
From Toronto to Fiji to Australia and L.A., Don Owen gives us his reflections on his trip and his own filmmaking: like a page from his diary...

to oz and back

by Don Owen



Butch Owen and the Sundance Spry discover Australia.

After a stopover in Hawaii (the Disneyland of the Pacific) and Fiji (where the Indian immigrant population outstrips the Fijian making the island seem like a fragment torn off the Indian continent), arrived in Sydney wiped out, to be greeted by the headlines everywhere "Margaret and Pierre Split". It all seemed to sum up too readily the crisis of our own country.

The Sydney Festival screenings are in the evenings because most of its large local audience works during the day. In style it is more like a film society providing a retrospective of last year's festivals hits. The audience, mainly young and vaguely arty, seem locked in a time warp: English Labour Party 1960. If a man in working clothes strikes a man in a suit the audience cheers!

The hit of the festival is Peter Watkins' **Edvard Munch** which is more personal and romantic than his usual work. Excellent use of sound overlap and colored filters. Also an excellent solution to the problem of dealing with historical material by treating it in a more intimate and personal way. Obviously Watkins identified totally with Munch and this gives it a vigor it would not otherwise have had. Unrelenting in its view of the artist-sufferer, it somehow fails to mention the matter of money in all of its more than three-hour pursuit of Munch from birth to death. Watkins himself seems a Kafkaesque character haunted by all kinds of fears and suspicions, especially of some kind of conspiracy against his work. However, as we get to know him better, find him witty and charming, able to see himself with a certain irony.

Australia is an interesting perspective from which to view Canada. Where so many of its films deal with the historical past, practically none of ours do. Where its history has become almost mythological, ours has been overshadowed by the more colorful American mythology. Australians share our paranoia about America and yet ironically, they suffer from an isolation that is like a great national wound. We're too near and they're too far.

But perhaps because of their isolation, Australian society is more defined than Canadian, thus their filmmakers are able to be more specific about the society they live in. There's no hedge, as in Canada, in the interests of making a bigger sale. Instead of film being a means of discovering who we are, our socially anonymous films diffuse our already filmy identity. In Australia there is a regional pride and rivalry that celebrates the many facets of the Australian character. Their state governments, unlike our provincial governments, put up a sizeable share of the film budgets. There is a greater commitment from the top to an indigenous film industry.

But there are haunting similarities to Canada, mainly in certain remnants of a colonial mentality. Same institutions, theirs beginning with an "A" and ours with a "C". Same hangovers from the days when the English foreign office took a paternal interest in the cultural life of the colonies. The major distribution and exhibition chains in Australia are American and British owned, and there is a great deal of paranoia on the part of the filmmakers that their films won't be seen by Australian audiences. Sound familiar?

Still, there's a sense that the Australian audiences are quite enthusiastic about their home-grown product. We were reminded of the enthusiasm of the audiences of Quebec for the works of their own filmmakers, and wondered whether once the novelty wears off (as it has in Quebec apparently), the audience will go back to demanding straight American-style entertainment.

*Director Don Owen, whose latest feature **Partners** was part of a retrospective of his works shown at the Sydney Film Festival, is presently working on a new script in California.*

Why can't we have both? Isn't it possible to make films that reflect our society with real insight but that also have solid entertainment value? One of the problems with this is that to get the audience into the theatres, you seem to need a major star. But somebody who spent the last 10 years living and working in Hollywood has lost any "Canadian" qualities of character and probably has little insight into the Canadian situation. You really have to live in Canada to know the anguish of it.

Of course, a clear sense of ourselves is necessary if we want to remain an independent cultural entity. Quebecers say that part of the problem is that we don't know who we are so the dialogue is on a poor level. They don't want to know us because we won't know ourselves.

But another Canadian pitfall has been remedied by the Australians: they have unified the Australian Film Commission (like the Canadian Film Development Corporation) and Film Australia (like the National Film Board) under one administration, along with the Film School and the government distribution network. They don't have the problem that we do in Canada where the heads of our various institutions barely speak to each other and certainly never exchange creative ideas.

As the Festival is mainly at night, spent a lot of time walking around Sydney – a very beautiful city, the harbour and its bays endlessly varied, vistas of red-tiled roofs and tropical vegetation; Australians open, very friendly; general atmosphere a weird combination of California and England. We were taken around to several of Sydney's many fine restaurants. Surprised to find how good Australian wine has become, and that Australians, traditionally beer-drinkers, now consume large quantities of their own white wine. Also amazed by a trip to the zoo where the animals seem like something from another planet entirely. Such unique ecology could support their search for greater cultural definition, just as our similarity to the Americans is supported in that we share so much of the same landscape.

One of the great pleasures of this trip is to spend some time with Robin Spry. Some rash talk about the exploitive aspects of the documentary. When you make a film about someone, aren't you in fact ripping them off? So-called primitive people often don't want to be photographed. They seem to know instinctively that it involves a diminishing of natural spontaneity. That's one of the attractions of making 'story' films. You create a fiction and use actors who have chosen this mode of action as their fate.

It was fun being a visiting culture hero – whisked around in official AFC limousines, radio and television interviews, pictures in the newspapers, wine and dined at the best restaurants. One elegant lady at a party practically ravaged me on the spot – great for my vanity until I realized that she was just suffering from a severe case of the Australian isolation and I was for her only an exotic presence from the outside world!

Ego problem: seeing Robin Spry's film **One Man** in Sydney and thinking how much better it was than **Partners**. The audience loved it. It works better as a structure, I thought. Got very defensive and apologetic about **Partners**. **One Man** is a lovely film combining tense scenes of violence with moments of exquisite human feeling, all delivered in a plot that does not falter. When I stopped being uptight over the greater success of a former protégé, I was able to be pleased with the triumph of a friend. Later in Melbourne where **Partners** received a larger and more auspicious screening and was well received by an attentive audience, I stopped apologizing for it. Then seeing my films at the Retrospective gave me a new perspective on their quality and searching diversity and especially on how Canadian they really were.

How do you relate to a work of yours that everyone says is a failure? You can ignore the criticism but at the cost of cutting off your own growth. You have got to face up to your failures, learn from them and then get on with it.

A new work is the best answer to your critics. There, you can insist on your shortcomings and turn them into virtues. This doesn't mean making the same mistakes over again, but developing ideas that did work, further, and in defining yourself more clearly. Even if it doesn't fit into the current fashionable jargon or prejudices.

So, on the way back from Australia, after a brief stopover in New Zealand and Tahiti, am spending some time here in L.A. Days writing (*Greenhouse Blues* is gradually becoming something else entitled *Mr. and Ms.*). Evenings seeing old friends and making new ones. You can learn a lot about filmmaking just by being surrounded by so much concern and love for it. I mean, people here eat, drink, sleep, work and talk *movies* endlessly. I find it very freeing and inspiring and the new script is going really well for the first time.

