

Tuning in mother nature

Driving in from the airport the other day I noticed one of those *bona fide* Maritime signs of spring – the porcupines were out at dusk, grazing on the roadside right-of-ways. After months of chewing on bark, they're more than ready for some tender green shoots. May not seem like much but we Maritimers are tuned-in to what Mother Nature has to say. Although the CBC has a large regional production studio in Halifax, their profile on the local film/video scene tends to be a low one. They are active in a gamut of news and public affairs programs but, with the exception of the two *CODCO* series produced over the last two years (in conjunction with Salter Street Films), there is little indigenous variety programming on this front.

I was therefore pleased to see that CBC was sponsoring a couple of screenings in May hosted by documentary filmmaker Harry Rasky. Rasky, the winner of two Emmys and an Oscar nominee, was in town to promote *Rasky's Gallery: Poets, Painters, Singers and Saints*, a 12-part documentary series which run this summer on CBC television. The series includes looks at George Bernard Shaw, Tennessee Williams, Marc Chagall, Arthur Miller, Leonard Cohen, Raymond Massey, Henry Moore, Yousuf Karsh as well as documentaries called, *Next Year in Jerusalem*, *The Peking Mystery Man*, *Stratosphere* and *To Mend the World*.

Rasky himself was here to screen two of the films from the series, including *Tennessee Williams South*, his favourite of this group which he has produced for the CBC, as well as to meet with local documentary film producers and film enthusiasts to discuss issues of documentary film production.

CBC's Judy Campbell told me that Rasky enjoyed himself and that he hopes to return here again. The King's College School of Journalism has invited him for a series of screenings and panel discussions dealing with the documentary process slated for the fall. The plan is to have Rasky as well as filmmaker Donald Brittain and journalist Anne Medina. Now *that* may make for an interesting series of discussions!

I talked with intrepid, itinerant director/cinematographer Les Kriszan, back from yet another trip to his native Hungary where he spent time last year on a Canada Council stipend observing Istvan Szabo shooting his recent feature starring Klaus Maria Brandaur. He had a chance to see some of the first rough-cut of the film at Mafilm Studios in Budapest, which he said looked very good. It's still 5 1/2 hours long, however, so a considerable degree of cutting still remains. On the home front, he's been quite busy on a number of commercial shoots which he is doing for ex-NFBer Barry Cowing who has started his own production company under the logo of Citadel Communications.

Sharon Smith, one of the stalwarts of NIFCO, the Newfoundland Independent Film Co-op, is a writer/director/producer on her own. The distance between Halifax and St. John's notwithstanding, I normally encounter her buoyant presence frequently at some gathering or other. Thus when I hadn't seen hide-nor-hair of her for some I grew curious and gave her a call. Turns out that she and partner Jeannie Staple have had their collective noses to the grindstone since last fall (except for a brief sojourn-to-the-sun in Florida from which Sharon had just returned) researching and writing a six-part (1/2 hour) television series which they hope to produce in 1989.

There are six dramas, collectively referred to as the *Small Treasures* series, somewhat in the style of Smith's previous film, *Season on the Water*. They examine children in six different communities of Newfoundland and Labrador and the cultural communities which they come from (French, Irish, Micmac, Inuit). They are all written from the children's perspective and Smith and Staple both spent time in the six communities where the stories are based, talking with children, working with them in schools and analyzing the results of questionnaires. Sharon told me that the scripts simply tell the children's own stories and the way in which they see their own lives in the communities in which they live.

The production of the series is proceeding via the Telefilm-CBC broadcaster letter route and, thus far, is going according to plans. Both Smith and Staple will be going to the Banff TV Festival this year and hope to make a number of useful contacts there.

The Atlantic Film and Video Producers' Conference for this year is well along and is scheduled for the middle of this month at the University of Prince Edward Island in Charlottetown as usual. I'll bring you more details of this as they reach me.

The *Film Nova Scotia Production Guide* is out and what a fine guide it is (a gold star to editor Andrea Shaw!). It has a very complete listing of all things pertaining to production in the province and is a *must* for anyone from outside the province (or from within, for that matter) to have when planning a shoot. Copies are available from Film Nova Scotia, P. O. Box 2287, Station M, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3J 3C8.

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