

Gilles Carle's **Jouer sa vie** (The Great Chess Movie)

Is it a sign of the times that two of Quebec's finest directors recently returned to their old stamping-ground, the National Film Board, to make documentary features? *Le confort et l'indifférence*, Denys Arcand's mordant analysis of the referendum defeat, appeared last year with quite a splash, and now we have Gilles Carle's *Jouer sa vie*, a modest and likeable feature on chess, sandwiched in Carle's career between *Les Plouffe* and its imminent sequel.

At its premiere at the Montreal festival in August, *Jouer sa vie* received the warm respectful applause rightfully due a pleasant minor work by a major director. It was also one of two Canadian features singled out by the international press for official praise (though this is less significant than the Board's press kit implies since most world-class Quebec features respected the Quebec independents' boycott of the festival). Since then, an English version, *The Great Chess Movie*, has bowed in the Toronto festival's New Directors, New Directions series (Carle may be a new director in Toronto...), and, though an attempt at a commercial run in Montreal was short-lived, the normal NFB outlets are expecting brisk traffic.

Witty and low-key, *Jouer sa vie* is more a meandering personal essay than a systematic analysis of international chess competition — not a bad approach for an activity so cerebral and so apparently uncinematic. Carle intercuts scenes of the high-level tournaments and of sidewalk duels (far more lively) with running commentaries by Quebec grand master Camille Coudari, billed as co-director, and a French chess columnist also known as the surrealist-anarchist dramatist, Fernando Arrabal. Although for me the glimpses of the social history of chess seemed more promising, the film's primary focus is on the three international champions of the seventies. The American recluse Bobby Fischer refused to appear in the film and is seen in library footage only; Soviet defector Viktor Korchnoi alone co-operated fully with the filmmakers though with no very memorable result; the most interesting of the three, current champion Anatoly Karpov appears up close only in one very uncompromisingly formal interview and a begrudging press conference, but his icy combination of innocence and arrogance steals the show.

You may wonder whether static tournaments, knowledgeable authorities, and uncooperative or uninteresting subjects can add up to a movie. Carle apparently wondered the same thing, resorting at times to distractingly cute music, snappy intertitles, and half a dozen clips from the chess scenes of world cinema, all in an attempt to soup up the film. The clips are of course wonderful, from Pudovkin's *Chess Fever* to Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* to Mel Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*, but they

tend to make you wish that Korchnoi and Karpov had just a little of the flair of Bette Davis as a glaring Elizabeth I, dramatically sweeping away the chessmen to lose her match but win the scene.

The dramatic weakness also has an ideological dimension. *Jouer sa vie* is very intent on criticizing the Russians' cold-war manipulation of the chess scene, but this denunciation of the politicization of chess is in itself very political: Korchnoi is depicted as "choosing freedom"; the unbeatable Karpov is equated filmically with images of Kremlin arms' parades; but the spoiled-brat wheeler-dealing whiz-kid, Fischer, escapes scot-free. Are Fischer and his network deals and millionaire chess patrons not equally symbolic of Reaganomics and El Salvador?

Ultimately, however, despite the tiresome Soviet-bashing and mild longueurs, *Jouer sa vie* is a pleasant and witty documentary. But, as the gimmicky suggests, Carle doesn't have enough command of the documentary medium nor enough confidence in his subject to crack the very hard nut that chess turned out to be. Two decades ago, Carle got started making short documentaries for the NFB, like everyone else in Quebec. I recall those films as also having been pleasant and witty (though the NFB in its wisdom has withdrawn most of them from circulation). In retrospect, however, those early documentaries were out of touch with the tremendous creative ferment that was going on elsewhere in the arena of direct cinema, both inside the Board and out. Carle considered documentary a "limited" genre at the time and could hardly wait to launch his career in features. In fact he put his foot in the features' door by means of a documentary on snow removal, which of course turned into *La vie heureuse de Léopold Z*, and the rest was history. Returning to roost after all these years and all that Carole Laure, Carle still gives the impression that he considers documentary a minor genre. And though we should be glad for this fruitful pause back within the documentary fold, it's probably all for the best that Gilles Carle is now back on the set surrounded by lighting setups and costumes, adapting still another classic Québécois novel, *Maria Chapdelaine*.

