

FILM REVIEWS

Allan Eastman's

A Sweeter Song

d. Allan Eastman, asst. d. John Ryan (2nd Steve Bradden), sc. Jim Henshaw, ph. Robert Brooks, csc, lighting, Tommy Wright, asst. ph. Dennis Rindsem, ed. William Gray, sd. Brian Day, boom man Steve Switzer, sd. rec. Brian Day, set dec. Barbara Waltman, wardrobe Lynn MacKay, l.p. Jim Henshaw, Susan Petrie, Peter Jobin, Susan Hagan, David Bolt, Allan Migicovsky, exec. p. Anthony Kramreither, p. John C. Hunter, assoc. p. Samuel C. Jephcott, p. manager Samuel C. Jephcott, p.c. Labyrinth-Burg, 1976, Color, 1976.

Canadians, we are told, are not funny people. We don't like to laugh at ourselves, and, on top of it all, we don't create comedy. Of course, that's not true at all. For one thing, some brilliant comedy is produced in Canada; for instance on radio's *Inside from the Outside*, or Don Harron's dirty puns or Mordechai Richler's writing. For another thing, most of the great comedy produced by Canadians is in American media, because they're all in Hollywood. It is a difficult type of creation, though, and the perils are many awaiting those who attempt it. *A Sweeter Song* is a Canadian feature film comedy — one of the few — and where it succeeds is the most unlikely places. Where it falters is unfortunately predictable.

Sex does happen in Canada. Sex can be funny in Canada. Accepting this premise is a hard one for Canadian filmmakers, and embellishing it to include an examination of male-female relations in our time through comedy is usually avoided. Allan Eastman and Jim Henshaw's script takes a square look at young people, their ideal mates, and their sexual and social follies, and while the result is not profound or extremely sophisticated over-



Allan Eastman giving direction to Peter Jobin and Susan Hogan for *A Sweeter Song*

all, it is done in a refreshing manner and there are some very good moments.

A news photographer, Jim Henshaw, is hung up on his best friend's wife. She discovers her spouse dallying with another and leaves him; unfortunately she chooses our hero's gay neighbor to move in with, instead of our hero.

Meanwhile our heroine, who works at the same newspaper as Henshaw, decides that Henshaw is for her. Susan Petrie proves herself to be one of the best actresses in Canadian film with this role. Unlike her past typecasting as the frigid teenage tease, she finds things in this character that aren't in the script, and it's one of the few times we can see a contemporary

young woman on the screen, especially considering the void that now exists in roles for women. She allows the script to overwhelm her at points — too much relish in her dirty lines that are grafted onto the dialogue, and tossing away a term such as "meaningful relationship" by laughing at its wrenching commonness as she proclaims it in her character — but in her crucial moments she's completely believable, and carries her low comedy scenes with great timing.

The other acting is strong too. Alan Migicovsky, Susan Hogan, and Peter Jobin round out the quintet with enthusiasm even though their characters are far from full. Henshaw has too much mooning after Hogan and looking nonplussed and confused to give

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. narr.: Narration.

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any real breadth to his character, but the fault lies more in the script. Playing an accident-prone individual offers too much predictability in a comedy, but Henshaw handles his overabundant pratfalls with skill, and elicits the required laughs from any audience.

