
Vancouver shorts out

by Gayle Scott

A review of An Evening of New Films presented on September 10, 1975 at the Pacific Cinémathèque Pacifique in Vancouver, B.C.

On September 10 the Pacific Cinémathèque Pacifique presented An Evening of New Films as part of its September Vancouver Film programme. The bill announced "a grab bag of recent work, running the gamut from mood-and-form pieces to educational documentaries, personal and social portraits to symbolist narratives and structural commercials, and capped by the definitive version of the notorious **Rawstock**."

Despite this tantalizing inducement, the National Film Board mini-theatre was less than overflowing on the evening of the Vancouver offerings. Ironically, there were more Vancouverites on the screen during the showings than in the audience. This is, sadly, both symptomatic of and testimonial to the frustrating predicament of the Vancouver filmmakers. But if those involved in the film scene themselves aren't interested enough to attend such a showing (for the bargain price of one dollar) then who can criticize the general public for its apathy toward home-grown cinema?

Local response seems to demonstrate that the quality, the content, the technical artistry – in short, the appeal of these films (not to mention the commercial viability) is too often found lacking, and therefore oppresses what patronage there is. Perhaps when the film colony itself deems the local endeavors worth seeing, worth paying to see, the indifferent populace will come forward with the appreciation and support we're all clamoring for. In the meantime, the home team is playing to an empty grandstand.

So much for the countdown – on to the show.

The opening film, **Wave Prelude – Gulf of Georgia**

Towing, is a symphonic composition by Gordon Kidd, in celebration of the sights and sounds that abound along the Gulf of Georgia.

The silent prelude of blue water waves shimmering through abstract light patterns seems to be an irresistible staple in the diet of 'coast' filmmakers everywhere. A more successful pass at transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary was made by the use of opticals that sent a three-dimensional billboard tugboat plowing through the foamy waters of the gulf. The sombre tone of the film, set mainly by the familiar, haunting sounds of the waterfront, with a little outside help from the Steve Miller Blues Band, left its respectful presence lingering the way the echoes of a foghorn linger after the skies have cleared.

Next up was **Windows** by Ken Straiton, a seven-minute queue of cinematic clichés daring to tackle the redundant question; "Mommy, where do I come from?" Aside from heavy doses of overt symbolism, including trains entering tunnels, children playing life-and-death games in a cemetery, and an ominous clock tick-tock-ticking off the minutes, there are some startling images and an unwonted glimpse or two through **Windows**.

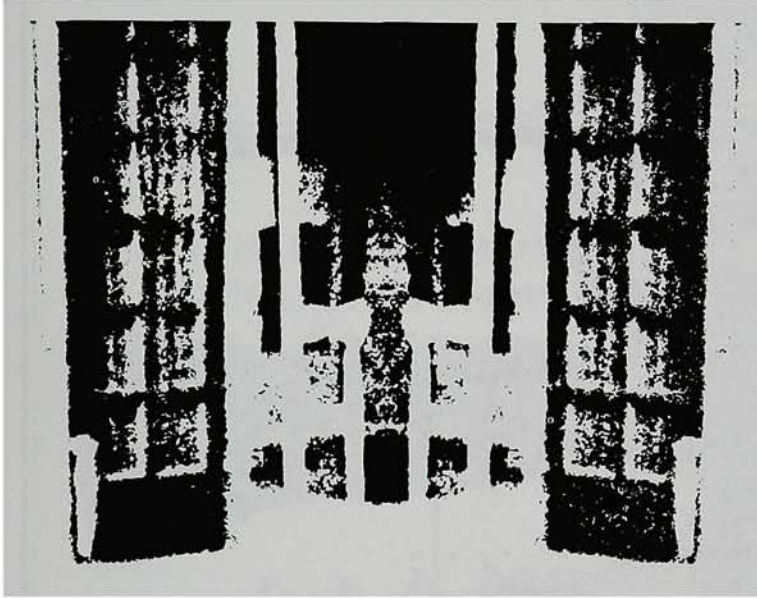
Two five-minute films by Phil Borsos, **The Barking Dog** and **Cadillac**, get the rib-bone award for humorous intent. **The Barking Dog** is a period piece that neatly tells a tale. **Cadillac** is a parody of a garrulous car salesman making his pitch for a dreamy sky-blue 1954 Caddie and reminding us that (almost) everything is "optional at extra cost."