One final note is about another polit-

ical aspect of *Jouer sa vie* that is closer to home in its implications than the Russian bear-baiting; that is the way the NFB is itself playing politics with film distribution. Again. Of course I'm delighted that the NFB is keeping relevant documentaries in the theatres while Ottawa and Quebec City culturecrats are still deciding whether there's a will and a way to save our cinema. Who could deny that Arcand's *Confort*, Klein's *Not a Love Story*, and even the underwater Cousteau vehicle, *Les pièges de la mer*, have contributed immeasurably to the cultural and political atmosphere here in Quebec — despite or even because of the controversy that all three films have set off (and despite the urgency of the subjects that the NFB is still timidly boycotting, like abortion and gay rights)? I'll take these films over *Humongous* any day. I'm also delighted that English Canadians will be treated to *The Great Chess Movie*, an all-too-rare extension of the dialogue between the two founding cultures, as they say (although I hate the voice-overing that seems to be preferred to subtitled for such exchanges). Nevertheless, it's very suspicious that an innocuous film on chess gets versioned for the Anglos, while the infinitely more important and better film, *Le confort et l'indifférence* (a film that would really contribute to the dialogue and become a staple of high school history classes until the end of the century) does not. On what possible grounds is this film being withheld from the English Canadian circuit? The NFB was rightly upset about the mess the Ontario censors made of distribution plans for *Not a Love Story*. Internal censorship is apparently another matter.

Tom Waugh ●

JOUER SA VIE (THE GREAT CHESS MOVIE) d. Gilles Carle, Camille Coudari cam. Pierre Letarte, Thomas Vamos asst. cam. Seraphin Bouchard, René Daigle, Serge Laforune, Martin Leclerc, Jacques Tougas elec. Maurice De Ernsted ed. Yves Leduc ed. sd. Michel Bordeleau mix. Jean-Pierre Joutel research Coudari narr. Pascal Rollin graph. Louise Overy, Val Teodori p. Hélène Verrier ad. Joanne Carrière, Monique Létoirneau lp. Anatoly Karpov, Viktor Korchnoi, Robert Fischer, Ljubomir Ljubovic, Jan Timman, Vlastimil Hort, Igor Ivanov, Michael Valvo, Tigran Petrossian, Vassily Smyslov, Boris Spassky, Mikhail Talh, Jose-Raoul Capablanca, Max Euwe, Isaac Kashdan, Miguel Najdorf p.c. National Film Board of Canada in cooperation with the Société Radio-Canada 16mm colour running time: 79 min., 40 sec.

● Arrabal sits for an interview with Gilles Carle and producer Hélène Verrier



David Acomba's **Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave**

"The road has taken a lot of the great ones," Robbie Robertson said to Martin Scorsese at the end of *The Last Waltz*. And the first superstar he named who had died before his time, worn out by the road, was Hank Williams.

Robertson's remark is typical of the respect with which Hank Williams is still held. He died nearly 30 years ago on January 1, 1953, at the age of 27, in the back seat of his Cadillac, somewhere on a West Virginia highway. It is this respect that is the key to the success of David Acomba's film *Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave*.

Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave began as a play by Maynard Collins, which Sneezey Waters, a well-known figure on the Ottawa Country music scene, had premiered at the Beacon Arms Hotel in Ottawa. From there, Waters had taken it to Toronto's Horseshoe Tavern and general acclaim. It was conceived as a re-creation of what might have happened if Hank Williams had not died on the road that night, but arrived in Canton, Ohio, and played his intended concert.

Williams, by that time, had been fired from Nashville's Grand Ole Opry, then as now the fountainhead of country music, and was living off the bottle and the needle. Collins, Waters, and director David Acomba, however, choose to concentrate on Williams' electrifying musical presence and the bittersweet genius of his songs, thus avoiding the pitfalls of maudlin melodrama into which Mark Rydell let Bette Midler fall in *The Rose*.

