

SHORTS

Paul Mason's **Dragoncastle**

Dragoncastle is a claymation (plasticene animation) short. It won first prize for animation, the Chris Statuette, at the Columbus International Film Festival. It has also been a finalist in several other festivals, including the Canadian Film and Television Awards. Although *Dragoncastle* is ostensibly "an animation film for kids, made by kids," intended for Kindergarten through grades three or four, it has a much broader appeal.

The story is as simple as it is imaginative. It takes place in a strange, ecologically balanced kingdom. A Disneyesque castle presides over the productive pastoral of the village. There are the requisite fairy tale characters: the king, the queen, the knight, monsters, the dragon, and the townspeople. Yet these protagonists quickly break out of their stock medieval molds to become lovable individuals.

The action is narrated by two young children, one of seven years, who sticks pretty well to the point, and another of two years, who naively and delightfully punctuates the action with spontaneous exclamations and commentaries.

As the story opens, the farmers tend their cows and fields, the women do their chores, and the children play. All is at best in the best of worlds, or almost. The dragon, who lives in a cave under the castle, is accused of incinerating the odd house and devouring the occasional cow. The townspeople petition the king. Something must be done. The king, a benevolent despot if ever there was one, agrees, and sends for the white knight, who comes from afar to rid the kingdom of this dread beast. The dragon is not enchanted by the prospect of doing battle with a knight, but does haul himself from his cave and give the knight a good tussle. The knight eventually deals him a resounding bonk on the head, and the dragon sadly moves off, "not with a sore head but with hurt feelings."

Of course, no one realizes that in driving off the dragon the ecological balance of the entire kingdom has been drastically disrupted, until it's too late. The "moat monsters," without the dragon's flames to keep them swimming benignly around the castle, go on the rampage, destroying much of the village. As if this weren't enough, without the dragon's flames to provide central heating, the towers of the castle are soon bending and shaking with the combined coughing and sneezing of its inhabitants.

Once more the king is petitioned by the villagers. The knight is sent for, commanded to find the dragon and "politely" ask him to return. The knight swallows his pride and rides off on his charger. He finds the sulky dragon who, after a bit of hot air, agrees to leave his desolate cave and return to the kingdom, where he receives a hero's welcome. He quickly dispatches the monsters to their moat, reclaims his cave, and begins heating the cold, damp castle above. The balance is once again restored. The villagers rebuild their town and tend their gardens. The dragon is in his cave. Peace on earth.

Although *Dragoncastle* will be marketed as an educational film, it was not originally intended as such by those who conceived it. Becky and Paul Mason began working on *Dragoncastle* at the ages of 11 and 13, respectively, after receiving some plasticene as a Christmas present. They built a castle for fun, and also, just for fun, decided to try a few seconds of animation. Their father, Bill Mason, an award-winning NFB director, helped them with the more technical aspects. Five years later *Dragoncastle* was in the can.

Technically, the film is very accomplished. The animation is alive and believable, with great attention paid to often humorous detail. The editing is well-paced and there is a good variety of camera angles. The monsters and humans have distinct, endearing personalities. Remarkably, there are no "bad guys and good guys."

Becky and Paul began playing with the plasticene castle in the living room of their home. As the set grew, and the two began to take their game more seriously, their father allowed them to move into his studio. Yet the living room floor is never really abandoned. The film is never pedantic or moralistic. The fun of a child's game on the floor is preserved.

The original score is by Andrew Huggett. The string ensemble playing "early renaissance" music provides a sophisticated backdrop on which the voices of the two young narrators play. The distance between the childish commentaries and the adult music is teasing and fresh. Perhaps it echoes the distance between the adolescents who began the film and the young adults who completed it five years later, between the game on the floor and the work in the studio. These distances animate the animation and charm the viewer, whether he is a child, or simply a child at heart.

Jeffrey Reid ●

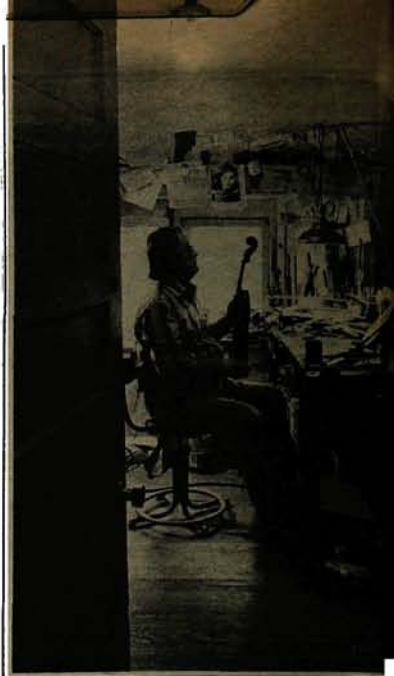
DRAGONCASTLE d. Paul Mason p. Bill Mason animators Paul & Becky Mason orig. score Andrew Huggett col. 16 mm running time 13 min. dist. Mobius International p.c. Mason Productions.

