lyrical, brutal, haunting *Once Upon a Time in America* – but it was a smart idea to look back at that period while experimenting with a money-saving high technology that will be very important in the future.

**Maurice Alioff** ●

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**CHASING RAINBOWS** *exec. p.* Mark Blandford *sc.* Douglas Bowie *p.* Louise Turcotte-Gerlache *co-p./d. o. p.* John Galt *prod. des.* David Moe *co-p. HDTV Systems* Charles Pantuso *d.* Mark Blandford, William Fruet, Susan Martin, Bruce Pittman *m. d. / comp.* Neil Chotem *casting* Dorothy Gardner, Claire Hewitt *art d.* Roy Kellar, Peter Baran *cost.* Suzanne Mess *set dec.* Armando Sgrigunuoli *props master* Ron Ror *make-up* Daisy Bijac *hair* Anita Miles *assoc. p. / post-prod.* Brooks Field *sup. ed.* Tony Lower *l. p.* Paul Goss, Michael Riley, Julie A. Stewart, Booth Savage, Lewis Gordon, Louise Lapare, Sophie Leger, Andrew Lewarne, Hal Eisen, Peter Boretski, Lisa Bunting, Wayne Robson, Thomas Peacock, Jill Frappier, Tony Van Bridge, Maida Rogerson, Alison, MacLeod, Kim Cayer, Malika Mendez, Christopher Earle, Mark Cleverley, Barry Stevens, David Matheson, Joseph Shaw, Gillie Fenwick, Gene DiNovi, Lesleh Donaldson, Patricia Hamilton, Diane Gordon, Dan MacDonald. Produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in association with Northernlight and Picture Corporation. HDTV *running time* 14 hours.

*Suzanne Guy's*

# Les Bleus au coeur

*Les Bleus au coeur* is Suzanne Guy's latest feature-length documentary. Ostensibly it attempts an explanation of women and crime through interviews with several inmates of Tanguay, a prison for women on the northern outskirts of Montreal. To complete the picture, Guy also interviews one woman who is struggling to make it "on the outside," two children of two of the women, a guard, and some of the nurse / social workers employed at the prison.

The film left me with a lot of questions – not about women and how they arrive at a criminal lifestyle – but about the inherent honesty of the film. I was left wondering if Guy also wanted to get at a larger issue, and if the film was trying to say something about the prison that patriarchal society represents for women, how the male-determined definitions we live within become internalized so that women, in effect, become prisoners within those very definitions. This is a tall order, and if *Les Bleus au coeur* intended to fill it, it does not succeed. But I can find no other explanation for some of the elements Guy has incorporated into the film, and how she seems to try and translate the prisoner image into other situations.

Dramatized vignettes are intercut with the interviews and other scenes of various activities that comprise prison life. These vignettes seem to be included more to evoke certain emotions than to illustrate any specific point made in the women's narratives.

One particular sequence consists of a series of shots of a young girl, dressed in white, dreamily walking alone on a bridge in a country-like setting. The camera remains in a medium long shot then pulls away to an extreme long shot as the girl reaches the rail and peers through it. From this angle we see that the bridge crosses a body of turbulent water and a series of rapids.

These are traditional symbolic images that connote specific ideas, in filmic and literary terms. Female innocence is visually framed behind the bars that at the same time protect from the turbulence below (life?), and imprison her. Why is this sequence here, and what subliminal connections does Guy want us to make?

In addition, although a documentary, the film opens with a dramatized sequence. A young woman rides alone in the back of a police van to Tanguay, where we follow her through the various induction procedures: registration, stripping and showering while guards examine her clothing, and then the walk down a long hallway to the 'cell', which in this case is a small, dormitory-like room. The sequence ends with a shot of the anonymous young woman as she sits on the edge of her bed and despondently lights a cigarette.

This is a clever way of getting us 'inside' so that we get a feel for what becoming a prisoner means, i.e. depersonalization, removal of privacy, etc. But then this woman disappears, and when the film closes with a woman leaving Tanguay, it is another woman, a real prisoner, who leaves. I can't but feel that *Les Bleus au coeur* would ultimately have been more convincing, and more honest, had it stayed on the fictional narrative track.

From this opening sequence we move to the woman who provides the 'outside' perspective. She states her ideas about why women commit crimes and end up in prison. She says that in every case there is a man behind it; she doesn't know why, but it seems that a man is always the reason. What the women say prove this to be mostly true, whether he was a pimp, a pusher, a deserting husband, a boyfriend who turned rat fink, or whatever. It is a provocative statement, and a pivotal one, in unwittingly alluding to the idea that these women are victims. In the end, that is what Guy wants us to understand, and to feel sympathy for them. It is a strong thematic opener, however, the rest of the questions the women respond to, or the things they talk about

**Joining hearts in jail**

only brush against this issue. Had this idea been more deeply explored, illuminating the perceptions these women have of men, of themselves relating to men, and finally of themselves in society (that is male-defined / dominated), a much stronger statement would have come out of *Les Bleus au coeur*.