By way of opening up the play, Acomba begins the film with Hank Williams in the back of his car, being driven through the night. As he drifts in and out of consciousness, he imagines stopping at one of the roadhouses, setting up, and putting on his show with his band. From time to time, the scene returns to the car, but by and large, it remains in Hank's mind.

The barroom is typical of any small town in America, and it is here that Hank seems most at home, playing his songs for the people. Acomba captures perfectly that transitional period of the early fifties, just before the arrival of rock and roll. Neither Waters nor Acomba treat the period contemptuously, and there is no irony about Williams' flattering remarks about Eisenhower and Nixon. Gradually, the audience in the theatre, like the audience in the bar, becomes caught up in the music, from the "hurtin' songs" for which Williams was best known — *Lovesick Blues*, *Cold Cold Heart*, *Your Cheatin' Heart* — to the uptempo *Jambalaya* and *Settin' The Woods On Fire*.

Sneezey Waters' skill as a performer is the key to the success of *Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave*. He recreates Williams' performances much more successfully than did George Hamilton in the previous film on Williams, in the 1964 *Your Cheatin' Heart*. In the



● As he might have been... Hank Williams (Sneezy Waters) on that last night

offstage sequences, whether flirting with Betty Anne the barmaid (Dixie Seattle) or doing a rousing jam of *Mind Your Own Business* with the club's black janitor (Jackie Washington), he remains true to the character, never slipping into excess. This is particularly true of the second set of the show, when Hank begins to slip and fall apart.

David Acomba's direction is steady and unobtrusive throughout the film. In sharp contrast to his previous film on the pressures of the music business, *Slipstream*, he no longer needs to resort to heavy-handed symbolism to make his points. Nor does he indulge in the kind of tricky camerawork and pretentious

visual style that marked his Toller Cranston fantasy *Strawberry Ice*.

Hank Williams-The Show He Never Gave is a textbook example of the kind of original, low-budget filmmaking that the country needs now, after the largely counterproductive excesses of the past three years. It was conceived as a television program, and should play well there. Hopefully, it could also play theatrically, provided Hank Williams' publishers, Acuff-Rose Music, about whom there are some sarcastic remarks in the film, give the okay.

J. Paul Costabile ●

HANK WILLIAMS: THE SHOW HE NEVER GAVE

d. David Acomba p. William Marshall, Henk Van Der Kolk exec. p. Peter Simpson, Richard Simpson assoc. p. Helga Stephenson sc. Maynard Collins orig. stage play Maynard Collins music p. Bill Garrett d.o.p. Albert Dunk csc art d. Ted Watkins ed. Sally Paterson CFE post-p. sup. Gerry Arbeid p. man. Phil McPhedran asst. p. man. Judy Watt p. consultant Peter Lamb cont. Susan David 2nd. cont. Joan Robinson 1st asst. d. Brad Turner 2nd asst. d. Roman Buchok 2nd asst. d. Extras: Ken Giroto p. sec. Victoria Sleeper p.'s sec. Linda Goldstein p. acc't. Sue Anderson asst. acc't. Joyce Caveen p. asst. Clark Johnson 1st asst. art d. Jill Scott set dress. Joyce Liggett prop. mast. Dan Connelly asst. props Robert James, Chris Biden, Pete Freeborn, Walter Woloszczuk prop. buyer Hilton Rosemarin trainee Jeff Meirovici cost. des. Erla Lank. D. Lynne MacKay ward. asst. Nadia Ongara, Mary-McCready, Deborah Weldon make-up Kathy Southern make-up asst. Barbara Palmer, Edelgard Kersch hair Sheila Yackimov assta. Albert Paradis, Jason Preston, Kent Ryde cam. op. Paul Birkett, Robert Rouveroy csc.

