

Barbara Willis Sweete's Music In the Midnight Sun

In the fall of 1987, *The Toronto Symphony* embarked on its most ambitious tour to date. Over one hundred musicians travelled to the Canadian Arctic – further north than any major orchestra had ever been before. (Opening titles to the film)

These simple sentences are a prelude to a stunningly photographed and intelligently organized record of a unique undertaking by the Toronto Symphony Orchestra (TSO), all enhanced by simply beautiful sound and a generous helping of wit and humour.

Under the opening credits we see the Inuit people in traditional performance, singing and drumming. On the radio in Inuvik, William Tagoona sings his own country-style song, "Our Land", in Inuit, and the announcer reminds everyone that the Toronto Symphony will be in town next week.

In Toronto the TSO rehearses at Roy Thomson Hall; members of the orchestra look forward to the first trip to the North; the tour manager worries if sleeping bags are required; and the stage manager starts loading the aircraft with, among other things, hockey bags and sticks for an important game. As the non-musical stuff and opinions are batted around, the excitement builds and the music comes to the fore.

Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" in rehearsal is melded with the tour aircraft being readied, the cargo being stowed, and hand signals from airport workers synchronise with the music. The plane lifts into the air as a map appears and the line of flight creeps across Canada to Edmonton, then north to Yellowknife and on to Inuvik. The orchestra is greeted on arrival by local dignitaries. The Valkyries continue to ride on, and the musicians are now playing a first concert, transformed from rehearsal to formal clothes, and music director Andrew Davis is giving his all before an entranced audience.

After this invigorating sequence, the film continues skillfully to interweave the musicians with the Inuit performers and artists, with the children and with the natural outdoor life, inducing an ebb and flow that is quite hypnotic.

A number of glimpses of orchestra members provide interesting little "off-stage" anecdotes. In Fort MacPherson, near Inuvik, oboeist Frank Morphy is somewhat apprehensive during an interview on the CBC morning show by Neil Collin, a great forthright character who doesn't hesitate to ask plain up-front questions, but lets his attention wander somewhat when Frank talks about classical music. Neil also removes his headphones smartly at the loud bits of brass in a TSO recording, and returns quickly to his own



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style with "Wednesday Waltz". Willie Gordon, Mackenzie Delta Fiddle Champion, teams up with violinist Andrea Hansen; double bassist Ruth Budd stays with another woman, Cece McCouley, chief of the Dene Nation; Andrew Davis chats up a woman preparing fish for the smokehouse; a special fashion show is staged for men and women – and so the exchanges go on.

Oh yes, the hockey match comes off – not on ice, but tarmac – and the Symphony struggles gamely against the Inuvik All-Stars, losing 5-0. "It's agonizing," says a TSO player, "to lose again. If we'd been on ice we'd have beaten them..."

The swelling strains of Mussorgsky start at the hockey match and the film draws to a close with "The Great Gate of Kiev" from "Pictures At An Exhibition" and, again, the orchestra is in concert, the audience rapt with some slight swaying and toe-tapping. The images of the North (which must be ingrained in the minds of orchestra members) slide by as in a dream. A flock of white birds seen from the air, land and water merge into a dazzling abstract painting, and one comes down to earth as the concert ends and Andrew Davis bows and blows kisses, and the orchestra beams at the applause.

The charm of this film is endless, the images pass ceaselessly, yet with real feeling and emotion, before the eyes, not prettified, not neatened or scrubbed in any way, and the glorious music made by the Toronto Symphony matches the mood and atmosphere of the North. The children, the dogs everywhere, the spirit of people who live in a hard land, are all captured. And it was no easy task.

At a preview screening during the summer for the TSO and the film crew at Roy Thomson Hall in Toronto, director Barbara Willis Sweete said that a skeleton crew was in the North for 10 days, but the TSO footage was shot in two-and-a-half days. The camera crew went through a lot of stock...