In its weird way of being at once very up-to-date and haunted by the ghosts of the past, there is a heated discussion in the Hollywood press about the *auteur* theory of filmmaking. It all revolves around whether Frank Capra is the author of his great films or whether he was only as good as the writer he was working with. Strangely, in the heat of discussion that followed by way of angry letters to the editor, the contribution of the actor was never mentioned. Strange because the genius of Hollywood, it seems to me, has always been to find those luminous archetypes that made the films vibrate. Unable to sleep, flipping through the channels in a



Hollis McLaren, Owen and Andra Sheffer (right) talk with Natalie Miller, member of the Victoria Film Commission.

3 a.m. dark night of the soul, no matter how skilled the story or pointed the direction, it is those luminous beings that we stop to watch: Spencer Tracy, Hepburn, Bogart, Bacall, Gary Cooper etc.

One of the tragedies of our film industry is that no sooner have we discovered and developed one of these talents, than they leave immediately for Hollywood where they quickly become imbued with a new cultural identity.

Now, after a month in Australia and a month here in L.A., I'm getting a real hankering to return to Canada. Is this true love or is it masochism?

The following text, a resumé of the Australian situation sent to us by the Australian information service, shows just how similar the film promotion experiences are in our two countries.



"Australia Now Recognised as a Film-Producing Nation"

Australia is known throughout the world as having an ebullient film industry and being the source of quality movies, according to the chairman of the Australian Film Commission (AFC), Mr Ken Watts.

Mr Watts believes Australia no longer has to promote the industry as a whole. He and other APC officers recently returned to Australia from sales efforts in Europe and the United States, which included the Cannes Film Festival.

The AFC is an umbrella organisation for the film industry in Australia, financed by the Federal Govern-

ment. It invests in film projects, helps to promote and distribute them and makes television and documentary films through its production arm, Film Australia.

Mr Watts said that after two years' participation at Cannes and at other festivals and markets, Australia's reputation was well established.

"In the future we will be able to go places like Cannes, concentrating our efforts on individual products rather than having to make people aware of the existence of an Australian film industry," he said. "The reputation we have established can be a springboard for Australian producers to make overseas sales."

Fifteen Australian films were shown at this year's Cannes Festival. Advances, sales and advance guarantees from the Festival totalled \$A600,000.

AFC's director of marketing and distribution, Mr Alan Wardrope, said that if sales followed the same trend as after last year's Cannes Festival, they could reach \$A2,000,000 in the next nine months.

The main interest in Australian films came from Canada, Scandinavia, West Germany and Italy.

The Australians were surprised that lower-budget films were the most successful. These included Australia's first animated feature, *Dot and the Kangaroo*, Tom Cowan's *Journey Among Women* and Brian Trenchard-Smith's action film *Deathchangers*.

The South Australian Film Corporation's *Storm Boy*, grossing well in Australia, did particularly good business at Cannes.

"This was a restatement of the fact that dollars don't necessarily make good movies," Mr Wardrope said. "It was a lesson to us."

Mr Wardrope also returned to Australia convinced there is a world shortage of good product.

"What we were all talking about a few years ago, is now a reality," he said. "Because of the slowdown in production in other countries, it is an opportune time for Australian films in overseas markets.

"In the United States, some films are being re-run for the fifth time. Cinemas are closing down and some American distributors are banding together to make their own films to beat the shortage.

"However, I think we must have films with universal themes. In the past this has occurred by accident rather than by design in Australia. International sales are now imperative for the survival of the Australian industry.

"With costs rising, Australian producers can no longer expect to make a profit on home distribution alone."

Mr Wardrope's assertion is backed up by Mr Watts, who feels that though each country develops its own style, the most successful films in the future will be those with universal themes that "Happen to be shot in Australia".

He also reported great interest from European and British producers in making co-productions in Australia.

"I think that with the Europeans the projects would be simple co-financing arrangements," Mr Watts said. "They are looking for new ideas and new locations."

Moves were underway for a film co-production agreement with Britain, he said.

After his talks in London, discussions would be held with producers and trade unions in Australia. When these were completed a delegation from Britain would come to Australia, or an Australian group would go to Britain.

While in London, Mr Watts also had talks with the former Prime Minister, Sir Harold Wilson.

Sir Harold is heading the interim board working towards the establishment of a film authority in Britain.

Mr Watts said Sir Harold had been extremely interested in the role and operations of the AFC in relation to the Australian film industry.

by **Trevor Murrell**
Canberra, AUSTRALIA



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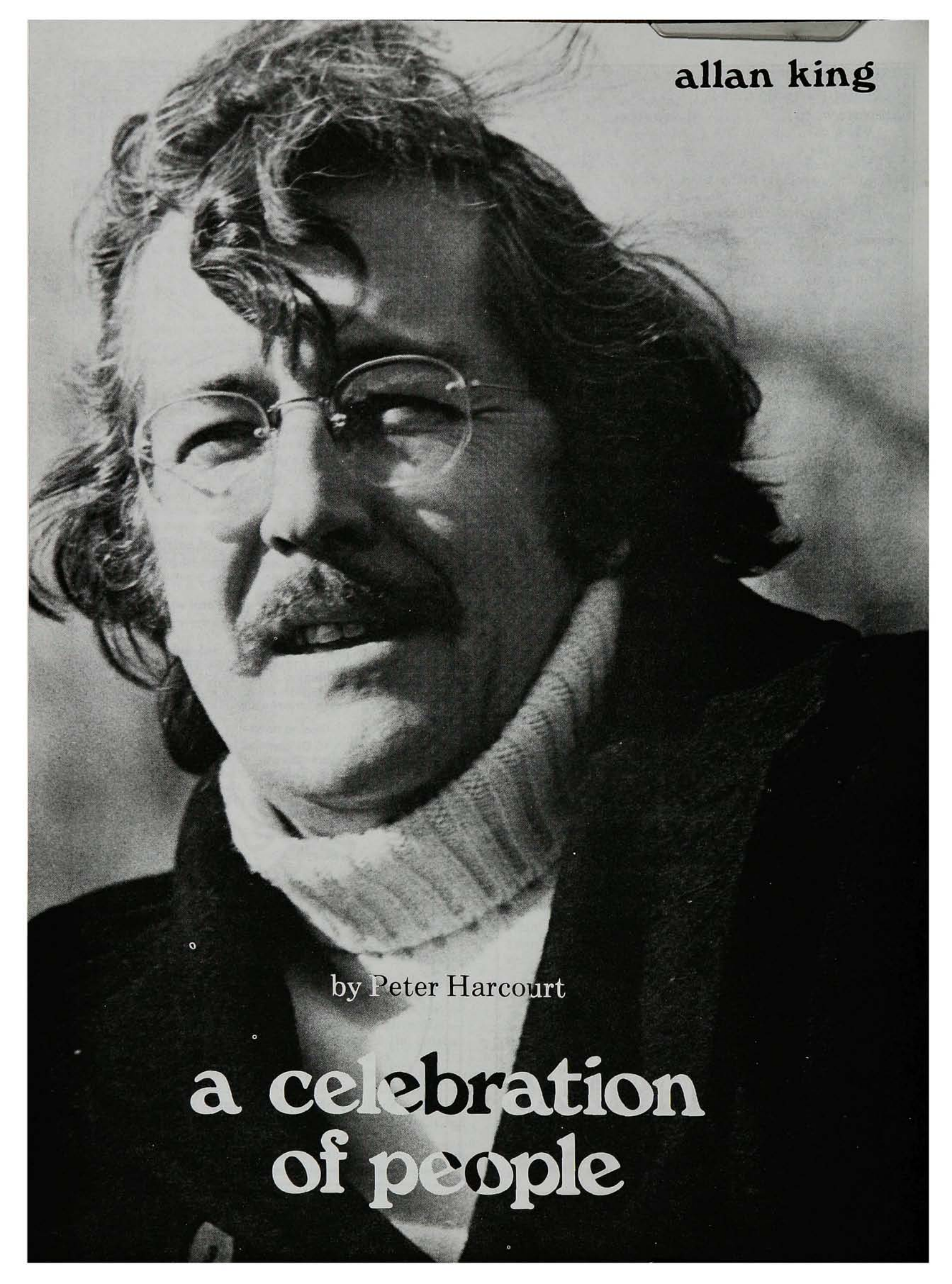
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A black and white portrait of Allan King, a man with wavy hair, glasses, and a mustache, wearing a dark jacket and a light-colored turtleneck sweater. He is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a slight smile. The background is a plain, light color.