Doug Connell cam. asst. Brian Harper, Robert Guertin, Janek Croydon, Barry Gravell clapper loader Zoe Dirse 18 track rec. Doug McClement ed. Bob Danylak boom Stephen Switzer p.a. system Doug Kaye gaff. Brian Montague best boy Paul Bolton 1st elec. Sam Huges 3rd elec. Rick Davidson key grip Jonathan Hackett best boy Roy O. Irvine grips Kurt Schiegel, John Davidson Jr., Wayne Goodchild, Bob Murphy asst. ed. Lisa Di Michele sup. eff. ed. Henry Richardson sd. ed. Fred Brennan ed. mix Nolan Roberts, Tony Van Den Akker music ed. Carl Zitterer asst. eff. ed. David Richardson asst. sd. ed. Yanina Jezek cast. Walker-Bowen Inc. insurance Richards, Melling Inc p.c. Simcom Limited Lp. Sneezy Waters, Dixie Seattle, Sean McCann, Sean Hewitt, Jackie Washington, George Essery, Keith Glass, Joel Zifkin, Ron Dann, David Harvey, Peter Beaudoin, Bart Bedford, Albert Bernardo, Philip Craig, Marie De Cosimo, Phyllis De Cosimo, Margaret Dragu, Cathy Elliott, Denise Ferguson, Jane Foster, Sandra Gies, Elizabeth Hanna, Kay Hawtrey, Peter Kish, Tex Kong, Marcia Tratt, Yanka Van Del Kolk, Bunty Webb, Robert Windsor. running time: 87 min., 16mm, colour.

Chris Windsor's Big Meat Eater

Big Meat Eater's producer and director, Laurence Keane and Chris Windsor, wandered around this year's Festival of Festivals hyping their \$150,000 horror, science-fiction, musical comedy as a bad movie - which is a fairly bright move, since the cult of the bad movie is growing like the pretty purple fungus I found on my front lawn when I was 11.

But 'bad movie' isn't strictly what *Big Meat Eater* is, though it's got its moments. The real 'bad movie' is one that is enjoyable only because of the sheer enormity and mind-boggling unbelieveability of its ineptitude. *Plan 9 From Outer Space*, *Astro Zombies* and *The Oscar* come to mind, movies that screw up so badly that watching them can induce that hormonal imbalance known and loved by mystics through the ages.

But *Big Meat Eater* does it deliberately and thereby lifts itself into a class with *Detour*, *Night of the Living Dead*, *Andy Warhol's Frankenstein*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Hollywood Boulevard*, *Elevator Girls in Bondage*, *Private Parts*, *Eating Raoul* (both from Paul Bartel) and, of course, *Rocky Horror*.

It's a class without a name. Let's give it one: 'Zoned Movies' - in honour of Dick Miller's classic line in the seldom-seen *The Wronged In Death Never Rest*: "I don't understand; my mind must be rezoned." and in honour of *Forbidden Zone*, the genre's undisputed masterpiece-to-date. It can be defined as a serious and bizarre sensibility applied to the materials of low culture - sex, horror, rock 'n roll, gore, bad jokes and B-movie plotlines, and (usually) low budgets. It isn't camp. Camp is slumming: laugh at it, as opposed to, laugh with it.

Big Meat Eater is, to my knowledge, the first Canadian 'Zoned movie. It's set in Burquitlam, B.C., a small town with a deep faith in appliances and a credo that "The Future Belongs To The Future." The story, for what it's worth, begins when Abdullah, the singing psychopath, murders the mayor and stashes his body in Bob Sanderson's butcher shop. 'Bob' is a civic booster who wants the town to adopt his new universal language, Adanaco. The town is already monolingual. But the mayor's body is revived by aliens who want the supply of Balonium under the house of crooked contractor Josef Wczinski, but not even the promise of new appliances can get Wczinski's family to move and, besides,

unknown to them all, their cockney-accented teenage son, is about to stumble on and use the Balonium for his own devious purposes.