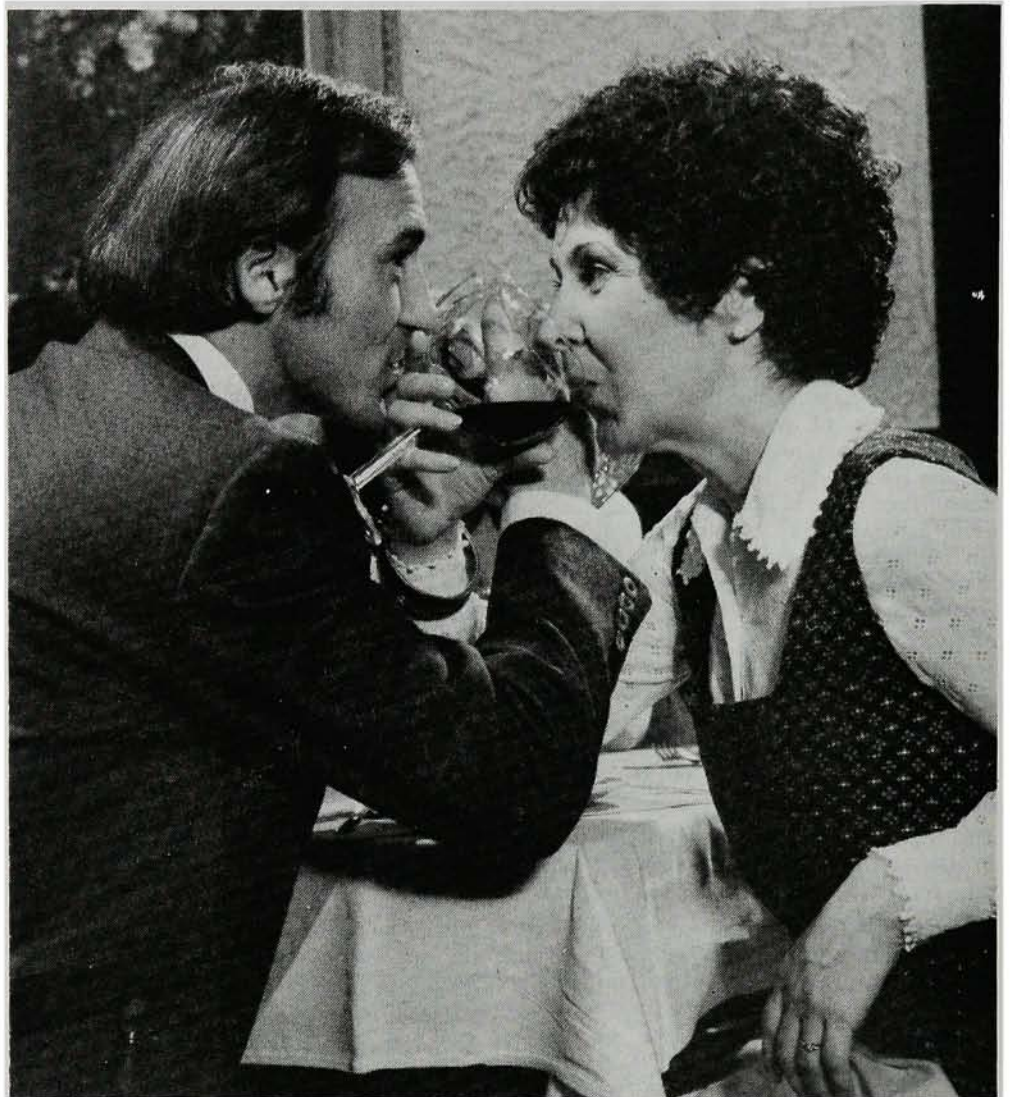
The story rounds itself out as it should, with everyone living happily ever after. It all happens against straightforward sets and lighting, with Bob Brooks' cinematography displaying just enough brightness to support the tone.

The perils, on the other hand, are obvious and too often not avoided. The tendencies to be self-indulgent and sophomoric are too easily embraced in the film, mostly in the script and especially in the glee with all the visual low comedy pratfalls and a couple of scenes that exist for their own sakes, rather than the story's: a gangster take-off, for instance. The object here was not satire, but affection for a type. The creators seem to be too far removed to place the type in the story, though, with any credibility. In another case, however, the desire to satirize the Canada Manpower experience works exceptionally well. Henshaw's character would get into such a situation and act in the situation in just the way he does, and at the same time the whole experience, to everyone who's been through it, is a highly effective comedic extension of the horror of the real thing.

The cutting of the film, by William Gray and Eastman, is very well done. It's apparent that in the script and in what was actually shot, there was a looseness that comedy can't tolerate. Now it's tight and moves right along, the camera angles are good, and the pacing keeps the audience interested. **A Sweeter Song** is Eastman's first feature, and a CFDC low-budget effort; it's to his credit that he's chosen such a difficult genre and brings most of it off.

For overall there is a freshness and likeability to the film that's a marketing plus. And it's one of the few times an audience is presented with an examination of young people's mating habits that is made by young people, rather than someone middle-aged who's trying to remember. There's no reverence in looking at it straight on instead of filtered through time, and that's an immediate plus for the film. A contemporary audience should react to it well, if it's marketed properly.

Stephen Chesley



Yvon Deschamps and Rita Lafontaine celebrate in **Le soleil se lève en retard**

André Brassard's

Le soleil se lève en retard

d: André Brassard, **asst. d.:** Jacques Méthé, **sc:** Michel Tremblay, **adapt:** André Brassard, **ph:** Alain Dostie, **ed:** André Corriveau, **sd:** Jacques Blain, **set dec:** Normand Sarrazin, **m:** Beau Dommage, **cost:** Louise Jobin, **l.p.:** Rita Lafontaine (Gisèle), Denise Filiatrault (Marguerite), Huguette Oigny (the mother), Yvon Deschamps (Jean Cusson), Paule Baillargeon (Ginette), Gilles Renaud (Yvon Thériault), **p:** Luc Lamy, **p.c.:** Les Productions Pierre Lamy Ltée, 1975, **col:** 35mm, **dist:** Les Films Mutuels, **running time:** 111 minutes.

Michel Tremblay and André Brassard, Quebec's best-known theatre

duo, have combined to give Quebec one of the most promising films of recent years. **Le soleil se lève en retard** is a love story, done in half-tones, which reflects well the mood in Quebec today.