allan king

by Peter Harcourt

**a celebration
of people**

In late September, Allan King's feature *Who Has Seen the Wind* will be released. Peter Harcourt takes this chance to look back over King's other films as well to give us a critical portrait of one of Canada's most accomplished filmmakers.

by Peter Harcourt

*"I suppose that the stream that runs through most of the things I respond to is a sense of feeling, of warmth about people, a celebration of people, a sense of humanity."*¹

Published in 1947, W.O. Mitchell's **Who Has Seen The Wind** is a loving evocation of the growth of a young boy's consciousness, of his awareness of the cycle of nature and his gradual recognition of the mystical meanings of life and death. In an oblique way, a pantheistic way, the novel is deeply religious. It is concerned with the forces that animate things, both nature and people. It is aware of the invisible. It acknowledges the wind.

In 1977, **Who Has Seen The Wind** also became a film, adapted by Patricia Watson and directed by Allan King. One of the remarkable achievements of this adaptation is that, in this most visual of media, they have managed to convey this sense of the invisible by moments of speechlessness. The film is full of wide-eyed glances, of silent interrogations—as if trying to come to grips with the significance of things. Largely, of course, these glances belong to Brian (an astonishing performance by Brian Painchaud); but they also are received by both his mother (Chapelle Jaffe) and his father (Gordon Pinsent), and they are shared by Digby (Thomas Hauff), by the open-eyed trust with which he greets the world.

In this way, the film implies more than it can say. Even the sullen resentment of the Young Ben (Douglas Junor) is conveyed through his body and his eyes. He has almost no lines at all in the film. Admirers of the novel may, in fact, be amazed at how little dialogue has been added. For all of Mitchell's imagery, for all the interpretative function of his prose, Patricia Watson and Allan King have found visual equivalents.

Who Has Seen The Wind is set in the '30s — a world of hard times, of depression and drought. In the last ten years, this has become a fashionable decade for the movies. There have been a number of films that depict that time. But with a difference. In Hollywood, films like **Bound For Glory**, **Thieves Like Us**, and **Bonnie & Clyde**, while their *décor* is authentic, their thinking is modern. Especially in **Bonnie & Clyde** which, with all its New Deal posters and sense of dusty streets, is the most meticulous of them all, the gestures are totally contemporary. Warren Beattie and Faye Dunaway, while playing characters from the '30s, speak directly to our own times. They appeal to our growing suspicion about the processes of the law and to the value we now place on individual freedom.

In **Who Has Seen The Wind**, there is none of this. With his short hair and clear blue eyes, Thomas Hauff as Digby radiates the idealism that seems so characteristically Canadian — particularly in the past. King has used these eyes in a similar way in his adaptation for television a couple of years ago of Barry Broadfoot's **Six War Years**. In this

play, it is the same idealistic innocence that projected the Hauff character so willingly into the war. Both in **Six War Years** and in **Who Has Seen The Wind**, Thomas Hauff seems totally the incarnation of those past times. So it is with everyone in **Who Has Seen The Wind**. There is nothing that seems out-of-period in their gestures or attitudes.

This is both a distinction and, possibly, a limitation. Audiences might find the film too idealistic, too trusting in the natural processes of life to be able to believe that that was how it was in those days. Whether consciously or not, audiences might also be disquieted by its comparative lack of protest. Mitchell's pantheism blurs somewhat the social and political implications of the town's persecution of the Chinese family and of both the Bens. Like the kitten that dies in the litter or the runt pig that ought to be destroyed (as both the novel and the film might seem to be saying), Nature has its rejects as part of its wholeness. While certain characters do protest — principally Digby and Miss Thomson (Helen Shaver) — the ambiance of the whole is more philosophical than political, urging us towards mysticism and towards an acceptance of "God's ways".

This idealism in the film, this self-effacing acceptance, is not just fidelity to the original story. There is something of this quality in nearly all of King's work. But in **Who Has Seen The Wind**, Mitchell's prairie world of the '30s is presented to us with an admirable accuracy. The reconstruction of Arcola where the film was shot (a reconstruction which the townspeople were pleased to accept), the circus posters, auction-sale announcements, period gas-pumps, and Bee Hive Corn Syrup cans combine with those trusting faces, with the expressive speechlessness of their eyes, to create within the film a warmly affirmative experience — an experience rare for our times.

The trust and love within the film is largely carried by Brian Painchaud as Brian. It is his consciousness of the world around him which becomes our consciousness of the film. But miraculously cast, Brian often has a sense of tiredness about his eyes — as if in advance of knowing it, all the questions he asks about life finally will have no satisfactory answer.

In this way, **Who Has Seen The Wind** is a meditative film. Like the novel it actualizes, it asks us to contemplate the meaning of human life and the formation of human values. And Eldon Rathburn's musical score assists this contemplation. For those of us who know his work, largely for the National Film Board, many of his devices will sound reassuringly familiar. But they are effective nevertheless. Plucked strings and a Jew's harp help to create the boys' excitement as they prepare for their gopher hunt; and at one point in the film, when Brian walks off into the prairie to spend the night alone under the stars, a solo horn and widely-spaced strings beautifully evoke the landscape's infinite vastness and a sense of awe.

Even more than the book, Allan King's **Who Has Seen The Wind** centers this prairie world within the consciousness of Brian. In this way, the film becomes a distinguished example of what is really a Canadian genre: films that create the world through the eyes of a young child. Claude Jutra's **Mon Oncle Antoine** and Francis Mankiewicz's **Le temps d'une chasse** immediately spring to mind; but **Lions for Breakfast** and **Lies My Father Told Me** work in much the same way. If we extend the age to take in young people, then the list of films is enormous — in terms of richness and productivity, virtually the Canadian equivalent of the American Western!