And this is where it all falls apart, justifying to a degree Windsor and Keane's claim to its being a 'bad movie'. As a bad movie, though, it's a flop. The delirium has already been laid in and the total disintegration of the plots only reduces it somewhat, allowing little drabs of boredom to creep in around the edges during the final third.

By this time, though, *Big Meat Eater* has built up a lot of good will with loads of silly, grisly, sophomoric humour, musical numbers, good comic acting and tacky special effects (all shot in one day for a total cost of \$500).

It has also given us, to its undying credit, Big Miller, the Alberta-based jazzman, in the role of Abdullah, the singing psychopath. Big Miller is a giant butterball of a man, master of, among other things, the "nigger stare" - a look of menace as thoroughly black as the blues, but fallen into complete disfavour since the '60s. (Chuck Berry used to pull it on stage occasionally. I don't know if he still does.)

He also has the show's two best songs - "Bagdad Boogie," which he throws Alderman Sonny the Weasel into the furnace for interrupting (or maybe for wanting the heat turned down) and the title song, belted out in a deep, relentlessly sexy voice to a pair of very turned-on middle-aged housewives, while Miller/Abdullah mauls a mound of raw meat.

Whether 'Zoned movies are your idea of a good time or not, Big Miller alone makes *Big Meat Eater* worth seeing. And besides, isn't it cheering to know there's a new spirit abroad in the land? Pass the drugs, Mother.

Andrew Dowler ●

BIG MEAT EATER d. Chris Windsor p. Laurence Keane sc. Phil Savath, Laurence Keane, Chris Windsor 1st a.d. p. man. Dean Stoker asst. p. man. Andrew MacLean d.o.p. Doug Mackay asst. cam. Wayne Sterloff sd. mix. Peter Bentley boom Richard Schreiner ed. Chris Windsor, Laurence Keane, Lilla Pederson mus. J. Douglas Dodd ward./props Rae Ford cont. Janet Brown gaffer Gordie Tocher key grip Jim Plumb loc. man. sets Andrew Maclean sp. eff. Michael Dorsey make-up Todd McIntosh make-up asst. Maurice Parkhurst hair Dorion choreography Helen LeCounte graphics George Campbell p.a. Marvin Smith, Marietta Kozak rushes sync. Michael Robison unit pub. Jami Drake p.c. B.C.D. Entertainment Corp. Ltd. Lp. George Dawson, Andrew Gillies, Big Miller, Stephen Dimopoulos, Georgina Hegedos, Ida Carnevali, Howard Taylor, Heather Smith-Harper, Peter Anderson, Gillian Neumann, Sharon Wahl, Jon Bryden, Shannon Keane, Kim Stehner, Jay Samwald, Neil MacDonald, Scott Swanson, Quincy the dog, Helen LeCounte, Bente Friemel, Elaine Thompson songs performed by Big Miller and Richard Newman running time: 85 min. 16mm, colour

● New stars in the making? Bill Miller and George Dawson in *Big Meat Eater*



Peter Mettler's Scissere

Scissere is a film of the sort that many resent – it demands as much as it is willing to give. And what it is willing to give is nothing less than a heightened awareness of all that we can see and hear in the world around us; a heightened awareness of ourselves, or others, and of how we cope or fail to cope in a world of increasing complexity and alienation.

This is a film of strange beauty and extraordinary power, a film that challenges our curious, near-instinctive bias towards films in which image and sound serve rather than shape those great gods of narrative convention: Plot, Dialogue and Characterization.

Although some of us – both filmgoers and critics – like to think we are open-minded and unfettered by convention, the truth emerges whenever a filmmaker attempts to explore the innate visual/aural language of film beyond established norms of narrative structure. He or she is singled out as exceptional, audacious, presumptuous, self-indulgent, or quite simply “ignorant of the basic narrative demands of film” and of the fundamentals of film convention to which audiences instinctively respond. The evaluation depends on just how far the conventions are being pushed.

