

FILM REVIEWS

steno with her supervisor than the ruler of her country.

The dialogue is wooden and repetitious. The Queen to George: "Your studies are so important, especially those about when you'll be king." In two separate and distinct scenes, George's tutor tells him (with appropriate slides) that he's a candidate for assassination. The Queen tells us, at least five times, that she's worried about the skulking, the killing.

The acting is atrocious. Charlotte Blunt, as the Queen, clearly lacks aristocratic charisma. Christopher Barry, as George, does nothing but scowl. Cec Linder, playing the Prime Minister, is too much the professional to look or sound bad, but for a man asking his queen to resign, he seems curiously uninterested.

Geoffrey Bowes, as Calvin, is the high point of the movie. In engaging scenes with the dummy, his speech and gestures are delivered with skilled timing. And Trudy Weiss, as the Queen's aide/lady-in-waiting, exudes a critical, almost sinister intelligence behind her banal lines.

Unfortunately, the suspense sequences

are not suspenseful. The Queen enters the cellar to look for the cat. The music rises. She turns on a light and comes face to face with a mirror. Shock! The music peaks and drops. She comes back down the hall, looking in rooms. Behind a door we see, lying on the floor, a glove belonging to the Skulker. The Queen peeks in, looks around, the music climaxes, but she does not see the glove and leaves. In no way could that glove have given her any useful information or threatened her. Where then is the suspense? Or consider the idiocy of a Skulker who wears luminous-green editing gloves that have no psychological or practical significance for him. They are there only for the audience.

In some scenes, over-exposed shots cause cheeks to disappear in glaring hot spots. But despite lighting continuity problems, there are several fine compositions. However, one can't escape the dreadful blocking, that results in scenes played out with characters standing in the middle of rooms as if they'd been warned

not to touch the furniture. (Considering that the film was shot in Casa Loma on, reportedly, \$200,000, that may be the case.) On occasion, the soundtrack distorts to the point of incoherence.

The list goes on, but space runs out. If you believe all this, you may be wondering how such a monumental piece of dreck ever made it to the screen. Some of the blame must go to producer and president of Hazelton Motion Picture, Inc., David F. Eustace. Eustace, I've heard, is an insurance man who sold his business and bought the Canadian rights to *It's Alive!* — and with the profits from that, made *Something's Rotten*. This makes him a beginner so, he should not be judged too harshly. Certainly not as harshly as Norman Fox, the writer, or F. Harvey Frost, director.

If you don't believe what you've read, go and see for yourself. Then come back and apologize; maybe next time you'll listen!

Andrew Dowler

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SHORT FILM REVIEWS

Young and Just Beginning — Pierre

p.c. Ruth Hope Assoc. p./d. Ruth Hope, Mark Irwin cam. Mark Irwin, Robin Miller sd. Bryan Day, John McGill mus. Gary Gegan, Clive Parks, Gord Paton, Mark Irwin ed. Ruth Hope assist. ed Gary Gegan dancers Pierre Quinn, Talitha Arndt, Kevin Pugh, Kim Glascock pas de deux John Alleyne, Kim Glascock choreog. Deborah Bowes, Barbara Forbes piano Ronald Raymond, Trevor McLain col. 16 mm length 25 min. year 1979 dist. Kenetic Film Distributors.

Young and Just Beginning — Pierre, the award-winning documentary produced by Ruth Hope and Mark Irwin is a beautiful tour through the National Ballet School of Canada, and an insightful look at the rigorous life of children aspiring to be artists. It is not however, what its title implies it will be: a specific, in depth study of Pierre.

The title of a work is an indication of its purpose. The film does indeed focus on eleven-year-old Pierre Quinn — a young Quebecer who has left his family and friends behind, to train at the Toronto school — but not strongly enough. Granted, an eleven-year-old who is "just beginning" to learn the technique and feel the spirit

