

Les 5 jours du cinéma indépendant canadien

A showcase / distribution forum for independents

BY PATRICIA KEARNS

Attempts to establish an independent film production and exhibition movement distinct from the mainstream of commercial cinema date back to at least 1929 when the first International Cinematography Congress met at La Sarraz, in France. One of the hopes of organizers was to establish an international filmmaking co-operative, to be based in Paris. This did not materialize, as such, but the congress spurred great debate about the role of independent cinema.

Sixty years later the discussion continues, as was evident, during "Les 5 jours du cinéma indépendant canadien", held in Montreal, from Nov. 16 to Nov. 20. The very successful "5 jours" provided both the opportunity for a Montreal audience to see a different film fare and for independent filmmakers and distributors from across the country to meet one another. The event was coordinated and organized by an energetic team of Main Film members, a Montreal production co-op. Peter Sandmark, one of the two principal organizers (the other was Guylaine Roy), spoke of the event's success in terms of its original goals. That several of the screenings were sold out and the others extremely well-attended means that exposure to the 37 films was high. That was a primary goal. The second aim was to work towards better distribution of Canadian independent films by establishing a stronger network of those involved. For this, a two-day distribution forum was set up, to which several speakers involved with distribution at different levels were invited. Their presentations were heard by participants who belonged to film production co-ops and distribution networks across the country. Most were members of the Independent Film and Video Alliance, an umbrella organization of 45 separate groups. The Alliance has acted as a pressure group to large institutions such as Telefilm, the NFB, Canada Council, and the Ministry of Culture, for the last eight years to assure that the needs of independent film and video makers are being recognized.

Representatives of the different groups introduced themselves and explained the history and specific concerns of their organizations. The level of information shared and the nature of that exchange point to the participants' desire to create the necessary links in better communication. Problems now faced by the



Jacob Tierney as the young Ben; Vicki Barkoff as Ma Waxman

Rick Raxlen's and Patrick Valley's *Horses in Winter*

For some, the greatest fear is death by drowning. Not for Ben Waxman (Rick Raxlen) who remembers coming back from a watery grave. Now he fears the water, also the dark, and howling wolves, but not death. Ben was saved from drowning at eight years old; he is now 41 and puzzled. Where does the child's state of grace go? And why suddenly, he wonders, is there this longing to remember his happy past. Waxman's adult ponderings provide one level of narration in Rick Raxlen's first feature film *Horses in Winter*.

As he leaves the city on a bus headed for his trailer in the country, Ben's memory travels to that summer when he was eight. He questions and comments on his childhood in a voice-over; fine solo piano music (Michel Utyerbrock from his piano suite *Innocence*) co-introduces, along with Ben's voice, which is somewhat but not

totally given to melancholy, a pensive and casual mood. We see, in flashback, the little Ben (Jacob Tierney) and his family during the last summer spent at their cottage, north of some city.

The film moves along slowly. Like Ben's summer it unfolds without great conflict or action. The film's characters do not motivate changes, they have little explicit effect on the story. There really is a single protagonist - Ben, seen in two stages of his life; even *he* is not outwardly moving towards something. The movement is inward in this film and represents the reflective experience of the filmmaker. Raxlen himself plays out a drama of psychological revelation in *Horses in Winter*.

This extremely personal style of filmmaking belongs to a tradition that film theorist P. Adams Sitney called the trance film. *Horses in Winter* describes an interior quest; a certain transparency of the protagonist exists; we are aware of the filmmaker's journey.

Young Ben's days are filled with simple things, examining painted turtles in the Book of Knowledge and in the grass, walking down the dirt road with his sister, lying on the raft - a place that big Ben describes as straddling the earth and water. The film brings us to a place like the raft,

a neither here nor there place, a place of contemplation, a place strangely familiar.

Art direction by Kathy Horner and Deborah Creamer helps create the simple world of the child Ben. The early '50s, a period easy to represent with embellishment, is treated here with restraint; costumes and sets are unobtrusive, adding to a *mise-en-scène* which in its modesty signifies capably and subtly.