We tolerate artists' creativity as long as they don't go *too* far, or better still, if they remain within the realm of “experimental,” supposedly non-commercial, non-mainstream film and video. But our backs go up, sometimes ever so subtly, should they dare stray into the “mainstream” feature film territory. Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore*, Terrence Malick's *Days of Heaven*, Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, *Barry Lyndon*, 2001: *A Space Odyssey*, and Steven Lisberger's recent *Tron* are but a few feature films cited by some critics as flawed, and by others as failures because their extraordinarily expressive images (and sounds) were not supported by equally defined and compelling stories and characterizations, or because their images and stories reiterated rather than complemented one another, thereby lessening the impact of both.

Thankfully, Peter Mettler, writer-director-cinematographer-editor of *Scissere* does not have the common sense to give up on us. In *Scissere*, Mettler offers us an experience of sound and image that at times is so pure and so potent as to seem without form or control. Yet there is a form, a very deliberate structure, so subtle at times as to appear non-existent. It is a structure that stops just short of the conventional narrative, yet is always there to give shape, force and direction to both image and sound, enhancing their potency, their complexity, their multiplicity of meaning, and allowing them freedom to exist independently within a structure that does not force an external, arbitrary interpretation.

With *Scissere*, Mettler boldly wades into the breach with a film one suspects is already being labelled “an experimental feature film.” But are we open enough to see and appreciate what Mettler is really doing and achieving? I hope so, since it is clear that Mettler respects us and trusts our ability to do so.



● One of the subway people: a heroin addict (Sandy MacFadyen) in *Scissere*

Scissere opens with a breathtaking 20-minute collage of image and sound. The more technically accurate film term “montage” cannot do justice to this passage in which Mettler not only reacquaints us with the astonishing plasticity of the photographic image and the language of film, but also immerses us in a visual experience akin to that of listening to music, an experience with a power and meaning that bypass reason, enter straight and untranslated into our consciousness, and stay there, echoing, illuminating, beyond word and thought.

Like a free-fall from a vanished plane, we find ourselves suddenly and irrevocably falling, rushing headlong through a breathing flowing mass of natural images – of sky and clouds, leaves, trees, forests, lakes and water. Especially water: in droplets, ripples, circles, lines and quivering star-like points of light. And as all these images slide by, shapeless human voices drone and chant in unison, comfortingly, warmly, reverently, in musical tones that flow with the changing images.

It is a visual and aural *tour de force* that is far from being a purposeless celebration of film technique. For when the natural images evolve into unexpected abstractions and then re-emerge in their original form, we are left with the old forms newly perceived. Sky and clouds and forest, lakes, leaves, trees and waters are astonishingly new to us again because of Mettler's gentle onslaught of sensual, tactile, ever-changing close-ups, and unhurried vertical and horizontal pans that cut and dissolve one into another as the camera glides over images near and distant, images that change from black and white into colour, into black and white splashed with delicate colour tinting, and into colour splashed with black and white.

The images and sounds slowly subside in intensity, shaping themselves into stark images of an unnatural, sterile, desperately lonely hospital environment. The comforting sound of human rhythms are now displaced by a soft, indefinable roar permeated with muffled voices, gasps and cries of anguish. We begin to realize that our heightened sensitivities are now and have been at one with the film's central figure: a young man named Scissere (Greg Krantz) who is on the threshold of re-entering the “real world” after a stay in a mental institution. We have, in fact, entered the mind and being of this young man, something of which we need not be fully aware until the film's concluding moments.

Rather than telling us to “open your minds, see as he feels, hear as he hears, feel as he feels,” Mettler, from frame one, puts us directly inside the mind of this man, makes us become Scissere, a person whose senses are acutely open, defenseless, and unselective, and whose perceptions are vividly coloured by detail and imagination. In this respect it resembles the silent film classic, *The*

Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, but with a caring twist and less of an interest in the psychotic distortions of madness, than in the illustration of the need for a greater awareness of ourselves and of each other, and for a deeper, warmer sense of humanity in an increasingly difficult world. Mettler could not have achieved such goals more effectively had he offered us a documentary or docu-drama of Scissere's case history. We learn more of the essentials of his existence (and ours) as a result of Mettler's judiciously chosen experiential approach.

