

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.* Aid-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 Marcinshyn, 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.*