One of the most pleasing films of the evening was a twelve-minute short produced by the Provincial Educational Media Centre, **Michael Dunn**. The subject is a local musician/craftsman who plays and builds acoustic guitars. In this brief sketch he manages both with unassuming style and skill.

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Don Cumming and Doug McKay, director and cinematographer, and Martin Fossem who did the sound recording, have struck a pleasant, if familiar, chord here. McKay, who feels the film suffers from having been hastily shot "like a newsreel" nevertheless manages a professional technique that is smooth and effective. The audio portion, a combination of Michael's voiceover and instrumentals, is likewise concordant with the film's quiet charm.

Another quickie P.E.M.C. production by the Cumming/McKay team, **Spider**, is simply a close-up of a large, exotic-looking spider spinning her delicate, glistening web for three minutes. Obvious typecasting aside, this simple film is easily fascinating, and left me hoping for a sequel.



The empty church doorway from **Good Friday** by Pete Lipskis.

One of the more moving films of the evening was **Good Friday** by Pete Lipskis (not to be confused with **Good Friday in Little Italy** by Pete Rowe). What we have here is a flock of churchgoers emptying out of a church onto the sidewalk and passing directly in front of the camera. The action is heightened and condensed by stop-motion editing, so that the parishioners seem to jump across the screen at common intervals to the pious sounds of church choir and organ music. The cumulative effect of 12 minutes of this is fairly hypnotic, and there is a serio-comic twist at the end to break the spell.

Two films by Zale Dalen, **Granny's Quilts** and **Fall Fair**, are notable for their engaging charm. Since **Granny's Quilts** has previously been dealt with in these pages, I'll only add that after repeated viewings of this winsome portrait, I still find it a predictably pleasurable experience – something like dunking chocolate chip cookies in cold milk.

Fall Fair is a capsulized dose of a rural B.C. celebration, offering a glimpse of the opening ceremonies of the 79th Annual Mission Fall Fair. The effort seems incomplete, as though they ran out of film briefly into the shoot, but decided to use what footage they had anyway. Short but sweet.

Park and Spark Lane is a student workshop film directed by B. Bosworth and written by Gord Fulton, in which the wheels of a collective imagination are audibly spinning. The scene of the intended crime is a secluded mountain road where the local teenagers line up in parked cars to refine their amorous advances.

This short may or may not have been brilliantly conceived, stunningly photographed, and faultlessly edited. However, I felt so abused by the prosaic dialogue and forced, awkward performances, that I must have reacted in self-defense, because I cannot recall anything else about the film.

The longest and most ambitious show of the evening was **Rawstock**, a 27-minute Simon Fraser University workshop presentation with a formidable cast and crew commanded by Danice MacLeod who credits herself as director, screenwriter, editor, art director, sound editor, and costume designer, as well as assisting George Payrastre and Fred Easton on camera.

Like most people who have worked in this business, I'm a sucker for the "film within a film" gimmick, however it is handled. (My current fave in this category is **Day for Night**). **Rawstock**, however, transcends all previous efforts in its literal interpretation of this theme. The central character, a Mr. Rawstock, (played by Phil Clarkson) is nothing short of a living, breathing, tangled glob of film stock (Get it?) being subjected to the willful maneuverings of those who would exploit his innocent nature for their own dubious ends.

Within this loose framework of cinematic surrealism, Ms. MacLeod explores her filmic fantasies as well as presents a few bizarre sequences whose relatedness to the pivotal action (if such things are needed) can only be guessed at.