On the other hand, when the film comes to dealing with the sexuality, and the lesbianism, of the women in Tanguay, it reverts to something bordering on sensationalism. The topic is avoided in the first half to two-thirds of the film – we don't see women holding hands, brushing against one another, any kind of intimate contact whatever. Then a woman tells us that her love for another of the women began as a good friendship, but then they fell in love. We see her next in the arts studio, making something with their two names enclosed in a heart. From there we jump right to a scene where they are necking and caressing one another on a dance floor. The camera follows them intently and moves to a closeup as her hand slides around the other's ass and up into her crotch. Without any warning, and without any emotional context, these scenes provide shock value only, especially as one woman has continuously spoken of her boyfriend on the outside, and whom we have seen visiting her at Tanguay.

Aside from its clichéd character, another sequence I mistrusted, and ultimately did not *believe* was where the prisoners have a baseball game. No matter what context, inside prison or out, if you put a lot of aggressive women on a playing field, you're bound to see much different behaviour than was exhibited here. The camaraderie, the giggles and good-natured banter all seem to me a performance for the camera. It is too unlikely, particularly in view of the fact of the inherent tensions of prison life, and, as one woman admits, when tensions rise, they fight. But we never see any of that tension in *Les Bleus au coeur*, whether Guy chose not to show it, or because the inmates chose not to display it for the camera.

All of these questions I have about *Les Bleus au Coeur* lead me to the basic question that must be asked about every documentary film comprised of interviews. That question is: if you put lights on someone, and a camera before him / her recording his / her voice and actions, just *how* honest will that person be? I think the fact that I couldn't stop asking myself this question while watching *Les Bleus au coeur* is, in itself, a comment on the film's failure to persuade, and its lack of believability.

When I noted in the final credits that the crew was mostly male, however, I felt that I had at least a partial explanation for my discomfort with the film. As far as I'm concerned, first of all if you put a camera in front of women in a restrictive, depersonalizing society, one that is barred from male company, and second of all, have a man *behind* that camera, what you get will obviously be less than honest and true.

Combining that thought with the visual tone and texture of the film, and the seemingly incongruous dramatic vignettes, it seems understandable why I mistrust what *Les Bleus au coeur* is telling me. There is an intrinsic discord between the way the film looks and what it has to say.

Tanguay comes off looking like a dormitory. Many scenes left me with the impression of a warm, harmonious glow. When I remember women in decorated bedrooms with filmy curtains at the windows, or exercising in warmly lit, wide hallways, I completely lose the sense of confinement and restriction, of guards and locked doors.

Several interviews are conducted in front of windows made of squares of opaque glass which refract the natural light and soften the image. One woman is even interviewed against a wall in the chapel, with a bunch of fresh lilacs on her left and a statue of the Virgin and Child on her right. This woman has responded to a life of violence with violent acts, but in *Les Bleus au coeur* we see

her in this religious context, bathed in the softest, warmest light imaginable. Would Guy have us perceive her as a martyr? It would seem so.

Reminders are inserted about where these women are in the form of shots from outside the gates and fences. These can be jarring, but eventually become ineffective, because of where they come in, and simply because of overuse. And here again, Guy pushes interpretation upon us, continuously framing things within the wire fence so we have the effect of bars, and at one point even includes a shot of a robin landing on the top of the fence and then flying away.

At one level Guy has effectively created a picture of a particular kind of female society, one that functions, in a sense, outside of normal society. Yet that society has all the trappings of 'normality'; we see the women at the hairdressers, in an arts studio, taking a yoga / relaxation class, playing ball, at a dance, and so on. But this normalcy is only appearance: the society is a forced, and enforced, one, defined by the bars, concrete walls, guards, locked doors and wire fences that *are* prison. It is when these images are projected toward a broader perspective that the film loses its meaning.

What these women have to say is interesting, often disturbing, and at times, even terrifying. But in her concern, perhaps to make the subject more palatable, or to make a 'different' kind of prison film, Guy softens the impact of their statements to the point of invalidating them. And I think my confusion about the intent of *Les Bleus au coeur* results from its own inherent confusion. In an attempt to make several statements, it makes none very strongly. There is no room in documentary film for subtle inference of the kind it employs, particularly in one that is attempting to deal with such indistinct issues. It is unfortunate, but I think that in her attempt to subvert or destroy preconceptions of women in prison, and to pose more profound questions about women as victims, and as prisoners, of society, Guy ultimately misrepresents prison life, and in the end, gives us nothing much at all.