Scissere prepares to leave the questionable sanctuary of the institution. His anguish becomes ours as he walks down the hallway to the front door. It is an anguish made agonizingly concrete by Mettler's stunning manipulation of image: Scissere's walking body moves - freezes - moves - freezes - moves - freezes - moves, each forward movement leaving a blurring, living streak in its wake. In this manner, Scissere is shown moving through his environment, his image responding to the task of walking through insubstantial air as if it were pressing, struggling through a substance far more palpable and unyielding.

We see what Scissere must feel as he moves towards an inevitable, unknowable future out in the world that had contributed to his placement behind hospital walls. We have before us a visual, sensual metaphor of his internal state – every nerve-ending taut and bare, every fibre of his being acutely aware of every particle of the environment that exists around him, every sound, every sight, as he moves forward to the door that leads from a sterile world into one that can only seem strange and threatening to the vulnerable mind.

The film is never silent. Under all the changing sounds of everyday life there is a constant rushing or roaring in our ears, like the aural equivalent of a continual life force, the quality of the roar changing with each change in environment. As the rhythmic human music had given way to the soft cry-ridden roar of the hospital, so does the hospital sound give way to the louder more insistent sound of the city: a nerve-jarring, multi-engined roar that changes in intensity but never ceases.

We catch a glimpse of Scissere in an underground subway station, people coursing by him as he stands watching, and we find ourselves entering the lives of three individuals (and one dependent) with whom we spend the balance of the film. Thanks to the talents of Mettler and his cast, these people are as real, as detailed, as complex, and as haunting (and haunted) as any we encounter in our own daily lives.

We watch them live in their own particular segment of the same world, reacting to life in their own distinct ways. A young mother (Natalie Olanick) spends the day on her own, searching for some meaning in the crazy-quilt of

city life and city people. Her young child – loving, dependent and powerless – has been left in the care of another woman and sadly, is not a part of its own mother's search. A white-coated scientist (Anthony Downes), immersed in a world of systematized calculations and observations, discovers a new species of moth – the possible culmination of his life search. A young drug addict (Sandy MacFadyen) steals a fur to finance a drug buy, “shoots up” and then plays his electric guitar with feverish intensity until oblivion sets in some 60 seconds later, and he is left alone and lost in his search.

As the film draws to a close, the paths of these four characters cross in the subway station where Scissere stands, watching. And now we realize that we have never left the mind of Scissere. Scissere had looked at the passing people and, like looking at his reflection in a multi-image mirror, had seen himself in terms of these people, and shaped the unseen details of their lives in terms of his own life, his own fears, his own memories of a mother's fleeting warmth and a child left behind (Scissere as a child?), of a young man lost in drugs and desolation (a feared future or the remembered cause for Scissere's hospitalization?), of a white-coated world of structured observation and scientific study (the comfortless world of the institution and an outside world of increasing alienation and dehumanization).

It is left for us to decipher, because this is not a story film but an experience. Shaped, yes, but an experience created with enough imagery, sound and time for us to become as sensitive, as engulfed, as aware and as imaginative as Scissere, so that when the film ends, we carry all of this into our own worlds, applying it to what we see, whom we meet, and how we cope with our own lives.

Some viewers may find 90 minutes of intense sensual stimulation and abstraction too challenging and too exhausting to be able to make much sense of it as it unfolds at its own pace. Indeed, perhaps because of its unique visual and aural intensity, the film could and should be tightened by a few minutes to give greater clarity and impact to this revelation in the subway, the key that brings together all that we have experienced, the important moment that is almost lost in the prolonged tension of our search.

Nevertheless, Peter Mettler deserves considerable attention and respect for having created what is, in fact, an internal documentary, a particularly vivid view of the human mind and the human experience from the *inside*. It is to be hoped that Mettler will continue to follow the path he has opened with *Scissere*, his first feature, and that he will continue to explore the near-limitless possibilities of what he and film and we the audience can achieve as an active, working triumvirate, aware of convention but unfettered by it.