Patricia Kearns •

HORSES IN WINTER *p/s/c*. Rick Raxlen *co-d./co-ed.* Rick Raxlen and Patrick Valley *d. o. p.* Stephen Reizes *asst. cam.* Achraf Chbib *add. cam.* Michel Lamothe *loc. sl.* Glen Hodgins *art d./cost./set dressing* Kathy Horner, Deborah Creamer *1st. a. d.* Alejandro Escobar *p. a. s.* Ed Fuller, Alison McGillivray *p. man.* Ray Roth *loc. man.* Suzanne Bouchard *craft* Barry Simpson *For Main Film: del.* p. Denis Langlois, Guylaine Roy *project coord.* Eric Gregor-Pearse, Sylvain l'Esperance *asst. ed.* Dilek Aral *sl. ed.* Richard Comeau *mix* Andre-Gilles Gagné *mus.* Edgar Bridwell, Peter Sandmark, Clive Jackson, Craig Morrison *mus. rec.* Fred Torak *add. mus.* Michel Utyerbroek from *Innocence*. *l. p.* Jacob Tierney, Rick Raxlen, Vicki Barkoff, Jacques Mizne, Colin Kish, Erin Whitaker, Lucie Dorion, Alejandro Escobar, Edward Fuller, Alexandra Innes, Neil Kroetsch, Roxanne Ryder, Lemi Parker, Lou Israel, Jancy Wallace, Ann Page, George K., Elizabeth Bellm, Steven Lepage, Mathew Niloff, Chloe Rose Raxlen. A Main Film, Raxlen coproduction with the assistance of the Canada Council, Telefilm Canada and the NFB PAFPPS program. 90 minutes, colour 16mm.

Film Reviews

Bachar Chbib's **Clair Obscur**

Clair Obscur is a fairy tale for adults. Of course, every fairy tale has its lesson; the lesson of *Clair Obscur* is, unfortunately, 'never let style override content'.

Director/co-writer Bachar Chbib has drawn from traditional fairy tales, folklore, television commercials and Hollywood cinema (silent and sound) to fashion *Clair Obscur*. The film contains a bevy of homages to these diverse storytelling forms; thus, it is a film which demands to be 'read' for embodied meanings. Unfortunately, this multi-faceted referencing does not provide the challenging and ultimately rewarding viewing experience it could have.

Clair Obscur is a silent film (albeit with an appropriately sentimental musical score and realistic sound effects) which makes use of an expressionistic dramatic style. The cast appears to struggle within the confines of the silent construct instead of achieving mastery of its defined elements. With their faces covered in cake make-up, the actors are relegated to overt actions and looks that are meant to speak a thousand words. The effect is stifling.

Concisely, this is the story of a rural Quebec family (husband, wife, daughter, and grandfather) whose lives are 'idyllic' (ie. filled with love, laughter, harmony, a sense of peace with their lot and assorted colour co-ordinated farm animals). Indeed, the family appears to be living in a butter commercial (golden light and healthy smiles over breakfast). One day the family is 'invaded' by a mysterious intruder (a beautiful blonde in a white stationwagon). The little girl is attracted to this 'temptress' (the Wicked Witch of the West or the Good Witch of the North?). The mother whisks her daughter away into the safe confines of the house while the father stands frozen with desire. He seems to know the woman from his past.

What ensues is a mystical journey through lost passions, frustrated desires and illusive fantasies. The film unfolds within three physical realms: 1) the farmhouse, within which the sanctity of family life is ultimately shattered by familial hostilities and cruelties, surreal and disturbing dreamscapes which merge with reality, and vengeful violence (Peckinpah style); 2) the bar/hotel/nightclub (*Clair Obscur*) where magic is supposed to happen and does, where men are allured and women gaze in awe or boil with jealous rage, where the wife finds her husband sleeping on the bed of the temptress, where a simpleton and a buffoon (Laurel and Hardy) wait hand and foot on the temptress (Entertainment); and 3) the 'natural' world of field, stream, junkheap and cemetery, the playground where the simpleton and the temptress exchange stolen kisses and the emotional landscape through which the wife



runs from the horror of her husband's adultery.

At the heart of *Clair Obscur* lies the tale of the stork that arrives with a 'bundle of joy'. Chbib fills the film with blatant and oblique references to this tale and in turn many other myths surrounding pregnancy. For example, the wife, undesirable to her husband since the arrival of the temptress, virtually goes insane over the loss of her husband's affections. She wanders through the farmyard in a delirious dream state. Dressed in a girlish nightshirt (which serves to contribute to Chbib's low-angle fantasy shot) she climbs a watertower to retrieve the stork's egg from the nest. She sits on the egg hoping to hatch it, fixes up the baby crib with green paint and devours large pickles. The temptress becomes pregnant. Her belly rises spontaneously like a successful soufflé. The wife vicariously feels the pangs of labour. The temptress gives birth at the foot of the farmhouse stairs in the throes of what seems to be ecstasy and she gives the child lovingly to the family.

It is difficult to distinguish between dream and reality in *Clair Obscur*; of course, the magical quality of film is well-served in this but the impact of the drama is lost to individual moments or scenes. It is difficult to determine the development of characters when it is not clear whose dreams and whose realities are on the screen. As a lyrical piece, *Clair Obscur* approaches success; impressions are left, images linger, moods are drawn. As a dramatic piece, *Clair Obscur* approaches failure; characters remain caricatures, emotions are not explored, stereotypes are not broken.