**Jamie Gaetz** ●

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**LES BLEUS AU COEUR** *d.* Suzanne Guy *idea/research* Michèle Robert, Louise Roy *mus.* Martin Fournier *d.o.p.* Rénald Bellemarre *cam.* Mathieur Décary *sd.* Michel Charron, Yvon Benoit *ed.* André Corriveau *gaff.* Jean-Marc Hébert *asst. gaff.* Jean Berthiaume, René Guillard, Roch Plante *key grip* Jean-Maurice de Ernsted *cont.* Martine Gagné *p.a.* Alain Labrosse *p. dir.* Dominique Parent *postprod.* Daniel Arieé, Anne-Marie Leduc *mix.* Michel Descombes *lab.* Bellevue Pathé *titles* Film Docteur *graphics* Robert Gaboury *del. p.* Danièle Bussy *ex.p.* Aimée Danis *adj. to p.* François Reid *appearing* Carole, Brigitte, Linda, Claudie, Madeleine, Brigitte, Josée, Nicole, Chantal *participation* Elsa Lessonnini, Emilie Paul, Pierre Huet, Gerry Boulet, Breen Leboeuf *p.c.* Les Productions du Verseau Inc. *with* Société Radio-Canada, Telefilm Canada, SGCQ *running time* 81 min.

*Vojta Jasny's*

# The Great Land of Small

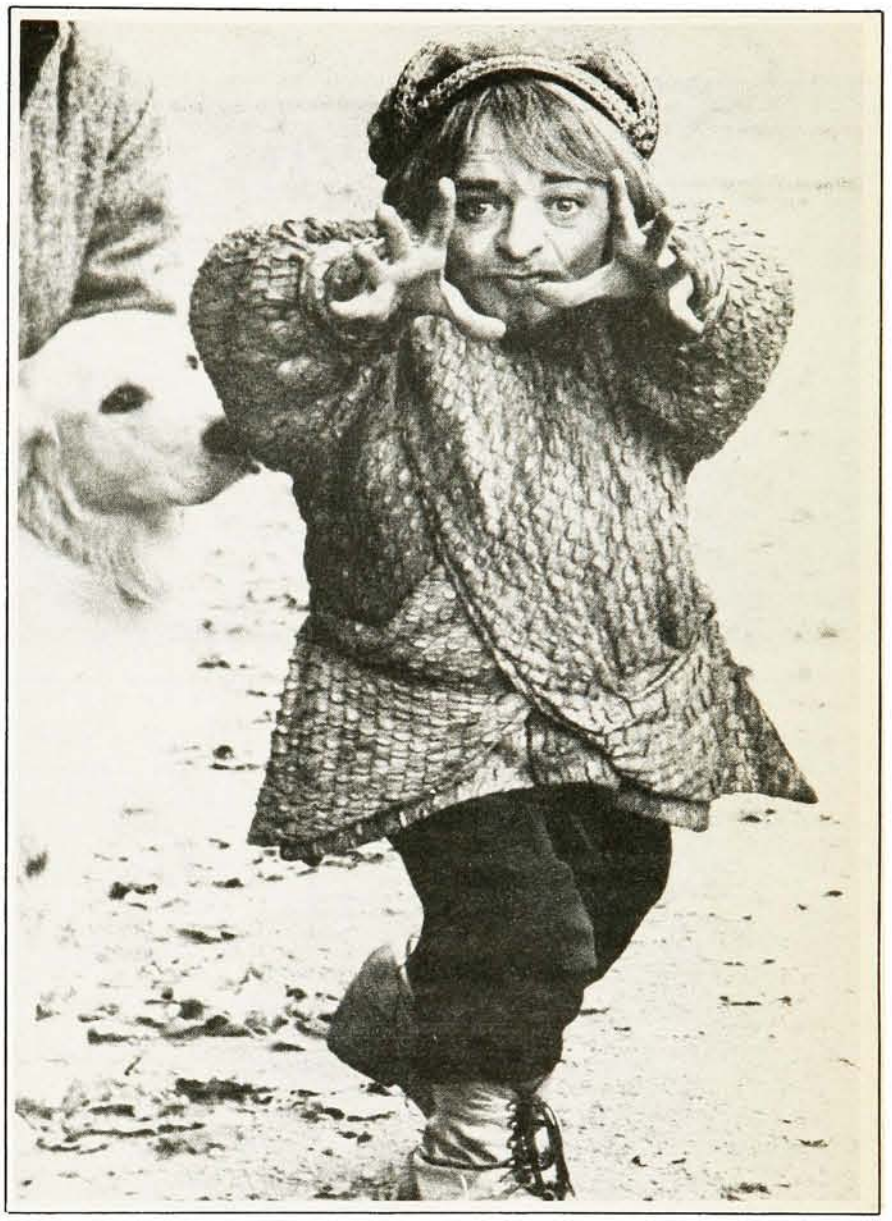
The spell is cast. A ground-level tracking shot catches a glimpse of the invisible and makes it suddenly visible. Fritz the elf is nestled in the leaves. He opens a pouch. Freed from the confines of the bag, sparkles of gold soar in the air, lighting Fritz's face. The director, Czechoslovakia's Vojta Jasny, leads us into the realm of the unknown. What better agent for this exploration than children? Jenny and David, two New Yorkers, come to Quebec's Eastern Townships to visit their grandparents. Full of the stories their grandfather tells them, the children discover an unsuspected world. Together with Fritz, they attempt to recuperate the pouch of gold powder which inadvertently falls into the hands of Flanigan, a bar owner. Born from the "Tales for All" series, *The Great Land of Small* is Rock Demers' fifth effort following films like *Bach and Broccoli* and *The Peanut Butter Solution*. The film leaves everyday life situations behind to capture the world of elves, white horses, and breathtaking rainbows.