Tremblay, the writer, and Brassard, who adapted the scenario and directed the film, have called it a film of reconciliation. The word is well chosen, and denotes an almost spiritual progression on their part. Whereas the plays which they have made and their first two films have been bitter, oppressive works, full of black humor and hopelessness, **Le soleil** is a tender film, full of promise.

The film is centered on Gisèle, admirably played by Rita Lafontaine. Her performance is responsible for the very great effectiveness of the film. She is perfect in her role of an office worker, just turned 30 and still looking for the love of her life. Both her family and the girls

at the office gang up on her and she turns, in trepidation, to a matrimonial agency.

The scenario would have given Tremblay and Brassard all the ammunition they needed to take potshots at small people in ridiculous situations. Yet here, the cynicism is gone; they are restrained and no one is made a fool. Eventually, Gisèle meets an almost painfully shy man and the two of them undergo the strained and tantalizing process of getting to know one another, building mutual respect and love from what appeared, at first view, an unpromising match indeed.

One can only thank the authors for giving us this version of love: for once, without glamor, without youth, without sensation. It is simply love as many have known it. Warm and, hopefully, long-lasting.

The film is full of extraneous elements which seem to have nothing to do with the story. Every now and then, Tremblay gives us a girl, wandering through the streets at night, looking for the man who stole her purse; or a disagreement between two deaf-mutes in the park; or a homosexual in the subway who asks Gisèle to marry him. For no reason at all, a family in mourning comes in to eat supper at a barbecued chicken place. In the context of the film, these episodes appear neither sinister nor tragic. They made me think of Hitchcock's appearances in his own films; a way for Tremblay and Brassard to remind us that this tender, sentimental film was still theirs, and that the strange bizarre world filled with their usual characters was not far away.

As a filmmaker, Brassard has made tremendous strides. His first feature, *Il était une fois dans l'est*, was rightly criticized for being filmed theatre. In this new film, the movement from scene to scene is effortless, the pacing carries one right along. Also, Brassard handles his actors well. The performances are superb. It's a pleasure to see Yvon Deschamps, best known for his stand-up comic monologues, as a shy, tongue-tied middle-aged man, falling in love awkwardly.

Certainly, *Le soleil* is a most pleasant film. Without violence or sex, it remains to be seen whether the public in Quebec will still appreciate such a muted and friendly portrait.

Connie Tadros



Ernest Borgnine tracks down his man in *Shoot*

Harvey Hart's

Shoot

d: Harvey Hart, **sc:** Dick Berg (from the novel by Douglas Fairbairn), **ph:** Zale Magder, **ed:** Ron Wisman and Peter Shatalow, **a.d.:** Earl Preston, **sd:** Paul Coombe and Karl Scherer, **m:** Doug Riley, **l.p.:** Cliff Robertson (Major Rex Jeanette), Ernest Borgnine (Lou), Henry Silva (Zeke), James Blendick (Pete), Larry Reynolds (Bob), Les Carlson (Jim), Helen Shaver (Paula), Gloria Carlin Chetwynd (Ellen), Kate Reid (Mrs. Graham), **p:** Harve Sherman, **exec. p:** Dick Berg, 1976, color, 35 mm, **running time:** 92 min., First Toronto showings, Nov. 26, 1976.

*"Far-fetched made-in-Canada mel-
ler about rampaging gun freaks.
Mild commercial potential."
VARIETY, movie reviews,
June 2, 1976.*

Shoot - very well acted, niftily directed, sharply shot - is not the world's greatest picture, nor even Canada's, but I think it deserves better than that sour welcome from the leading trade paper. Commercially it may, perhaps, be proving mild, lacking the nastiness of *Death Weekend* (a film which I promise never to mention again) but in craftsman-like and even meaningful terms it's by no means negligible. The story of

a hunting party mysteriously menaced by rival hunters and becoming eager to return the compliment has overtones of relevance, even though films such as the Spanish *La Caza* (The Hunt) have explored similar territory already. The approach to a consideration of *macho* values under pressure is not especially subtle - except in one scene with a drunken widow, ferociously played by a feline Kate Reid - but then a jolly weekend spent shooting anything that moves may not itself harbor much subtlety.

Harvey Hart, with two recent features to his credit (in every sense), would seem to be a man well qualified, borrowing a phrase, to "interpret Canada to Canadians". Both *Shoot* and the attractive *Goldenrod* attest to a clear visual style and a sympathy with people, notwithstanding the thin representations of Canadian actors in notable roles. What Hart and his colleagues and his audiences badly need now are strong and viable scripts. Good literate dialogue has begun to return to American films, as witness *The Front* and *Network* (overrated though Chayevsky's work has been). Who can write it here and where will they find the chance? The present screenplay is not without merit but it misses definite, determined communication of its point of view. Hunters might have quite a jolly time watching *Shoot*, which is probably not what was intended.

Clive Denton