What cannot be overlooked in *Clair Obscur* is

the production design. Colours are lush (ranging from strong complementary colour combinations in the boudoir of the nightclub to rich autumn shades in and around the farmhouse to garish hues in the sequences in which the wife is most distraught). Props and set-dressing make use of components which are unusual but fitting with the environments in which they appear. For example, a dried leaf sits on the nighttable beside the wife who feigns sleep. The husband sneaks into bed after having been out all night with the temptress. The leaf is a simple, unobtrusive touch which adds to the mood of the scene through the representation of the season, the symbolizing of the 'drying up' of the couple's relationship and a dab from the colour palette used in the farmhouse environment.

Although the musical score in *Clair Obscur* does become heavyhanded, especially in the 'Peckinpah style' scenes, it does so with obvious intent. For the most part, the music helps scenes lacking in emotional depth.

Clair Obscur's attempt to revise the stork myth only glorifies its clichés. It digs up references without organizing them within the film to help us better understand their meaning.

Toby Zeldin •

CLAIR OBSCUR p. Helen Verrier, Bachar Chbib d. Bachar Chbib sc. Bachar Chbib, Maryse Wilder d.o.p. Stephen Reizes ed. Albert Kish art d. Claire Nadon mus. Francois Giroux cost. Claire Nadon sd. Glen Hodgins l.p. Bobo Vian, Susan Eytton-Jones, Paul Babiak, Jack Spinner, Attila Bertalan, William Kosaras, Barbara Zsigovics, Jean-Claude Labrecque, John Drapery. Produced by Les Productions Chbib with financial participation of Telefilm and SOGIC. 35mm colour 85 minutes.

Frank Cole's **A Life**

In the seemingly cold world of Frank Cole's *A Life*, one finds a visual virtuosity and emotional core so seldom attained in our country's film industry, that I do not hesitate to rank this stunning new feature alongside Vigo's *L'Atalante*, Clement's *Forbidden Games* and Bunuel's *L'Age D'Or* as a work of uncompromising, risk-taking and always breathtaking genius. As Cole himself states in his promotional material, *A Life* charts "a man's life - survival amid death - in a room and a desert."

In the early stages of the film, we are faced with the grainy black and white images of an old man. Off camera, a voice (undoubtedly Cole's) asks, "Are you afraid of dying, Grandpa?" The old man, quivering and moist-eyed, seems somewhat perplexed, perhaps even intimidated by the camera. His reply is in the negative, yet somehow it seems inconclusive. And towards the end of the film, the same grainy black and white assaults us with an old woman, lying on her deathbed, gasping for life while a voice-over pleads, "Live!" These gut-wrenching, disturbing images bookend a journey which is - in spite of the bleak, barren, sometimes horrifying sequences which populate the film - extremely life-affirming.

In the first section of the film, Cole focuses upon the interior environment of the film's central figure (Cole himself). Moving oddly-framed, inanimate objects out of the eye of the camera, the man appears to be ridding the spartan room of what little it has in it. As well, Cole assails us with a variety of strange images; a bare, white wall with a nail driven into it, a phonecall that never really comes and that is never really answered, a woman with a gun stuffed in her panties, and a little girl who runs through plate glass (at first silently, but then followed by the excruciatingly painful sound of the smashing glass). These images are punctuated by recurring shots of the man chiselling, hammering, measuring, and planing. He appears to be building something in this barren interior; a tomb, perhaps? Maybe so, for the man never appears to leave this environment.

But then, he leaves one tomb for another. One of the first exterior shots in the film is a series of head and shoulder freeze frames of Cole, as a variety of backgrounds flicker behind him. It's as if the camera itself is sealing this man in a cold, barren crypt. Yet later on in the film, a voice-over proclaims, "I did this to feel alive." Perhaps the very process of making the film is what keeps the man, (the artist) from pulling the same trigger of the same gun that in an earlier scene is used by a woman who appears - ever-so-briefly - to write about and shoot herself in the eye.



Jean-Yves Dion and Frank Cole in the Sahara.

And survive she does. The man puts himself through the most rigorous paces in the interior shots and then puts himself (the filmmaker) into the middle of the Sahara Desert, where he risks his life to provide a series of stunning exterior images to parallel the equally claustrophobic interior sequences. In the room, for example, we witness a snake slithering helplessly and aimlessly across the hardwood floors, while in the desert, we see Cole himself, crawling helplessly along the grains of endless sand. In the room, we hear the sound of wooden matches being struck and eventually extinguished as the snake slithers over them, while in the desert, we see a jeep being doused with gasoline and set on fire as the camera slowly and gradually pulls away; the jeep a flickering speck on the infinite horizon of the Sahara.

