

FILM REVIEWS

Gille Carle's

La tête de Normande St-Onge

d. Gilles Carle. **asst. d.** Roger Frappier. **sc.** Gilles Carle with Ben Barzman. **ph.** François Protat. **ed.** Gilles Carle, Avd  Chiriaeff. **sd.** Henri Blondeau. **a.d.** Jocelyn Joly. **m.** Lewis Furey. **m.d.** John Lissauer. **cost.** Claudette Aubin, Huguette Gagn . **l.p.** Carole Laure (Normande), Raymond Cloutier (Bouliane), Ren e Girard (Berthe), Reynald Bouchard (Carol), J.-L o Gagnon (Sculpteur), Ga tan Guimond (J r mie), and Carmen Giroux (Pierrette). **p.** Pierre Lamy. **p. manager.** Monique Messier. **p.c.** Les Productions Carle-Lamy Lt e (Mtl), 1975. **col.** 35mm. colour. **running time** 112 minutes. **dist.** Cinepix Inc.



Normande visits her mother in St-Jean de Dieu, a mental hospital in **La T te de Normande St-Onge**.

Gilles Carle, how can you do this to me! This is such a great film you've made. Your talent oozes over every cut, every beautifully composed frame. The music is just right, as is the multi-layered story, and the totally convincing acting (especially by your stunning girlfriend Carole Laure). The art direction and photography is as superb as anything I've seen from Europe. So why is it that I leave the theatre feeling that the half eaten feast is hanging like lead, undigested in my stomach.

La T te de Normande St-Onge is Gilles Carle's 8th film. He is one of those directors of the caliber of Fellini who operates on such a basically filmic level that the result is a joy to watch, irrespective of content. His films consistently flow well, there are few false notes and we are rarely bored. He is able to work in layers, building character on character, story line on story line

so that you are always surprised and delighted in the "what happens next" department. He is also in touch with the society and situations which people his films. Unlike most films and television today, we don't get a phoney collection of stereotypes jumping like marionettes through some thin sensationalist plot line. The characters in his films are types that we all readily recognize, and like the people in the Czech film renaissance of ten years ago, they seem to be totally natural, strolling in front of the cameras on their way to the tavern or grocery store.

The film begins flawlessly. Normande St-Onge (Carole Laure) works in a drug store selling make-up. She dreams of being a cabaret dancer but her situation is such that any hopes of art and escape are bound to remain just dreams. She is patently the star of this film and through much of its 116 minutes the camera lurks voyeuristically over some part of her nude body. Most of the spectacle comes in the all too numerous dream and flashback sequences all of which are supposed to originate from somewhere in her head. When the film descends to reality, the strongest acting certainly comes from her as well. The odd part is that the focus of the film is not her at all, and maybe therein lies the problem.

The star of the movie, for me, is the house where she lives; a typical Montreal three level flat with the darndest collection of tenants since Genet's **Balcony**. On the top floor is a welfare lady who drinks a lot and has several bird cages filled with rats which she keeps as protection "for when they come to get me." In the basement lives a plaster caster gentleman who is just as obsessed with Carole's nude body as the director of the film and goes to great lengths to make a life size replica complete with pubic hair. On the main floor is Normande's own menagerie: a mother whom she has managed to spring from a mental institution (put there for showing her backside to a judge), a boyfriend who spends most of his time in bed or in his scrapbook pouring over old love affairs, a rather odd magician character, and finally a hippy sister whom she sibling rivals with.