If **Who Has Seen the Wind** is characterized by directness and simplicity, these qualities (which are also in the novel and can be found in different ways in other films by Allan King), finally, are focussed through Brian. Most of the world created for us is presented through his eyes — questioning the values of the life and death around him, trying to make

¹Peter Harcourt, author of *Six European Directors* (Penguin, 1974) and *Movies & Mythologies* (CBC, 1977) teaches film at York University.

sense of it all but drawing no conclusions. Conclusions (if there are any) would belong to another world, a more and more sophisticated world – a world closer to our own times.

*"Certainly, in the past at any rate, it's been very much part of my character to be unsure, to be very careful; it's difficult for me to be very forthright emotionally and even forthright in talking in a general way. I'm not sure how much of it is a desire to be covert or how much of it is a simple confusion in my own head about what I feel or what I think."*²

Who Has Seen The Wind marks a new stage in Allan King's career; for until very recently, King has not been known as a director of dramatic features. Like other Canadian filmmakers, he began in documentary. Working out on the West Coast in the late '50s and early '60s, King produced a number of shorts for the CBC that earned him his initial reputation. **Skid Row** (1956), **Rickshaw** (1960), **A Matter of Pride** (1961), and **Bjorn's Inferno** (1964) established the credentials that allowed King to do a variety of items for the CBC, as well as to set up production offices in London, England. It was about this time, however, that King began to conceive for himself more challenging projects, moving slowly but surely towards a form which, more than anybody else, Allan King invented – the actuality drama.

The actuality drama is a mixture of documentary and fiction. By-passing the conventional ingredients of script and actors, it takes actual people in actual situations but then shapes the material so that it becomes both something more and something less than that – a film by Allan King. The purest example of this way of working is **A Married Couple**, made in 1969. But before that there was an interesting predecessor – virtually an invisible predecessor because it has been seen by so few people. The film was made for the CBC in 1964 and is called **Running Away Backwards** or **Coming of Age in Ibiza**. In some ways, it is one of the most interesting films that King has ever made.

It is interesting because it is so naive and embarrassing – so uncertain about what its values really are. In this way, it takes risks. **Running Away Backwards** tells the story of a group of Canadians "living it up" in Ibiza – trying to "find themselves" away from the insipidities of day-to-day Canadian life. This ambition in itself is more than a little naive; yet it is a project that more than a handful of Canadians have felt obliged to go through.

Running Away Backwards offers a dilemma for the spectator. Is it a naive and embarrassing film about a bunch of Canadians sensitive to the uncertainties of their own identities? Or is it a sensitive and uncertain film about a bunch of naive and embarrassing Canadians who are escaping the demands of maturity by running away to Ibiza? To pose this riddle is to comment on the way that Allan King works as a director. The directors we most know about, whom we talk about as *directors*, are generally those that impose a particular vision of the world upon whatever material they handle. Hitchcock, Bergman, Hawks, Antonioni – even Don Shebib – all have a view of life that is developed in one way or another, from film to film. They often have as well a recognizable style – or at least, a repertoire of stylistic effects that we learn to associate with the work of each director.

With Allan King, however, these matters are more elusive. There have been, to be sure, some thematic pre-occupations. From **Skid Row** through **Warrendale** (1967) to **Come On Children** (1973), King has repeatedly concerned himself with social outcasts, with characters who cannot adjust to the conventions that our society lays down as normal. This



Going topsy-turvy while **Running Away Backwards**.

theme is also present in **Running Away Backwards**, even though these pampered, middle-class people have melodramatically chosen their outcast state. But more important than theme is King's attitude, his attitude as a filmmaker. I would want to characterize this attitude as one of self-effacement. Rather than impose himself on his material, Allan King tries as far as possible to let his material speak for itself. Whether the immense formality with which he interviews his winos at the time of **Skid Row** or his scrupulous fidelity to the original text in **Who Has Seen The Wind**, as a director King tends to make himself invisible, as if absent from his own films.

In this way, Allan King is arguably the most Bazinian of directors. André Bazin believed that it was the cinema's chief privilege to be able to record directly a pre-existing reality. Thus he preferred the extended takes of William Wyler to the subjective camera tricks of Alfred Hitchcock; and he valued the grainy, newsreel quality of the early films of Rossellini over the conceptual editing that has been so much talked about in Eisenstein. I believe, had he lived to see them, Bazin would have also valued the films of Allan King.

Of course, King is not *actually* absent from his own films! But he does stand back in a way, whether through respect or from timidity. This is what makes **Running Away Backwards** such a challenging film to deal with. Essentially, it is about discontent – the discontent of over 1,000 ex-patriots that are seeking a "cure" in Ibiza. They are attempting to gain some health from a more primitive civilization where there is still some harmony between its citizens and their landscape, where there is still a human pace and scale to life. Yet, as the old Spaniard explains it towards the end of the film, these Canadians are all spectators, unable to understand. "Words which have disappeared from your dictionaries are still meaningful here," as he explains.

In this way, throughout the film, the search is presented as both futile and necessary – as a stage one must go through. So it is the rhetorical Jake who leaves at the end because he has seen the limitations of the histrionic self-assertions that this new world has allowed him; while Hank, who has resisted the idleness and sexual freedom that characterizes this ex-patriot community, is left behind – supposedly to do some “grad work” on himself with the young blonde who seems both to attract and frighten him, offering a challenge which, at least in those days, Canadians found hard to deal with on their own soil!

Looked at today, the film contains a lot of nonsense. Yet I know it is a nonsense that felt real to many of us of that '50s generation. On a personalized, existential plain, the film registers a rejection. Yet unlike our existential leaders to the south, unlike Norman Mailer, Ernest Hemingway, and Henry Miller, in **Running Away Backwards**, there seems no espousal. There is no sense of politics and no concern at all with cultural analysis. One simply spends one's time away, “like children playing in a Roman church,” as that old Spaniard put it, and then one goes home again, no doubt to “earn a buck”, having dabbled in sex and art.

The film, then, also registers an immaturity – an immaturity which is part of the sense of embarrassment that the film can cause but is also part of its quality. It is as if Allan King and his associates had the initiative to make explicit some of the adolescent over-assertions that certainly were felt by many Canadians of that generation but which few of us would have had the courage to express so openly. In this way, the film becomes a document of a certain class of Canadian self-evaders, seeking escape from the monied rat-race but finally so dependant upon it that inevitably they are drawn back. Running away backwards, as the film is called: people aware of an absence, of something their life has denied them, yet only able to affirm it in the most juvenile of ways.

“If you have a sensitive, intelligent, quiet, responsive, unobtrusive and unjudging, impersonally critical cameraman or camera crew, then not only is the camera not inhibitive, but it stimulates the (people) to talk, in the same way an analyst or therapist does. You can talk if you want to; you don't have to talk if you don't want to; you do what you want.”⁴

The same attitude and problems are present in the next three major films that Allan King directed (in between doing bread & butter items, largely from London, for the CBC): **Warrendale** (1967), **A Married Couple** (1969), and **Come On Children** (1973). Each film represents a distinguished example of King's early way of working. They are not “just” documentaries but they are not quite dramatic fiction either; and like **Running Away Backwards**, all three films leave us feeling a bit uneasy at the end.