David Fine's **Viola**

David Fine's new short *Viola* conveys the feeling of hands - out exploration - a young director trying on an attitude for size. In this case, the attitude is rudimentary aesthetics: it is a lovely film to look at, bold in no way, but still lovely and simple and full of life.

The viola itself is shown as an object of obvious sculptural beauty, and Fine has been lucky in his chance to work with Mark Irwin, whose camera work here is so lush and epicurean. We are shown the making of the instrument in detail, and Otto Erdesz's especially sensual approach to his craft. His attitude towards the creation of the instrument enlivens it for the viewer. At the end of the film, the craftsman's wife/musician, Rivka Golani-Erdesz, plays the viola with intensity that both touches and holds the audience. Fine and Irwin have managed to sustain the emotion and the integrity of the subject matter in document. If at times this film reads like the classic "artist's film" (step back and see Moore and his bones), on this level it is true to its subject matter, which is exciting in itself.

In the past Fine has worked primarily in animation. His short films have picked up a number of awards in various competitions, in the student division. Live action is a new direction for him and *Viola* is a respectable effort. With greater experience and confidence in



● "Otto Erdesz's especially sensual approach to his craft." PHOTO: DAVID FINE

his abilities, Fine may allow more of that imagination of his earlier work to once more show through - something we can look forward to. **Katherine Dolgy** ●

VIOLA

p./d. David Fine d.o.p./lights Mark Irwin, csc.ed. David Fine interviews Otto Erdesz, Rivka Golani-Erdesz, John Newton, Donald R. Dinovo **Bach's Adagio perform.** Rivka Golani-Erdesz, with Lillian Bezkorvany, Donald R. Dinovo, Shirley Fine, Carol Gibson, Gerard Kantarjian, Murray Lauder, Olga Priestman, John Trembath, Rosalie Zelonka **concert cam.** Mark Irwin, Phil Ernschaw, David Fine, Rolf Cutts (asst.) **concert rec.** Donald R. Dinovo **additional viola perform.** Rivka Golani-Erdesz **violins by** Otto Erdesz p.c. Fine Film Productions, 1980 (produced with the assistance of the Ontario Arts Council col. 16mm running time 27 min. 50 sec. dist. Magic Lantern Film Distributors Ltd.

LETTERS

(cont. from p. 37)

Score one for culture

Appearance of the new format prompts me to write a long-delayed note of appreciation. I think the magazine is making a very important contribution to our cultural growth and to the representation of that growth both at home and abroad. This last number has been really fine. The only thing that gives me a funny feeling is the description of yourselves in the masthead as a "charitable organization."

Dan Driscoll,
P.E.I. District Representative,
National Film Board

The Cinema Canada Magazine Foundation is indeed a charitable organization, and donations are accepted with thanks. Ed.

Count me out

Regarding the ad for Cinema Canada's "coverage at Cannes." Congratulations. It's sexist, exploitative and very American, in the fashion of Penthouse and Playboy. I hope you're very happy with your new image. If I had a subscription, I'd cancel it.

Sharon Thomson
Vancouver

The ad got the results intended; no one forgot it, and the Cannes coverage, as you can see, is super.

Just a note about the ad being sexist. A sexist ad is one which uses sex gratuitously to sell a product, exploiting the person in the ad. The photo was of a lady who goes to Cannes every year, and was taken on the beach there. Not only would she be thrilled with the additional exposure she got through our ad, but the ad itself goes a long way to render one of the visible attractions of the Cannes fest itself. Think of it as a documentary! Ed.

Good and disgusting

The new format of *Cinema Canada* is clearly a step forward; however, I find your choice for the cover of No. 73 and your advertising for coverage at Cannes both sexist and disgusting. Furthermore, if your magazine is, as you claim, "the best film magazine in Canada" (which it is), then why the need for "eye-catching" pictures that are cheap, exploitative and unnecessary?

Natalie Pawlenko
Toronto

The choice of the cover photo was made by Beryl Fox, the producer of By Design. We endorse her choice, and expect Claude Jutra's film to be neither cheap nor exploitative. Ed.

● *Dragoncastle's* unusual ecology...

PHOTO: BECKY MASON