It all adds up to a really fine movie. First each character is lovingly introduced and then they are allowed to simmer awhile in the Laingian T group atmosphere of this most bizarre household until the plot is suitably thick. And then everything just falls apart. The story which has been building up layer by layer to some sort of incredible resolution goes poof and we find ourselves in a lighted

Film Credit Abbreviations: d.: Director. asst. d.: Assistant Director. sc.: Script. adapt.: Adaptation, dial.: Dialogue. ph.: Photography. sp. ph. eff.: Special Photographic Effects. ed.: Editor. sup. ed.: Supervising Editor. sd.: Sound. sd. ed.: Sound Editor. sd. rec.: Sound Recording. p. des.: Production Designer. a.d.: Art Director. set. dec.: Set Decorator. m.: Music. m.d.: Music Director. cost.: Costumes. choreo.: Choreography. l.p.: Leading Players. exec. p.: Executive Producer. p.: Producer. assoc. p.: Associate Producer. p. sup.: Production Supervisor. p. man.: Production Manager. p.c.: Production Company. col.: Colour Process. dist.: Distributors.

theatre with a half empty cup of popcorn turning to our neighbour and asking what's happened. "Did someone pull out the plug?" "No, the movie is over."

Now I know that all the world is a stage and we are such stuff as dreams are made on and all that sort of thing; but I still want my movies to end, especially when they have had such good beginnings and middles. And this is not the first time that Gilles Carle has done this to us. **La vraie nature de Bernadette** is another one of his films that set us up for the climax that never happens. In both these movies, it's almost as if the script writer (Gilles Carle) went out for a coffee break when the movie was half finished and forgot to come back. What a pity because the ending of a film is what you are left chewing as you leave the movie theatre. This film just oozes into a series of masturbatory fantasies with the plot and the characters left flapping in the wind. The sad part is that you tend to forget what a marvelous film you have just experienced.

In the end all that's left are the pieces. The music by Lewis Furey is excellent particularly in the dance-hall number which Normande and the members of the household stage to cheer up Mama, herself a retired dancer. There is a very remarkable sex scene between Normande and her lover. Heaven knows we've all been through enough juicy sex scenes in films but what is exceptional about this one is the "hey, that's what it's really like" feeling about it. No bells, no dissolves to birds and mountains and oceans; just a bit of body to body fucking such as you get in life and rarely in the movies. This is one of the few sex scenes which I've seen in a film where I didn't feel embarrassed watching it.

With all the work that goes into the making of a film, with all the obvious talent which this film shows, it totally bewilders me why Gilles Carle and company don't work things out on paper before molding their half finished scripts into celluloid. It is often said that the problem with Canadian films in general is one of script. English Canadian films, in particular, have trouble with realistic dialogue and a convincing story line. The shame is that this film excels in both these areas. It ends up being the sort of film which is so rich and so engrossing, that one is all the more furious that it wasn't better.

Ronald H. Blumer

William Davidson's

Lions for Breakfast

d. William Davidson, **sc.** Martin Lager, **ph.** Robert Brooks, **sd.** Douglas Canton, **ed.** Tony Lower, **m.** Nick Whitehead and The Black Creek, **l.p.** Jan Rubes, Danny Forbes, Jim Henshaw, Sue Petrie, and Paul Bradley, **p.** Tony Kramreither, **p.c.** Burg Productions Ltd., 1974, Colour, 35mm, **running time:** 98 minutes, **dist.** Saguenay Films.

In the Great Canadian Quest for the Internationally Marketable film, one genre has been very much avoided: the children's film. This type of film can require a modest budget — no complicated, expensive sequences or 'major' stars are really obligatory — and the rules are fairly simple to achieve artistic success. In the latter area, the main problem is the tone: reach the kids but don't be condescending. And supply some simple, if not simplistic, moral statement. **Lions for Breakfast** succeeds on all these counts, and, judging by a kids' screening that I attended, raises some interesting questions regarding morality in this day and age.

The first rule is to have obnoxious names. A youth is named Trick and his little brother is named Zanni (because the elder was always doing tricks and the younger was zany when he was even younger). The old man is named Count Ivan Stroganoff, and he

The runaways with Count Ivan Stroganoff in **Lions for Breakfast**.

rolls every 'r' when he proclaims it. You expect a chef, and in fact he probably was one because he's been everything else: cabinet maker, seaman, circus worker, etc.