Both **Warrendale** and **Come On Children** concern themselves directly with adolescents, with young people who have come to feel that they live outside society. **Warrendale** explores the “holding” therapy devised by John Brown for the treatment of emotionally disturbed children – a treatment which (in the film) involves a mixture of extreme caring and something that looks like violence; while **Come On Children** takes a group of “disaffected young people from the suburbs of Toronto” (as the opening title explains it) and set them up on a farm where they are allowed, perhaps encouraged, to “do their own thing.”

Of the two films, **Warrendale** is the more disturbing – as much because of the therapy as the filmmaking. In this way, like other films by Allan King, the experience of watching it

throws us away from the film *as a film* and out into a discussion of the material it contains.

Yet the film is not neutral. Nor is the fact of filming in such an environment without its effect upon the kids. Young Tony, especially, who, throughout the film is constantly telling everybody to “Fuck off!” – a touch of realism that kept the film off the grandmotherly CBC – at one point looks directly at the camera and asks, as if to us, “Why do I swear all the time?” I don't think it is hard to find an answer. Like other people in the film (though to a lesser degree), he is aware of his “performance”.

But the film is remarkable for the environment it creates – both topographical and psychological. The Warrendale clinic looks indeed like a warren of dwellings placed in a mud and rubble wasteland – a suburban nightmare which, in itself, couldn't help but increase the sense of isolation that all the children feel. In a way then, not dissimilar from the attitudinizing adults in **Running Away Backwards**, the kids are cut off from what might be their real culture – from their actual homes in some sort of city dwellings, hopefully more humane than this setting we see them in. While I have neither the space nor the competence to fully discuss the implications of this therapy, it is disturbing to say the least.

I can see its virtues – the virtues of confrontation. The kids are not allowed to retreat into themselves. When they shout or get violent, they are shouted back at in return and held firmly by caring arms. But sometimes this holding involves as many as three adults at a time for just one child. And the kids are expected to verbalize everything. Tony must explain why he resents Terry's bad breath; and Carol must rationalize her resentment of Walter – the fact that she misses him because he is rarely there. Now is this loving force or emotional rape? This is the question that the film leaves unanswered.

The film finds its centre in the death of Dorothy, the cook – one of those “happy accidents” in filmmaking that allow the filmmakers to shape their material towards a climax. But even this, considering the nature of the event and the public way it is announced, with all the kids gathered together and the camera ready to roll, is somewhat disturbing.

But as a film, **Warrendale** is important largely because it leaves us with all these problems. It confronts us directly, both with the validity of the therapy, and with the ethics of filmmaking. Once again in his life, Allan King has taken on a project that many more cautious people would have shied away from.

Come On Children is organized in much the same way, except that there is no “happy accident”. One of the girls has a baby, but this isn't dwelt upon; one of the guys shoots up speed. Another lad, John Hamilton, really becomes the “star” of this film. Through his song-writing, he is also a kind of choric commentator. He is constantly playing the guitar and entertaining us with his stories and with all his unfocussed charm. A small confrontation occurs in this film when all the parents come up for a day. But even this is low key – a sad but basically unangry presentation of the generation gap of which these kids are so aware.

There were a number of films made at the end of the '60s, before the Youth generation gave way to what Tom Wolf has called the Me generation: Mort Ransen's **Christopher's Movie Matinee** and Jacques Godbout's **Kid Sentiment**, both made in 1968; and Claude Jutra's **Wow!** made the following year. In the context of these films, **Come On Children** is admirable both because of the respect it brings to these kids and because of the quiet rhythm that gradually establishes itself as the kids sit around and talk and sing and do not too much at all. And if the fact of intrusion seems less in this



One of the emotionally disturbed children at Warrendale.

film than in **Warrendale**, it is nevertheless made explicit at a couple of points in the film.

During an early sequence while two of the lads are eating breakfast, one of them becomes increasingly impatient with the fact he is being filmed, an impatience that becomes anger before our eyes. "You're fucking the shit outta me, man," he finally screams, putting his hand up before the camera. And towards the end of the film, as the kids are getting ready to leave, one of them is directly interviewed by King himself – a rare disruption for an Allan King film. "What are you going back to?" we hear King ask from behind the camera; and then a whole series of questions concerning what he is going to do, what he would like to do; if he went away, what he would do there; and so on. To each of these questions, in a pleasantly smiling but ultimately hopeless way, the young lad replies "Nothing." Nothing in the world as he has known it. "Maybe get with whatever's happening elsewhere," as he finally puts it.

Like so many of King's films, **Come On Children** presents people without a future, without a culture to sustain them, with no clear idea of what they exist in the world to do. The film plays off with John singing the well-known Dylan song which seems to sum up the feeling of them all:

*... I'm walkin' down that lonesome road, Babe,
Where I'm bound I cannot tell...*

Miraculously, however, King's discreet direction combines with the editing skills of Arla Saar to give this film where nothing happens a gently reflective rhythm and distinct shape of its own. It becomes a quiet kind of drama – a drama of nice kids who have a real respect for one another but who feel there is nothing to do and nowhere to go. It is no wonder that the film hasn't been seen. It would be too much like an accusation.

*"Some of the critics... felt that **A Married Couple** had no imagination or that it was somehow dull. I'm a little puzzled by the expectations for fantasy in film, for myth-making; it seems that if you can give people a comfortable fantasy or myth, it is easier for them to accept. If you say what you feel directly or show them the world as you experience it, this seems to cause difficulties."⁵*

Of all the films of this period, **A Married Couple** represents King's most dramatic achievement. However, like most other distinguished Canadian films within this system of ours controlled by American exhibition outlets, it hasn't been a great commercial success. Yet its influence has been considerable, most obviously on the American television series **An American Family** but also on the parliamentary documentation done in Britain by Roger Graef – one of the old team of Allan King Associates when they were based in London.

It is not exactly an *agreeable* film – unless you like to listen to people shouting at one another for the better part of an hour and a half. It is not a film that makes you wish you were married! But what is so extraordinary is that the couple which King found to consent to such a project, Billy and Antoinette Edwards, are both natural performers. They bring an energy to everything they do that makes for interesting material on the screen.

Seen nowadays, several years after it was made, the film seems like a study of oppression – largely of the man over the woman but also of all the members of the family by the structure of family life itself. As a family, the Edwards quantify everything. Nearly all their squabbles concern mo-

ney and the acquisition of material goods – a pair of \$40.00 shoes; a new shag rug; a gas stove for their re-modelled kitchen, a washer and dryer, a new hi-fi! Billy, in characteristic fashion, offers the classical male argument: since he makes most of the money, he has most of the rights – an argument that Antoinette strives constantly to resist.

As the Edwards depict it for us, in the edited version of their lives which we have on this film, married life is a struggle for dominance with all the cards stacked in favor of the male. Even their sex-life becomes part of this battle. Antoinette tries desperately to defend her right, when she feels like it, to sleep in her own bed. Talk between the Edwards seems like thrust and counter-thrust, with Antoinette's suggestions becoming more and more preposterous the more aggressively they are resisted by Billy. Like their opening argument about the harpsichord, for example, a scene that reads so tersely in transcription that it seems hard to imagine that it never was "written":

Antoinette: Where so you think we should put the harpsichord? Over there?