This superior offering was seen on CBC-TV as

part of *Adrienne Clarkson's Summer Festival* in August.
Pat Thompson ♦

MUSIC IN THE MIDNIGHT SUN p. Niv Fichman, Barbara Willis Sweete d. Barbara Willis Sweete assoc. d. David Morton ed. Sam Chu, Bruce Lange d. o. p. Len Gilday stereo sound Brian Avery p. man. Renee Gluck loc. man. David York 2nd unit d. Stephen Roscoe cam. Tobias Schliessler, Joan Hutton additional cam. Tony Sloan, Jon Joffin, Robert MacDonald, Gordon Langevin, Robert Brooks additional ed. Christopher Reilly, Steve Weslak cam. assts. Lynnie Johnston, Jon Joffin, Chris Higginson, Lori Longstaff, Colleen Norcross, Ernest Spiten, Steven Tushima additional sound John Martin, David Springbett sound assistant Sandy Twose sound ed. Barry Gilmore asst. sound ed. Tony Gronick gaffer Robert Spears lighting Peter McAdam, Tom McMongle graphic animation Warren Collins animation photo. Robert Mustysyn stills John Bassett asst. ed. Robert St. Hilaire sync. David Ostry, Stephen Roscoe p. coord. (CBC) Paul De Hueck unit man. (CBC) Gail Cochran assoc. p. (Rhombus) Larry Weinstein music rights (Rhombus) Mary Nikles business affairs (Rhombus) Brian Katz, Paul Brown marketing (Rhombus) Sheena MacDonald sound re-rec. Paul Massey neg. cutter Sharon Street p. cons. Julia Sereny translations Renie Arey, Leonard Harry, Tommy Ross produced by Rhombus Media in association with the CBC, TVOntario, and the Toronto Symphony; with the participation of Telefilm Canada and the Ontario Film Development Corp.

Tom Berry's Something About Love

Thematically, *Something About Love* is a typical '80s film, like *Moonstruck* and *Crossing Delancey* and scores of others. The Me generation of the '70s is reverting to type as they come home to the tribe, turning into the We generation of our era.

Those we had once watched *Goin' Down the Road* to get away from the straight and narrow and the parochial are coming home in droves.

Their homeward journey is within the new conservative mainstream, signalling a turning-away from experimentation and risk-taking and a return to traditional values. The film *Something About Love* is very much in that mainstream too.

As the film opens Wally Olynyk (Stefan Wodolawsky), son of a Ukrainian mortician in Cape Breton, is editing video footage in a Los Angeles studio. Now what can be more down-home Canadian than that? In one fell swoop we get the perfect socio-economic and ethnographic snapshot of the multi-cultural media Canadian with carefully cultivated eccentricities. Alas, even if the inspiration is genuinely autobiographical, the totality smacks of construct.

As the film progresses Wally is called home to deal with his aging, estranged father (Jan Rubes), an opera-loving patriarch who begins to display symptoms of what is ultimately diagnosed as Alzheimer's disease. Wally, at first ill at ease with his family, old friends and the love of his youth (Jennifer Dale), gradually becomes heavily involved with his roots, duties and relationships. The story culminates during Easter with the arrival from L. A. of Wally's pregnant girlfriend, his reconciliation with his father and his father's ultimate act of generosity: he commits suicide by driving his hearse off the cliffs into the sea.

Here we have a story based on common (albeit quirky) humanity which, through the use of a set of easily accessible metaphors for death and rebirth centred around Easter, attempts to ascend to the mythical. One of the central anecdotes in the film concerns memories of a childhood baseball game in which the young Wally is characterized as a great player who saves his team – even though another kid becomes the hero of the game.

This feeling of watching a fielder's choice or a sacrifice fly characterizes the way this film affects the viewer – there is balance everywhere: In the script. In the careful direction. In the tasteful blending of realism, sentiment, low comedy and high intensity. In the two outstanding performances of the film, the very fine acting duet of Jan Rubes and Stefan Wodolawsky.

There is balance too in the way the next echelon of players – the Olynyk family, Ron James and Lenore Zann – provide accomplished accompaniment and the way the rest of the competent cast provide background with nary a shrill note. Even the soundtrack strives for balance; for once, the dialogue is up-front and easy to catch.

In fact, all is exemplary in Tom Berry's and Stefan Wodolawsky's screenplay. It has textbook structure, proportion and development. Perhaps the baseball metaphor, opportune as it may have been, is less fitting than a musical one. This is a carefully orchestrated, operatically composed work. So with all these ingredients and with so many