The landscapes of both the interior and exterior environments of the filmmaker are painstakingly etched to create an overwhelming sense of despair. Even the landscape of the filmmaker's body and head is examined by the camera's (or filmmaker's) eye. A less-gifted artist could be charged with mere self-indulgence. Yet Cole's vision is so daring and psychologically complex, that by turning the camera on himself in this unsparring manner, he almost creates a distorted image for (and of) the viewer. Allowing this series of terrifying, lonely and sometimes beautiful images to wash over oneself, is to open up emotionally to a cinematic world which cries for some sense of understanding and passion. This is a sparsely populated world that Cole has created, and since the

camera is aimed directly at himself, *A Life* is filmmaking at its most daring and revealing.

The film's emotional core comes from Cole's sadness and desperation; yet one leaves this experience with a sense of fulfillment, a sense that there is a life beyond the mere survival which Cole painfully explores. This is a film of lasting value and Cole must be commended for the bravery of his vision. As well, it must be mentioned that Jean-Yves Dion's desert photography, Carlos Ferrand's interior photography and Vincent Saulnier's sound design are of a level and quality so far beyond anything seen in recent years, that *A Life* represents some kind of culmination in the world of independent Canadian cinema.

One hesitates to bandy about such words as "masterpiece" in describing anything, but *A Life* comes about as close to it as anything this writer has seen in some time. And time, as always, will declare the final verdict. *A Life* seems destined for some kind of enshrinement in the history of Canadian film.

Greg Klymkiw •

A LIFE p. 14. *Is. led.* Frank Cole d.o.p. (*desert*) Jean-Yves Dion d.o.p. (*room*) Carlos Ferrand sl. *mus.* Vincent Saulnier sd. ed. Lya Moestrup. Jean-Yves Dion sd. ed. Adrian Croll art d. Elie Abdel-Ahad assoc. p. Robert Paegle a.d. Richard Taylor asst. cam. Mark Poirier asst sd. Tamara Smith still photo Paul Abdel-Ahad cont. Léa Deschamps props Anne Milligan cost. des. Jennifer Thibault p. asst. David Balharrie with; Anne Miquet, Heather O'Dwyer, Abderrahmane Ghis, Mr. and Mrs. Fred Howard. Produced with the assistance of the Canada Council, Ontario Arts Council, NFB and Gary Nichol Associates Ltd.

André Gladu's Liberty Street Blues

"Jazz came up the Mississippi from New Orleans, it didn't come down the Allen expressway from York University"

— Jazz guitarist Peter Leitch

For an art form purported to be the 'Universal Language', music is largely dependent on a sense of place for its identity. Perhaps for this reason, Dixieland or New Orleans jazz never made much sense (to me anyway) in a Canadian context. My experience of Dixieland was of a bunch of middle-aged amateurs creating a cacophony on tunes such as *When the Saints Go Marching In*.

But I have seen the light (*Hallelujah!*), or at least the light passing through André Gladu's new film *Liberty Street Blues*, a documentary about New Orleans jazz which succeeds brilliantly in showing how rooted, socially relevant and swinging this music really is.

As well as being an excellent primer on black music in the crescent city, the film continues the recent Quebec fascination with things marginal in American culture. At the outset, Gladu draws parallels between Montreal and New Orleans; both cities are apart from their surroundings (both physically and culturally), with a unique ethnic mix and (con)fusion of cultures which results in fertile ground for experimentation and the growth of new creative forms.

Stylistically, *Liberty Street Blues* shares little with the films of the NFB's *Americanité* series (of which is it not strictly a part). Absent are the docudrama and collage elements of, for instance, Jacques Godbout's *Alias Will James*. Instead, Gladu offers the film equivalent of the recent "Day in The Life" photojournalism books. The centrepiece of this day in the life of black New Orleans is the annual parade organized by the Young Men's Olympian Aid and Social Pleasure Club, an organization which had its origins in the immediate post-Civil War era. And at the centre of the parade is the music, as played by the Tuxedo Brass Band. Our guide to the proceedings is Dr. Michael White, introduced as a professor at Xavier University and clarinetist with the Tuxedos. (Not in the film, but noteworthy, is Michael White's role as head of a New Orleans board of education program called *Jazz Outreach*, designed to give students an appreciation of their and the city's musical heritage).