Once you get over the name business, which the audience didn't seem to mind, the characters are quite likeable, and thankfully possess only a small amount of cute-kid behaviour. Jim Henshaw and Danny Forbes play the brothers, and Jan Rubes is superb as the old man who 'adopts' them and whom they adopt when they leave the foster home where they've been living. With no family ties, they can immediately jump into the next kid-type existence: the search for the ideal place to have the ideal way of life. Call it 'home' if you will, and Trick summarizes it well: no hassles, streams, valleys, grass, and you feel good all the time. Or, as Ivan describes it, "Somewhere there's got to be a place where you can keep a hundred dogs." They name it, for brevity's sake, "The Blue."

Along the way they travel in an old bus that very nicely has a cargo compartment containing all emergency items. Trick gets distracted by a lovely young girl and almost succumbs to the good suburban life in a scene depicting that lifestyle that runs like a heavy-handed **Graduate**; they go swimming, have adventures in lion farms, outwit thieves, and finally arrive at the piece of land Ivan owns, which is, of course, rural, dilapidated, and hardly what The Blue would be. Whereupon, after the crisis in which Trick forces the others to face reality and then agrees to stay, the audience



FILM REVIEWS

is presented with the moral: "You've got to make your dreams work."

The film certainly works. At the Canadian Film Awards showing the kids listened attentively, cheered the defeat of the villain, chuckled at Paul Bradley's dumb garage attendant, laughed at Zanni's unsuccessful attempts to do laundry, and applauded the destruction of a hotel cafeteria as a bunch of town folk almost get the deed to the land in a crooked card game.

Writer Martin Lager and director William Davidson obviously chose their boundaries very carefully and came up with a serviceable series of situations. There's nothing flashy about the film, nor should there be: by proceeding in a straightforward line the creators have achieved exactly what they set out to do, and they've done it without resorting to too many clichés or to depressing cuteness.

What the movie reveals about the audience is even more interesting. We're operating in a fantasy world here, and while there must be dangers, they cannot be too potentially hazardous. Yet Henshaw and his girl roll about in some very sexy hay, and he is pursued by an irate father with a large shotgun. In the cafeteria fight sides are easily determined, yet those on the same side fight each other. Gambling is a legitimate source, on two occasions, for needed funds, and nowhere is any other method of obtaining income shown. But it's the gambling sequence that reveals why this dark side can be accepted into the genre with relatively little opposition from the audience: as Ivan is about to lose a card hand, the kids were able to follow the playing of the hand perfectly. As the opponents laid out their cards, the audience verbally reacted to obvious loss on Ivan's part.

In other words, the kids have already assimilated this dark side, whether from TV shows or news or whatever. In a way it's exciting that the usual namby-pamby slickness and simplicity of past kid pictures isn't necessary anymore, but at the same time there's some sadness too: for all we know, in five years Sam Peckinpah will be making successful kid pix.

Stephen Chesley

**Daniel Bertolino's
and François Floquet's**

Ahô... au coeur du monde primitif

d. François Floquet and Daniel Bertolino. **sc.** documents gathered by Anik Doussau and Nicole Duchêne. **narr.** by Georges Perrec **ph.** François Boucher, Daniel Bertolino and François Floquet. **sd.** Carle Delarochette-Vernet, Roland Martel **ed.** Françoise Arnaud, Pierre Larocque **p.c.** Via le Monde Canada Inc. 35 mm colour. **running time** 92 minutes. **dist.** Films Mutuels.

When I was a kid I used to love to go through my grandmother's collection of old *National Geographic's* look-

ing for pictures of primitive tribespeople. That fascination doesn't seem to have left me, since I got the same kick out of watching *Ahô... au coeur du monde primitif*.

It's hard to determine exactly why most people are so attracted to pictures and films of stone age tribespeople. Simple curiosity about the origins of the species may have something to do with it, or some sort of back to nature romanticism. But I think the reasons are often tied in with a subconscious feeling of loss — of wanting to recapture the love and protection of a tribe, an extended family. Watching how people function in that kind of situation is somehow very reassuring.

The film is visually stunning, with lots of pans over lush jungles and rain forests, and shots of natives in bright ritual make up and costumes. Different cameramen were used for different segments, but they all caught the incredible beauty of the surround-

The Cintas Largas tribe from *Ahô... au coeur du monde primitif*