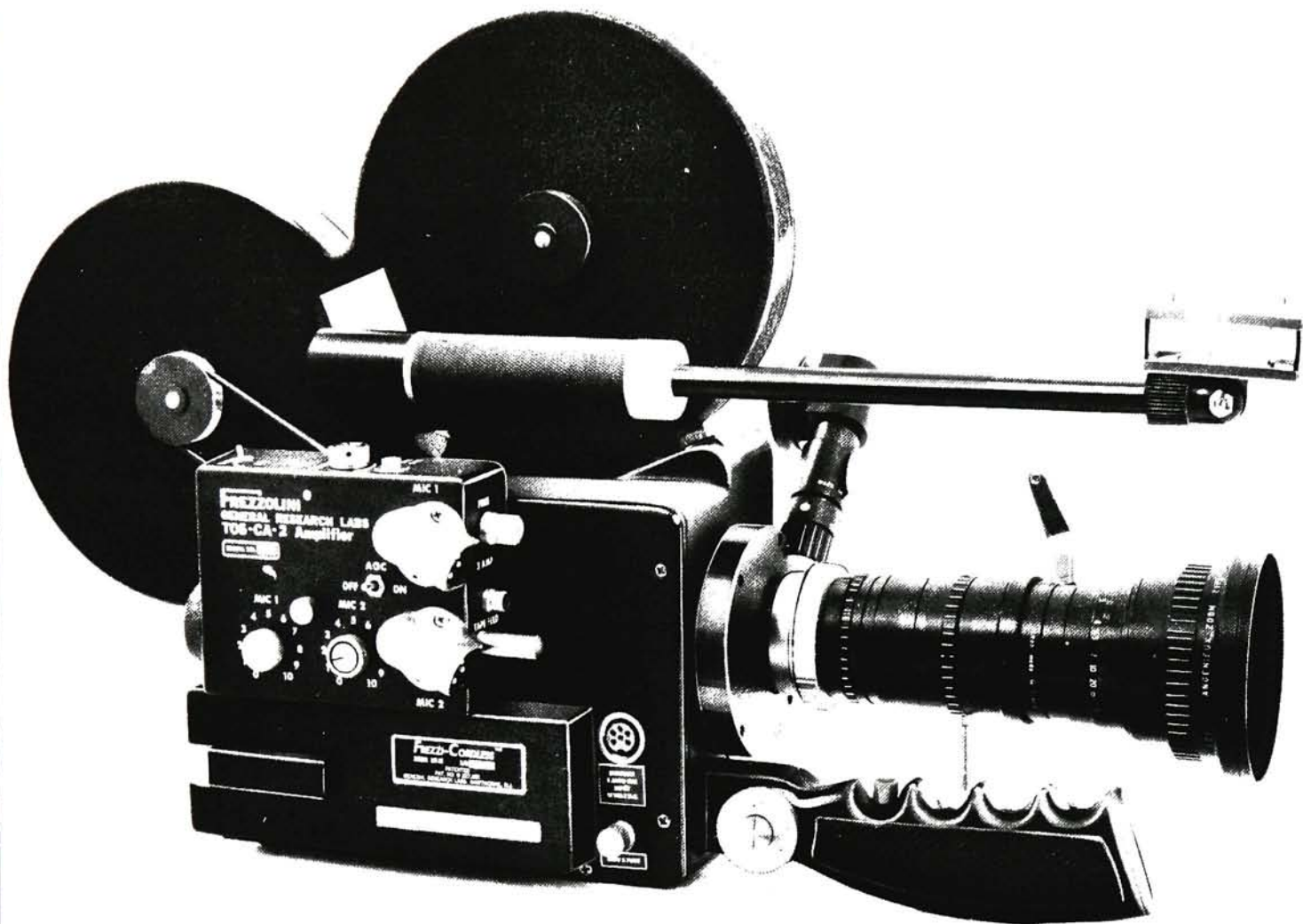
While Mr. Rawstock is being put through his paces – "Expose!... Develop!... Push one stop!..." – the chorus is taken up by a bevy of nude and nubile cheerleaders whose energetic gyrations, in spite of some over-indulgent repetition, provide the up-beat tempo for this farcical frolic.

Amidst some imaginative sequences and loose-leaf choreography redolent of a performance by Evelyn Roth's Moving Sculpture dance troupe, **Rawstock** occasionally loses its way before coming to its ultimate conclusion. While not quite living up to its pretensions, **Rawstock** can be appreciated for the obvious fun being had at its own expense.

The bulk of the credit must go to Danice MacLeod for her explorations *spirituelles* in her zealous pursuit of conceptual images, and to everyone else involved for the high spirits that pervade the film; the cheering section is in full swing here.



Colleen Torok, Phil Clarkson and Roz Porter (l. to r.) from **Rawstock** by Danice MacLeod.



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