Billy: The harpsichord. I don't know. The same place we're gonna put the rock band. What harpsichord?

A: That I'm gonna buy.

B: You're not gonna buy a harpsichord.

A: Oh yes I am with part of my money.

B: Oh no, you're not gonna buy a harpsichord.

A: Yes, I'm gonna buy a musical instrument.

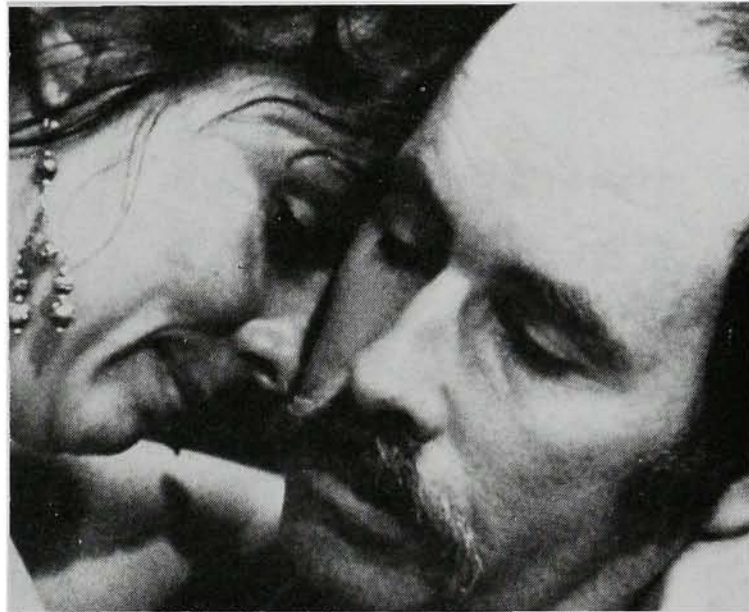
B (shouting): You're not gonna buy a harpsichord. And the reason you're not buying a harpsichord is because the harpsichord is a selfish instrument just for you. The money is gonna go to buying the things we absolutely need. What do we need a goddam harpsichord for?

A: How can I study voice again if I don't have a musical instrument?

B: You don't need a harpsichord. I'll get you a harmonica.

If there is rarely the sense of a genuine conversation between them, rarely the sense of speech as gentle exchange, the film is not without its moments of tenderness. Billy is often presented as playing with their son, Bogart, or fondling their dog, Merton. There is a lovely moment in the film when all four of them are sitting on the floor together, testing out their new hi-fi, and exchanging kisses with one another (even with Merton) and listening to that old Beatles recording of "Maria". Right after this scene, Billy and Antoinette are alone together, dancing to "I'd love to turn you on...", she all wrapped around him as they move together, the image somewhat fractured by the bevelled glass of the french doors that the cameraman Richard Leiterman, is shooting through. It is a most effective moment, I would argue, because the distance both suggests reticence on the part of the crew concerning this intimacy and, through the splitting up of the image, the scene also creates a pleasant visual effect.

A sadder, more tender moment occurs after a party sequence towards the end of the film. Antoinette has been flirting with some guy in a red shirt which (as the film is fictionalized in the editing) seems to have led to a sort of squabble between the Edwards, once they got home. In any case, after the party, the film picks them up in close-up, cuddling on the sofa. Antoinette is crying and talking quietly to Billy – possibly the most tender talk in the film. But we can't hear what they are saying. A record they are listening to (one of Sarastro's arias from *The Magic Flute*) erases their speech from the sound-track. Although the scene actually happened this way when they were shooting it, this effect again suggests reticence on the part of the filmmakers. It also forces us to deal purely visually with the significance of the scene.



Antoinette and Billy Edwards in a rare quiet moment.

It is not an encouraging moment. Antoinette seems really disturbed, as if trying to reach Billy. But his face is largely turned away from her – as if like elsewhere in the film, in rejection of whatever she has to offer him. The scene ends with a dissolve to Antoinette alone in her own bed, cuddling her pillow. Then we cut to Billy, still downstairs, finishing off a drink and patting the dog.

A Married Couple is a most distinctive film. There is nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world. It is a frightening experience. Like all the other films of this "documentary" period, **A Married Couple** is also a film about exiles, about people cut off from a culture that might meaningfully sustain them. While there is no political analysis in any of King's films, they all add up to a statement that cries out for political interpretation. They are all about alienation. They present the separation of the individual from culture. Unless we are deeply pessimistic about life and accept all these problems as an unalterable aspect of "human nature", King's films all suggest the need for social change.

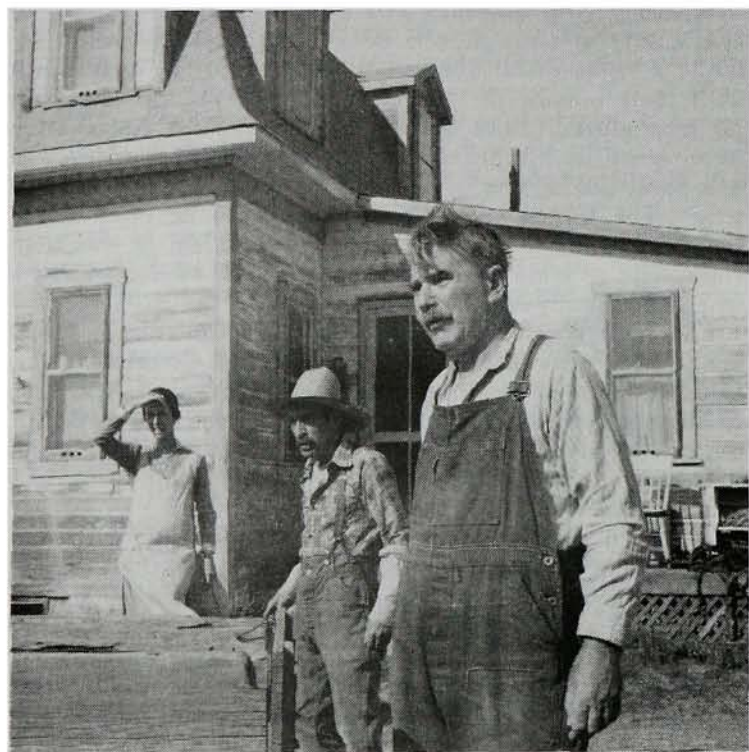
Whether King himself is aware of this, I do not know. His characters certainly aren't. Both Antoinette and Billy see nothing wrong within the institution of marriage as it exists, with their pursuit of the perfect home. The problems are all internalized. Both Billy's dominance and Antoinette's resentment are ritualized into the routines of marriage. At one point during one of their fights, Billy is explicit about this. "The framework isn't the problem," he cries out at her. "The laws of society are not the problem in this marriage. The problem is you and me. ... What we don't know is whether we really hate one another or not."

Like both **Warrendale** and **Come On Children**, like most of the early work of Allan King, **A Married Couple** is a film that, in spite of the fine shape that King and Arla Saar finally evolved for it, leads us away from the film as a film, out to talk about the problems it contains – the problem of marriage. And that statement of Billy's could provide a central point from which discussion might begin.