We meet Michael White warming up his clarinet on the morning of the parade. At the same time of day, Gladu crosscuts to a variety of scenes; from the market where vegetable and pie vendors hawk their wares with musical cadences, to the street-rapping proprietor of a shoeshine stand, to young girls playing complicated clapping/rhyming games in a schoolyard. The effect is to reinforce what Michael White states in his car on the way to the parade: that this music, New Orleans jazz, grows out of the soil of the delta and that it has a strong social function in addition to being the precursor of the art form that Charlie Parker and others elevated beyond the general comprehen-



Sadie Colar and Michael White in *Liberty Street Blues*

sion of the public.

The parade itself is no mere entertainment; there's a strong element of affirmation. On the surface, there wouldn't seem to be a great deal to celebrate in a city where 40 per cent of black students don't finish high school and where 48 per cent the citizens live below the poverty line. But, of course, that's what makes the event both a communal celebration and an act of defiance. That the parade takes place at the pleasure of the authorities is made clear by the fact that the participants have only four hours in which to hold the event, including the time-honoured custom of stopping along the way at various community centres and institutions for a little imbibing. Gladu underlines this fact by panning back to indicate the presence of a white, mounted policeman trailing the parade at a distance. During the parade sequences, Gladu makes good use of a handheld camera, giving the viewer the impression of being in the midst of the musicians, dancers and participating onlookers.

Like the parade, the film makes judicious use of time-outs. In this case, it's in the form of side-trips to a variety of musical settings which reinforce the notion of the music as a socially cohesive force. First stop is a jazz house party featuring Dr. White's Original Liberty Jazz Band. Eighty-eight-year-old bass player Chester Zardis offers some instruction in slap bass technique (early funk?) and a few phrases in French, a reminder of the ethnic diversity within New Orleans' black community. Banjo player Danny Barker, who played with Jelly Roll Morton, offers his interviewer (Gladu) a taste of beans and rice and talks about how music has been his passport to a wider world. And best of all, pianist and singer Sadie Colar, a spry 70-ish, relates a terrific anecdote about playing the blues, her severe, church deacon father and the jazz-loving parish priest.

The atmosphere here is warm and nurturing, as it is later in the film when we sit in on a rehearsal of the five-man *a cappella* group The Zion Harmonizers. But there's a different reality in Congo Square and in the clubhouses of the 'Black Indians'. Here music plays a more elemental role. Rival groups, the White Cloud Hunters and the White Eagles, compete and challenge one another not with violence, but through ritualized confrontation involving music, generally percussion-based. This sequence leaves the impression (how accurate?) that New Orleans is the only place in North America where skill with a conga drum replaces skill with a weapon among inner-city youth gangs. The music of New Orleans, Gladu seems to be saying, is such a strong force for social coherence that it successfully sublimates the violence that would normally pervade such a dispossessed community. Here, perhaps, the film indulges in a bit of idealisation/romanticism that is generally avoided elsewhere.

Gladu brings it all home with an end-of-day

sequence that parallels the opening. The fruit and vegetable vendors, the street artists and the lighting all switch to minor, twilight key. The parade disintegrates and the participants and spectators filter home through the dusk. And Sadie Colar, still going strong, sings one final chorus of blues.

André Gladu, whose earlier documentary work focused on visual artists (*Pellan, Marc-Aurèle Fortin*), has crafted an insightful document of a community and its musical traditions which succeeds equally well both as a musical and sociological portrait.

Frank Rackow •

LIBERTY STREET BLUES *p.* Eric Michel, Jacques Vallée *d. res.* André Gladu *a. d. / p. man.* Ginette Guillard *cam.* Martin Leclerc *cam. asst.* Carole Jarry *ed.* Monique Fortier *sd. ed.* Claude Langlois *asst. sd. ed.* Sylvie Masse *mix.* Jean-Pierre Joutel *sd.* Claude Beaugrand *asst. sd.* George Porter *admin.* Joanne Carriere, Gaetan Martel, Jacqueline Rivest *consultants* Michael White, Michael Smith, Ben Sandmel, Nick Spitzer, Lynn Abbot, Tad Jones, Ulysses Ricard. Produced and distributed by the National Film Board of Canada. *colour.* 16 mm, 80 min.

Greg Hanec's Tunes a Plenty

Although Greg Hanec's *Tunes a Plenty* has some of the same deadpan humour that distinguishes other Winnipeg features like John Paiz's *Crimezone*, Guy Maddin's *Tales From Gimli Hospital* and Hanec's earlier *Downtime*, this second feature seems a throwback to an earlier tradition of Canadian movies. Eschewing '80s post-modernism, the film looks and sounds like a lost child of the CFDC "low-budget features" programme of the earlier '70s. The requisite realist signifiers are all there: the unmodulated photography of nondescript basements, living rooms and back offices, the sound of flat speaking voices competing with the sharp scrape of kitchen utensils across an arborite table. As I watched and listened, my recollections were of Don Shebib's *Rip-Off* and Clarke Mackey's *The Only Thing You Know*.