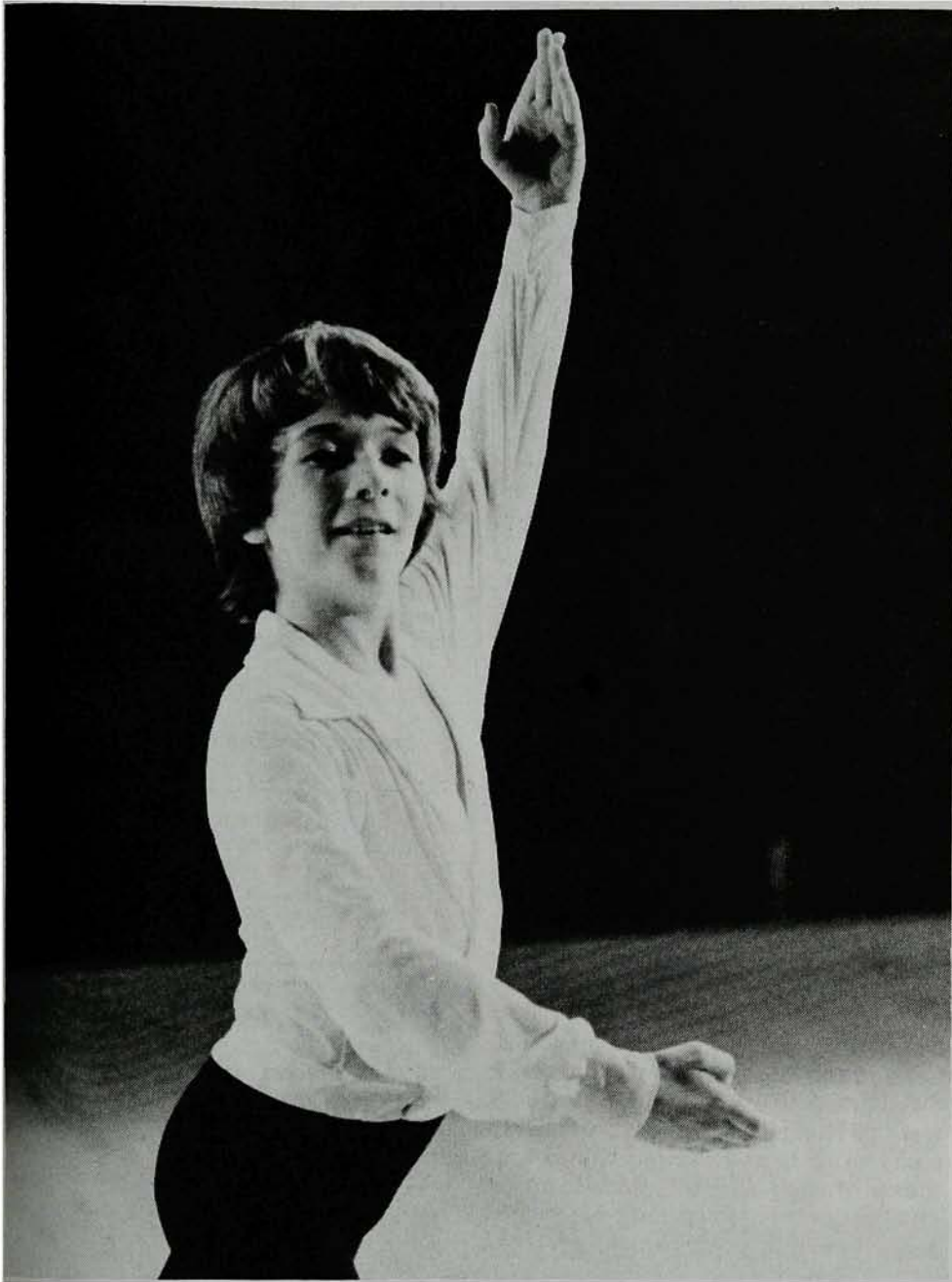
of his chosen art is obviously not going to be the most articulate and sophisticated of subjects; but, if you put the film beside any of the episodes in the CBC's *Spread Your Wings* series (films about children which are trying to do exactly the same thing as *Pierre*), you realize that Pierre himself borders on being an excuse to study dancers in general, instead of being the film's *raison d'être*.

Still, *Pierre*, and the young dancers as a group, present a powerful and definite point of view. Their faces, reflecting earnest concentration, or the sudden fun of a mistake, are irresistible. Their gangly arms and skinny ankles working toward grace and strength give us a clear sense of where the technique of art comes from. The editor adeptly portions out these elements with a rhythm that is both elegant and truly evocative of the studios atmosphere.

The dance-class setting, with the bars, the mirrors, the patch of light on the middle of the bare floor from a window, and of course the dancers, is a photographer's delight. Fortunately, Irwin doesn't get carried away, but uses his camera with commendable restraint to create apt images of a place where something difficult, with a beautiful reward at its end, is being learned.

The Kickboxers

p./d./ed. Gary Bush ph. Dave Geddes asst. ph. Jan-Marie Martell gaf. Ron Williams ed. Gary Bush sd. Richard Patton sd.ed. Shelly Hamer sd. re.rec. John Bennest p. asst. Scott Bickham m. Paul Grant, Craig Thomlinson m. engineer Steve Hunter l.p. Tony Morelli, Dennis Crawford, Rob Webb p.c. Gary Bush Productions col. 16mm 3/4" video cassette running time 17 min. 35 sec.