Although the film ends tenderly, it also ends with non-achievement – with Antoinette and Billy seeking the creature comforts of touching one another, of holding one another, but with nothing really resolved. We know that the next day, fresh squabbles will begin. The Edwards are trapped within their own image of themselves: middle-class consumers whose life values are as empty and non-sustaining as the silly Heintz commercials it is Billy's job to supervise. As the film presents them to us, the Edwards'



Jose Ferrer as old Ben in *Who Has Seen the Wind*.



Sean, Ab and Annie searching in *Who Has Seen the Wind*.

lives are as barren of human sustenance as the wasteland setting of **Warrendale** and as hopeless of a future as the end of **Come On Children**. It is not a comforting picture of our middle-class world.

I'd done most of what I wanted to do in documentary, simply as a technical form. I didn't see it shifting very much from there. Also, I had always used documentary essentially as a dramatic form. I've done essay films, but I've always been interested in stories about people. It was never practical in Vancouver where I started to do dramatic work. We didn't have the budgets. We didn't think we had the experience to work in that manner. So one made films about real people and told a story about them.

*In essence, the form of **Warrendale** is a dramatic structure; and with **A Married Couple**, it is directly a dramatic structure with two central characters. The fact that they're documentaries, for me, has always been coincidental. That was economically where I could work.*

Using actors and scripts has more control in many respects and also allows for a range of experience that is beyond the scope of individuals who are playing themselves. Also, I began to feel that I wanted that kind of control. I wanted to be able to work more directly in a dramatic form, with actors.⁶

Since the dissolution of his offices in London, and of his Toronto company after **Come On Children**, Allan King has been working increasingly for television, as indeed he has always done. But now with a difference. Since 1974, he has increasingly involved himself with drama, involving real scripts and real actors. In some ways, this work is more conventional than the work he has done in the past.

There are several reasons for this switch to drama, both financial and practical. Financially, in spite of their distinction, King's actuality dramas didn't make much money; and practically, through John Hirsch and the revitalization of television drama at the CBC, all of a sudden work in filmed drama became more of a possibility. There are other factors too that may have influenced him: his increased association with Patricia Watson, now both his colleague and his wife; plus his admiration for Toronto's little theatre – for directors like Paul Thompson and Martin Kinch and for playwrights like Carol Bolt, two of whose plays he has filmed.

In fact, his version of **Red Emma** (1976) has much of the old King quality about it. Helped by the constantly steady camera work of Edmund Long, King made what at times looks like a documentary of Kinch's stage production but which at other times seems like a film version of the play itself, with Kinch directing the actors and King his film crew. Kinch worked with King again for Rick Salutin's **Maria** (1976), a film about a young lady in a clothing factory who tries to organize a union. This time, however, Kinch is simply the dialogue coach and King is the director. It is as if, by these means, King has been training himself for the different sort of challenges that dealing with actors entails.

Among these television programs, the most innovative is **Six War Years** (1975), a video adaptation of Barry Broadfoot's oral history of the Second World War. Working directly on tape, King was able to superimpose close-ups of faces in color speaking directly to us over black-&-white newsreel footage of the war; and he also had a handful of faces in color speaking directly to us over black & - white



Reverend Powelly and Mrs. Abercrombie listen to the proceedings in *Wind*.

newsreel footage of the war; and he also had a handful of actors play out a variety of roles. Apparently influenced by Paul Thompson's work with the Theatre Passe Muraille, *Six War Years* might really be described as a piece of "epic" television – a Brechtian combination of direct statement and dramatic re-creation that simultaneously moved and informed us. Its achievement still represents one of the most **original** hours of television that I have seen anywhere in the world.⁷

Less satisfactory, to my mind, is King's direction of *Baptising* (1975), drawn from the story by Alice Munro. My own misgivings about this film centre basically on the music. While the story does connect young Del's dreams of romantic love with listening to opera, the decision to run operatic music over her later scenes of lovemaking has disquieting results. First of all, it gives to all these sequences an Elvira Madiganish sort of lyricism which is a cliché, to say the least. Secondly, the continued use of this music might imply that the *reality* of making love is still wrapped up with Del's dreams. It might suggest that she isn't learning anything, that she isn't growing up. But it is the point of the original story to illustrate the reverse.

Nevertheless, whatever my reservations, *Baptising* too provided a fine experience for its viewers within the opiate world of television. It certainly offered an excellent training ground for the greater challenges of *Who Has Seen The Wind*.

It is difficult at this stage to see where Allan King is going. Since *Who Has Seen The Wind*, King has already made a film version of Carol Bolt's *One Night Stand*, and I assume that he will go on working for the CBC. But he wants to make theatrical features; and even if, by his own past achievements, this means he is working in a more conventional mode, Allan King's artistic presence is still very much there.

While I have tried to do so intermittently throughout this article, the exact nature of this presence is still hard to characterize. It has to do with innocence and also with naivety – initially about the expected characteristics of the medium he was working in and, throughout his life, about the complexities of existence, especially when seen from a social/political point-of-view. But these twin characteristics are, arguably, what make his films so unmistakably Canadian, speaking from and to an Anglo-Saxon, middle-class culture which was at one time so dominant but which has become increasingly uncertain of itself since the Second World War. Related to this too is possibly King's lack of

self-assertion: in his documentary days, his respect for the reality he was filming; now in his drama days, his respect for the original text.

Thinking about King's achievement, I keep remembering Keats' notion of "negative capability" – an openness to experience which Keats believed essential for the receptivity of the artist. This, Allan King has in abundance – almost to a fault. Until *Who Has Seen The Wind*, King's major films have all been about rejects, about misfits within the society that contains them. But this subject matter is never analysed as such. The situations are simply presented to us, always with King's sensitivity and respect; but there is little in the films that might betray King's personal attitude.

Perhaps King's work on *Red Emma* and *Maria* might lead to a more direct awareness of the political issues which form a submerged dimension in all of his work. But if his films present characters with no culture to sustain them – culture in the anthropological sense of shared values and conventions – then this might well explain both King's attraction to and the achievement of *Who Has Seen The Wind*.

Who Has Seen The Wind depicts a re-creation of our past, a past where society was not vitiated by generation gaps and battles between the sexes, a world where – as Helen sings at the beginning of *Red Emma* – "all their lies were true." People believed in things: in the process of Nature, in the continuity of human life, in the necessity of self-sacrifice – as they did as well, more grimly, in *Six War Years*. The male-centered world of middle-class, Anglo-Saxon dominance had not yet been challenged nor made aware of its increasing inability to nurture its own children.

Furthermore, the formal tidiness of fiction must be attractive to King at this stage of his career; for fiction provides a stronger sense of order than is possible when working with the raw material of actuality footage, struggling after the event to find an order in the editing. Finally, the extraordinary feeling – both of sincerity and wholeness that characterizes every frame of *Who Has Seen The Wind* is all the more impressive because these qualities are the characteristics of a past that still had a strong sense of active community values, values that have virtually vanished from the suburban sprawl of our increasingly urbanized world – the setting of so many of King's previous films.