Tunes a Plenty is about a garage band in self-imposed exile. The title is not particularly apt. Although songs make up a considerable portion of the film's running time, the title hints at a jauntiness never aimed for and fails to suggest the downbeat tone achieved. Early on, the band's leader, M.C. (played by Hanec himself) dismisses a would-be manager who might offer a gig or publicity. The scene is significant because it signals the way the band, under M.C.'s initiative, turn away from others, especially women. Some of the best scenes counterpoint the testy harmony of the band as they rehearse in dark basements with the greater irritation engendered by individual member's

contact with employers or girlfriends. As he demonstrated in *Downtime*, Hanec is especially adept at expressing inner city ennui, the unaffected camera placements and editing allow us to catch the cryptic words and missed eye contact that undercut understanding between male and female.

The film has a thin anecdotal narrative line you might reluctantly at first associate with American films of the rock group genre (*The Buddy Holly Story, La Bamba*) but it drops even this tentative connection to convention when the anticipated career-making audition sequence fails even to materialize. (I wonder though if this is really such a remarkable break with narrative practice or merely a case of a Canadian convention - the tendency or urge to fail - replacing an American one?)

Tunes a Plenty may deliberately ignore the anticipated climaxes of standard narratives in this genre, but it possesses an odd rhetoric all its own. Here is where it suffers in comparison with the earlier *Downtime* which benefitted from Mitch Brown's more generous characterizations and quirky dialogue.

As a musician as well as filmmaker, Hanec wants to use the movie to dramatize the frustration of trying to be an independent rock artist. The argument here is the overworked one about the need for integrity in a world where, as Hanec's mouthpiece, M.C. puts it, "all that work and effort just boils down to how you advertise yourself in some stupid video or poster." M.C. is a purist for "original" songs whereas his bassist, Cal, urged by his girlfriend who arranges the promised audition, sees no harm in doing "covers". (Lest this seem an obscure topic, CBC radio recently examined the phenomenon of "clone" or "tribute" bands who make a living playing note for note imitations of defunct groups: Grand Funk Railway or Gary Lewis and the Playboys - take your pick of instant nostalgia.) Occasionally Hanec makes something of this theme. He nicely deflates the pretensions of M.C. for instance when one of his "originals" comes over the car radio and a companion who can't tell the difference says, "This is you? Sounds alright. I thought it was just another record." A visit to an abandoned weatherbeaten shack in the middle of the prairie later inspires M.C. to say, "this is a dead dream, but at least it's still standing," then gaze up to the sky and ask, "but what happens to my dreams?" The same instant connection to emptiness and disappointment, dipping into self-pity, informs the lyrics of M.C.'s songs.

Unfortunately though, the tone of self-deflation which might give this theme the shading and humour it needs, isn't maintained. Instead, a lack of distance emerges between Hanec the filmmaker and musician and his screen persona. Following one last charming scene in which M.C. rediscovers his enthusiasm for music after having sold his instruments ("the first time I've ever made money out of music"),

the film climaxes with a clumsy sequence that calls into question the self-mockery that animates the earlier scenes. M.C. is now a church organist leading a choir in a hymn-like rendition of one of his songs condemning commercial radio. He's become a kind of master of ceremonies but the event is fantastical and absurd. The banality of the rapidly scribbled, unrevised lyrics ("A.M. radio is no good/But there are some good tunes / The people who program are turning us into fools") is made worse by the pretentious setting and transcription.

Marred by its gauche rhetoric, *Tunes a Plenty* still has its eyes and ears alert to the lives of these second cousins of beat. The movie validates their existence and Hanec is to be commended for keeping the realist aesthetic vital.