Pierre Quinn aspiring to be a Baryshnikov in *Young and Just Beginning* — Pierre

Most importantly, the film keeps us aware that the National Ballet School is a school . . . with children in it. The sequences of the kids in class, or rushing around with blazers and kilts flying, are exuberant and vital elements of the whole. The teachers enhance this feeling, in the studio and the classroom, where they are clearly enjoying themselves teaching dance to happy youngsters, not heavy-headed eleven-year-old artists.

Gary Gegan's music maintains the juxtaposition of art and childhood in all parts of the film. But the serious, adult aspects of ballet study must also be dealt with.

The film winds down by focusing on the older students, in control of their talent, aware of its possibilities. A lovely pas de deux is presented at the climax, and then a series of action stills of the great dancers.

Finally, we return to Pierre, who tells us that he wants to be like Baryshnikov. We believe him; we too want him to be like Baryshnikov after seeing this film. But we haven't been brought close enough to him to really feel the why and wherefore of his dream.

John Brooke

In the words of filmmaker Gary Bush, *The Kickboxers* is a "profile of three livewire fighters (actually two fighters and a coach) who make contact with life through the sport of full-contact kickboxing." Kickboxing, as a metaphor for life, may sound simplistic, but it makes perfect sense within the context of this lively documentary.

Incorporating elements from boxing and Kung Fu, this popular Oriental sport has recently gained adherents in North America. Like boxing, padded gloves are worn, and winning in competition is based on a point system or, frequently, knocking out one's opponent. But, according to Gary Bush, who practices the sport himself, kickboxing is the more brutal sport because kicking is part of the technique. The idea of coming into contact with life stems from Bush's belief that the importance of a martial art such as kickboxing lies in its ability to help people overcome fear — not the fear of injury or of losing a tournament, but the fear of oneself. Winning is not the ultimate goal: mastering the discipline of kickboxing and thereby receiving inner tranquility is. It is an interesting dichotomy — a rough sport emphasizing strength and speed, that leads one to the road of inner peace. Bush, who is calm and soft-spoken, says that this dual nature of the sport is what fascinates him.

The Kickboxers takes us into the glare and ruckus of Rob Webb's gym outside Vancouver. A former champion himself, Webb is training Tony Morelli (the Canadian Light Heavyweight Kickboxing champion), and Dennis Crawford (the Super Lightweight Western Canada Champion). We are told that some of the best kickboxers in British Columbia train at this gym.

Tony and Dennis, who work as a carpet layer and welder respectively, are preparing for a forthcoming competition. The film immediately takes us into the boxing ring with a direct overhead shot of the two fighters. Their movements are so grace-

SHORT FILM REVIEWS



Alex Kwok in a scene from **Battle of Ego** — the foot is faster than the eye

ful, at first they appear to be dancing. Then, in a blur of red gloves, they begin to fight. This opening sequence radiates vitality. The fast action, and the predominance of the bright red and yellow of the boxing gloves and ropes, enhance the impression of vigor. Trainer, Webb, offers a panorama of facial contortions as he puts Tony and Dennis through their paces. When he pummels each in the stomach, Webb is obviously delighted that his protégés can withstand the beating. After a few quick jabs at the punching bags, and a stint at jumping rope, the boxers are removed to the comparative serenity of a very green, wooded park, through which they are running.

It is obvious after watching the training that kickboxing is a demanding discipline. But, because each movement is carefully orchestrated, it is also obvious that the sport, brutal as it may appear, is a civilized one.

Tony and Dennis are next shown at a competition. The contestants, wearing long, silken pants, display no emotion during the rounds, which are announced by a busty young girl carrying a placard: the same girl who bestows kisses on the winners. The fans, fairly evenly divided between males and females, are wide-eyed and exuberant to be sure, but not frenzied. Both Tony and Dennis are victorious in the competition, as we expect them to be. Because they enjoy the sport,

and because Webb is so confident in their ability, winning only seems natural.

The Kickboxers is the second in a series of films Gary Bush is doing on the martial arts. The first, a five-minute short called **Battle of Ego**, he calls an impressionistic account of his experience in the martial arts. It is a beautiful five minutes, filmed mostly in slow motion with, what sounds like, the breathing of a tiger in the background. **Ego**, which was shown at the World Film Festival — Montreal '79, features Kung Fu stylist, Alex Kwok. The next film will be shot in Hong Kong on the theme of survival. Bush plans to follow three young men from Vancouver as they encounter the complexities of Hong Kong society for the first time.

Gary Bush is interested in films on other cultures, especially those dealing with the disparity between East and West. He wants his films to help Canadians reach a deeper level of understanding of themselves and of the immigrant populations in their midst.

The Kickboxers has potential for wide appeal. It introduces, simply and completely, a sport practiced in this country that few Canadians are aware of. It entertains, while subtly presenting a sometimes forgotten, but important idea: it feels good to win, but there is tremendous satisfaction in making it through the training.

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