In this way, *Who Has Seen The Wind* seems like the complement of Allan King's previous work, as if rounding it off and bringing it to an end. But hopefully (if our audiences support this film), it is also a beginning. □

Notes

I would like to thank Allan King personally and his secretary, Christine Harris, for arranging for me to re-screen nearly all of these films.

1. From *Allan King, an interview with Bruce Martin* (Ottawa, The Canadian Film Institute, 1971), p. 14
2. *Ibid*, p. 1
3. See "Men of Vision" (on the films of Don Shebib) by Peter Harcourt in *Cinema Canada* No 32 (Oct. '76), pp. 35-40.
4. In *The New Documentary in Action: a casebook in Film Making*, by Alan Rosenthal (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1971), p. 29
5. In *Allan King, an interview*, p. 17
6. From a personal conversation with Allan King, recorded in July, 1977
7. I have already talked about this program in somewhat the same terms in "Frequent Hirschs: some reflections on TV drama after the third year of the CBC renaissance," in *Books in Canada*, Vol 5 No 4 (April '77), p. 14.

The above article will appear in a book on Canadian critical studies, edited by David Helwig, to be published by Oberon Press in the Spring of 1978. The book will also contain an article on Claude Jutra as well as studies on theatre and literature.

Reel Feelings at the Toronto



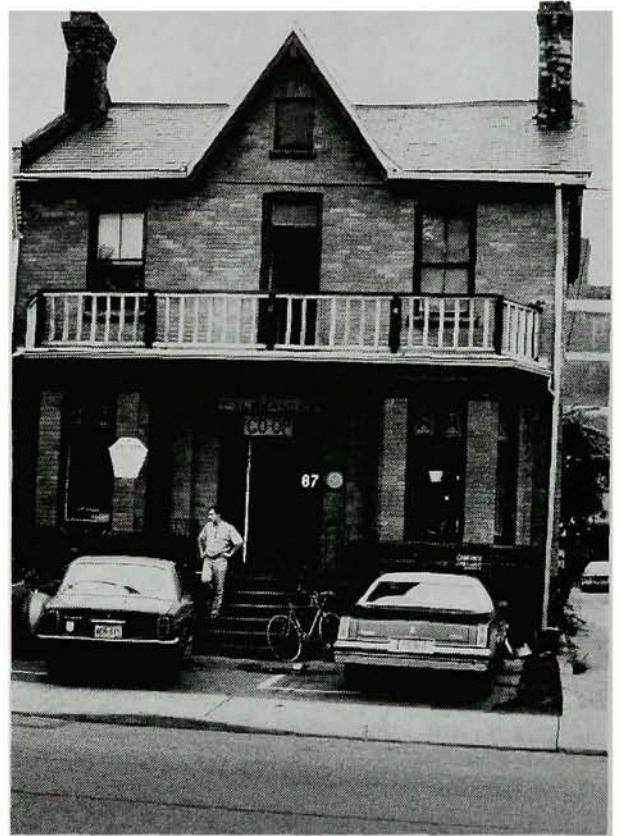
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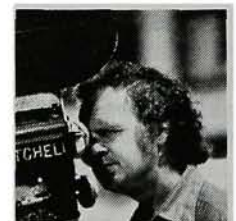
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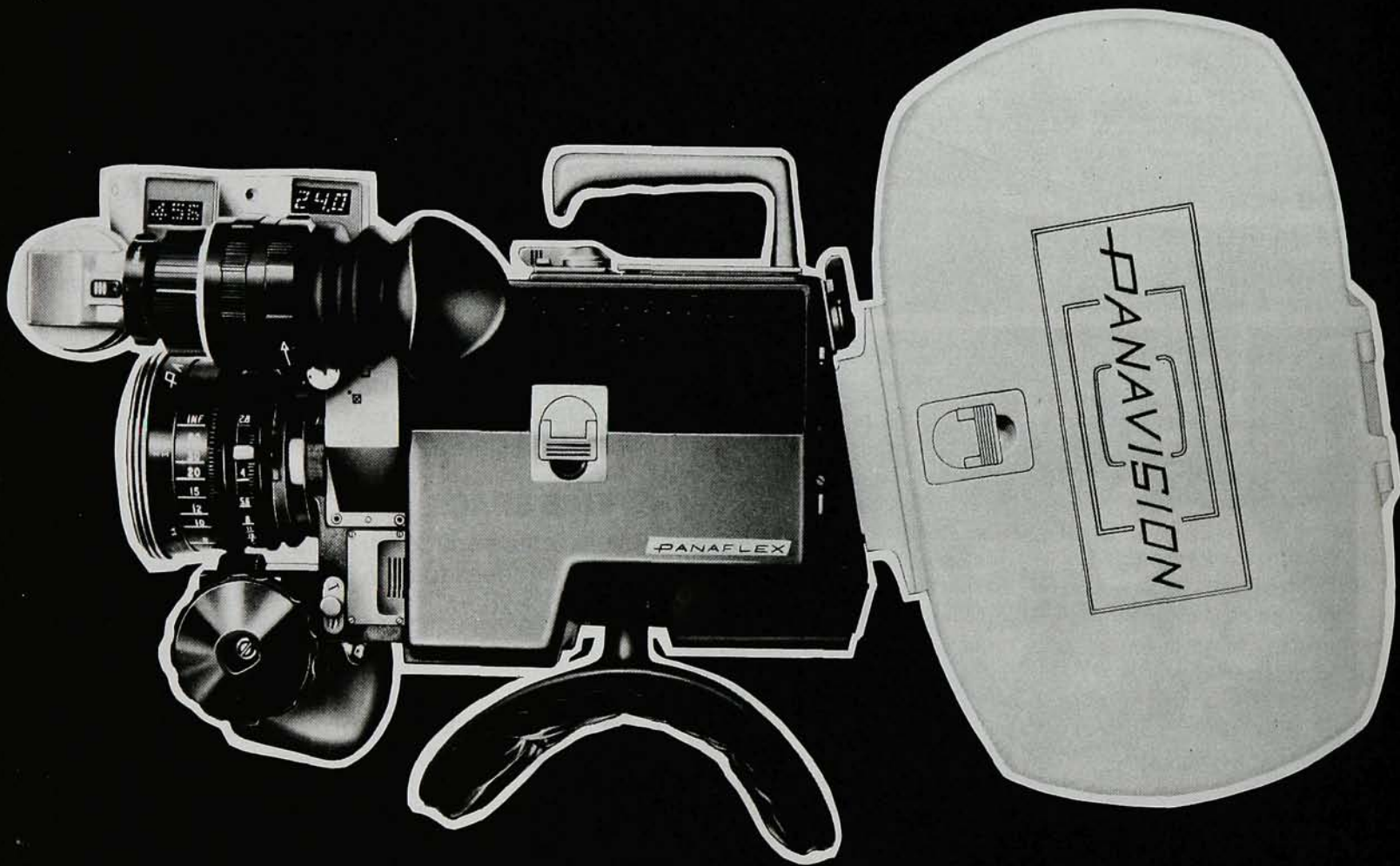
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