Howard Curie •



Greg Hanec directs and takes the lead role in *Tunes a Plenty*

TUNES A PLenty *p. d. / sc. / ed.* Greg Hanec *p. man.* Greg Hanec, Colleen Dragen, Marion Malone *cam.* Les Sandor, Greg Hanec, Kevin Ferris, Darryl Somersall *add. cam.* Ray Impey, Barry Gibson *sd. rec.* Larry Tascona, Barry Gibson *sd. asst.* Gary Jarvis *add. rec.* Greg Hanec, Dwayne Crowe *band seq. mix.* Glenn Seburn *app. sd.* Marion Malone *asst. ed.* Ray Impey, Barry Gibson *cont. sd.* Richard O'Brien, Ray Impey, Dwayne Crowe *makeup* Shawn Wilson, Sharlene Fwankevich *p. assts.* Robert Levesque, Dave Pratt *lab.* *Ad-Can Labs sd. services* Wayne Finucan Productions *sd. mix.* Clive Perry *titles* Kenn Perkins Animation Ltd. *cam. and rec. equip.* Winnipeg Film Group, Long and McQuade. *Thanks to:* Dale and Randy Jamz, Joe Krolik, Steve Comic Service, St. Matthews Anglican Church, Mr. Steak (Canada), Ian McLeod, Kris Johnson, Glenn and Corie Seburn, Allen's Tombow, Margaret Redston, John Paiz, John Paskovich, Mike Mirus, Winnipeg Film Group, Film Manitoba, CIDO, Manitoba Arts Council, NFB. *music by* Greg Hanec, Ray Impey, Brent Marcinshvyn, Glenn Seburn, Ted Youd. *l. p.* Greg Hanec, Ray Impey, Barry Gibson, Bob Nelson, Jennifer Redston, Matt King, Patti Harris, Murray Moman, Michelle Hughes, Maureen McGregor, Andre Bonner, Wally Buraconak, Gary Jarvis, Randy Jamz, Dwayne Crowe, Dale Jamz, Perry Trylinski. Produced by the Winnipeg Film Group in association with CIDO. *running time* 103 minutes *colour.*

Jonny Silver's
Lonely Child

The subject matter of Jonny Silver's docudrama *Lonely Child: The Imaginary World of Claude Vivier*, makes for incredible fiction. A young Québécois composer, originally schooled to enter the priesthood, develops into one of Canada's most original contemporary classical composers.

Flamboyantly individualistic, iconoclastic and greatly talented, the young Claude Vivier receives a grant to write an opera on the death of the composer, Tchaikovsky. Leaving behind strong friendships and a bevy of admirers, Vivier departs for Paris. His work proceeds brilliantly – but the unexpected takes a tragic turn. The news reaches home: Vivier is found murdered in his Paris flat. Dead at age 34.

An apology is in order. I only demonstrate how these kinds of facts lend themselves easily to melodramatic fictionalization. The problem is how to recount, beyond narrative or documentary/biographical cliché, the story of a man who was, indeed, known for mocking the pretence of the academic composition world, who did once live above the infamous beer, souvlaki and drug dive, The Skala, who was known to act a little like a wacked-out six-year-old in the presence of his dog. And who was found murdered in his Paris flat. Dead at age 34.

I am told by a friend of Vivier's, that Silver has done his homework well. The character of Claude Vivier at 26, living and working in Montreal, excellently cast and acted by Denis Forest, is the *enfant terrible* of contemporary classical composition, without being an *enfant gâté* or an *enfant prétentieux*. He is portrayed as being naturally iconoclastic, innocently 'crazed' and, as Vivier is said to have confessed, a loner and a bastard (in the original sense of the word). But a happy bastard. Silver's Vivier is the artist as child, with an imagination which is both disciplined and exploratory, wild and responsible. He may drink with friends, with fellow composers, Michel George Bregent, Walter Boudreau and Denys Bouliane, but it's clear, too, that when it comes to his craft, he works like hell. Apparently, Silver and Forest have even got the derisive cackle and holler of Vivier's laugh down pat.

As for Vivier's musical or philosophical aesthetic we learn through interviews that Vivier was stimulated by his experiences of other cultures, that Love and Death were thematic preoccupations, as were ideas of imaginary cities and imaginary cultures. Silver gives us a hint as to the elements which fed into Vivier's imagination and hence, into his work. To Silver's credit, too, is the fact that *Lonely Child* most aptly accomplishes the task of matching Vivier's music to the visual narrative.

But overall, a film which proposes to offer a



Germain Houde as the mature Claude Vivier in Paris

"collage of film elements that parallel, structurally and artistically the music of Claude Vivier", seems mostly to be focused on the linear, (albeit fragmented line of) the events of Vivier's life. And death.

Although *Lonely Child* may be described as an experimental documentary and Silver has chosen a difficult topic in the life and work of Vivier – which is fundamentally a documenting of a Grand Imagination – the film falls short of equalling Vivier's own innovative form and style.

Granted, the aesthetics of Vivier's work are probably still rather eclectic and inaccessible to the general film-going public. And, within budgetary limitations, Silver cannot be expected to include dramatized footage of Vivier's developmentally important years in Germany, or of Vivier's travels in Asia or to other cities from which he was stimulated to create his imaginary, synthesized version of those cultures – not in a "post-modern" syncretic manner, but from passion, from reverent curiosity and with imagination, Vivier's imagination.