Demers unites two different traditions of storytelling. He combines the skills of director Vojta Jasny and cinematographer Michel Brault. A pioneer in Québécois cinema, Brault, known for *Les Raquetteurs* (1958) and *Les Ordres* (1976), lends to *The Great Land of Small* his long history of creative endeavours. Coming from direct cinema, Brault makes the poetic sensibility of Jasny materialize into a tale which escapes the obvious.

The magic inherent in the images springs from the constant attention directed to "the small". High up, perched on a branch, an owl observes the woods. A caribou witnesses Flanigan's illegal hunting. Not moving, it knows it will be killed. But will it? Merlin the horse appears, dreamlike, its white robe glowing like silver. The grandfather's cat watches Jenny and David arrive. Fairy tales command such images.

With a preference for the camera placed close to the ground, Jasny communicates the invisible dimension foreign to our grown-up eyes. It is the cat's point-of-view which leads us into the cozy living room. Crawling underneath the dining room table the camera slowly intrudes on the trio. Jenny and David listen – ears wide open – as the grandfather reveals the secrets of invisible creatures.

Jasny and Brault capture the forest at dusk. This quality of light – rarely seen in films – makes Flanigan and his men appear as undefinable shapes lost in the darkening forest. The blue tinge together with the mystical synthesizer music adds to the bewitching feel that the



**Small fantasy figure in *Great Land***

Jasny-Brault duo creates. Colour and texture blend into the images. They outline the schism between our reality and *The Great Land of Small's* domain. The bridge where both worlds meet takes the shape of the rainbow. Dedicated to those who kept their eyes open, *The Great Land of Small* finds its significance in the initial meeting between the children and the elf. Jenny and David enter enthusiastically the green, white, and pink prism of the rainbow. The elf is seated between two trees within the diffused yellow hue. David and Fritz's eyes meet instantly. But Jenny cannot see. Only when she repeats to herself that she believes in invisible creatures is she able to discern the elf. Oscillating from childhood to adolescence, Jenny slowly loses the innocence of youth. Only faith in the powers of imagination restores her ability to view beyond the visible.

From the autumn countryside with its gradation of ochre and amber tones, Jasny projects us into the land of "the small". The futuristic structure of Montreal's Olympic Stadium successfully composes the realm of the invisible. The population is made of the very tall and the very small alike. They sway in their robes tinted by the whole spectrum of the rainbow's colours. Amazed at what they see, Jenny and David, tailed by their dog Willy, follow Fritz into this world of flying butterflies and skillful jugglers. At the end of a corridor formed by the enthusiastic crowd, the Queen advances solemnly. A colourful procession of acrobats accompanies Her Majesty who looks a lot like the children's mother. With ease, the Queen even executes a trapeze number. But every nice dream has an end. The little group leaves Fritz's land in the company of the keeper Cerber and the half-dog half-human Munch.

*The Great Land of Small* escapes Disney's simplistic division between good and evil. Jasny portrays Flanigan as a regular kind of bar owner who becomes greedy as soon as he takes possession of Fritz's gold powder. The film reaches its peak at the moment Flanigan is closest to dominating the world. At night, the bar owner climbs The Black Mountain. Once he reaches the top he opens the magical pouch. Streams of light swirl around his body as if a malevolent spirit is discharged, Mephisto-like, Flanigan invites the evil forces upon himself. In a flash, a blue electrifying current outlines his figure against the dark sky. Meanwhile, Sarah tries to reach out to her father, but in vain. The rotund fishlike shape of Slimo – the gold powder-maker – appears like a menace in rear projection. Too close to the scene, Sarah, struck by the light, rolls down the mountain. In shock,