There is a humorously untraditional sequence in Silver's direction of the camera, panning from one side of a Paris flat wherein actor Germain Houde as the older Vivier, is supervising a rehearsal of one of his works, to a couch across the room, upon which sits composer Gilles Tremblay, who immediately launches into a frontal address to the camera: a monologue on Vivier's ideas on his art. Otherwise, interviews appear staged and often too conventionally staged.

The dance segments, choreographed by Julie

West, may contain *Lonely Child's* most evocative and dreamy cinematography but the segments view like filler. Unlike cuts from the filmed production of Vivier's Alice in Wonderland-esque opera, *Lonely Child*, the question arises, what is the purpose of these passages in the film?

The weakest scenes in Silver's docudrama are the near melodramatic depictions of Vivier's last days in Paris. Is it possible to shoot footage of Paris, and Paris at night, which is visually unattractive? Yes. Germain Houde is badly miscast and the dramatized details leading up to Vivier's murder (which, of course, are fictionalized deductions) are overly sensational. Yes, the man picked up men and brought them home. Yes, maybe, even in his thirties, he might have been known to enter churches and light candles beneath the altar. But as the earlier segments of the film subtly and adeptly demonstrate, Vivier's religiosity was driven by an interest in the mystical and mythical, not in the grounded rites of the Catholic church.

Again, as Silver adeptly, if not lovingly portrays, Vivier's sexuality was probably integrated with his overall childlike – that is, pure – passion and desires. So what's with the pseudo-leather Paris pick-up scene?

Docudrama can be filmed in an experimental manner without abandoning all sense of storytelling. One of Agnes Varda's latest films, *Jane B. par Agnes V.*, manages to succeed at this; reshaping the definitions and representations of "fiction" and "fact". (Although perhaps Varda had an easier time working directly with her subject, Jane Birkin.)

With *Lonely Child*, Silver has excelled in

factually documenting the work and, in parts, the life of an artist whose existence was dramatic, inventive, extraordinary, insightful, and experimental. But Jonny Silver's capability in fictional dramatization leaves us with the story of a young, maverick composer, tragically murdered in his Paris flat, away from home and friends. Dead at the age of 34.

Clea Notar •

LOVELY CHILD p. Jonny Silver, Michael Macina d. Jonny Silver sc. Jonny Silver, Owen Burgess d.o.p. Dennis Pike cam. Pier Giorgio Bottos cam. asst. René Daigle, Denis Forcier key grip Paul Tremblay grip Mario Dumont gaffer Eloi Deraspe hair Antoine Bergeron makeup/hair Lucille Demers cont. Jean-Marie Robillard stills photo Lise Charlebois addn. photo Jean-Claude Labrecque, René Daigle craft Carlos Vidosa ed. Jonny Silver sd. David Millar mus. Claude Vivier asst. ed. Marguerite Cleinge, David McGroarty sup. sd. ed. Karl Konny re-rec. mix Daniel Pellerin Foley Maureen Wetteland graphics Dennis Pike, Rosie Bailey p. man. Christian Vidosa, Suzanne Kiesel Toronto: cam. Robert Fresco cam asst. John Hobson key grip Paul Tremblay grip Eloi Deraspe gaffer Jim Plaxton best boy Sam Ylect. Brad Lemee, Duncan English stills photo Tom Robe Paris crew: a.d. Wendy Orde cam. asst. Nara Keokosal cont. Agnes Fierobe key grip Pierre Sim gaffer Olivier Reverdy p. coord. Marc Hébert Montepulciano/Vienna crew: cam. asst. Gianni Xias key grip Mario Brega gaffer Salvatore Rupert mixer Eugenio Rondani p.a. Nura Silver p. coord. Mario Donati l.p. Germain Houde, Denis Forest, Yvan Beaulieu, Christian Bernard, Attila Bertalan, Claude Sandoz, Dino Oliveri, Pauline Vaillancourt, Jacques Drouin, Violette Chauveau, Anik Bergeron, Yves-André Bergeron, François Beaugard, Monika Haim, Véronique Robert, Michel Grenville, Bora Bulajic, Pascal Queroy, Xavier Galy-Acme, Julien Dubois, Chantal D'Arcy interviewees Walter Boudreau, Denys Bouliane, Michel-Georges Bregent, Gyorgy Ligeti, John Rea, Gilles Tremblay w. voices of David Fox, Serge Garant, Pierre Granger, Robert Sunter, Claude Vivier dance sequences Julie West Dance Company, Julie West, Cathy Kavanagh, Louise Parent. project admin. Mother Corporation. Produced by SILVERFILM INC. dist. les films du crépuscule.