Laurinda Hart ●

SCISSERE d. Peter Mettler p. Ron Repke Peter Mettler exec. p. Alfred Mettler sc./d.o.p. Peter Mettler asst. d. Mitch Harrison ed. Peter Mettler lighting Jens Sturup. Steven Deme asst. d. Henry Jesionka. Bruce McDonald. Marsh Birchard add. sd. Peter Mettler. Bruno Degazio post-p. asst. Bruce McDonald. Joey Hardin p.c. Collaborative Effort Productions Lp. Greg Krantz. Natalie Olanick. Sandy MacFadyen. Anthony Downes running time 90 min., colour b&w. 16mm. Produced with the support of Ryerson Polytechnical Institute. Film House Group and OAC.

Lon Appleby's Body by Garret

In the few years since the documentary *Pumping Iron* was released there's been a noticeable increase in the popularity and profitability of body building. The principal characters of that remarkable film, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Lou Ferrigno, have gone on to enjoy a certain amount of notoriety. Arnold, of course, flexed his muscles as *Cosman the Barbarian* while Lou dyed his skin green to become *The Incredible Hulk*.

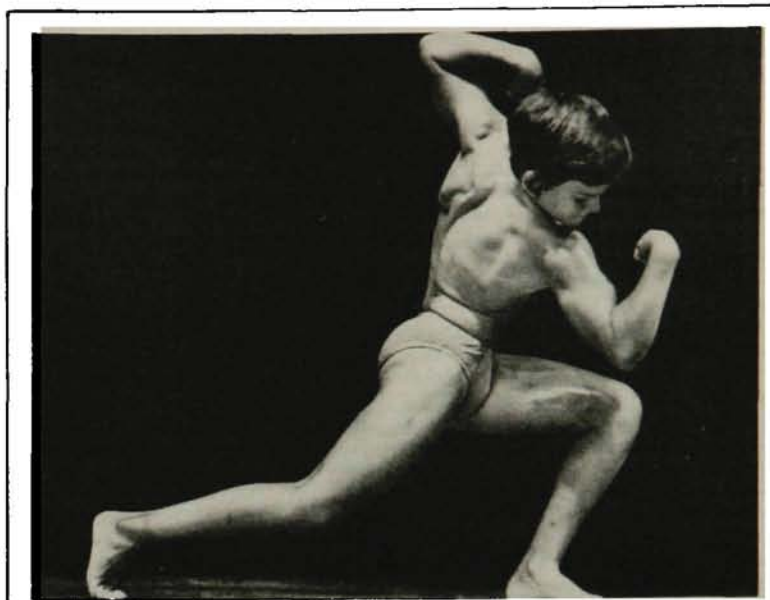
For these reasons, some have argued that body building has finally come out of the closet and deserves to be recognized as a legitimate sport. Others continue to dismiss it as a carnival sideshow, its participants being nothing more than freaks. Opinions no doubt depend largely upon the aesthetic value one places on oiled, near-naked men getting up on a stage to show off their gargantuan biceps and pectorals. Opinions aside, however, one thing is for sure, body building is here to stay. And if you don't believe it, go see *Body By Garret*, a CBC documentary which chronicles a few days in the life of 12-year-old Garret Walsh. As four feet, six inches, and weighing 102 pounds, Garret is considered the youngest competitive body builder in the world. He has to be seen to be believed. The earnestness and the enthusiasm this kid from Toronto applies to his strenuous vocation is astounding, or alarming, depending

on how one views... No, I'm not getting into that again.

"I want to be the best body builder there is. I want to be Mr. Olympia" says Garret with wide-eyed innocence as he works out in his basement. And watching the ease by which he handles the barbells one has no reason to doubt him. Garret, with the help of his father and mother, has the body building regimentation down pat... the push-ups, the bench presses, the jars of vitamins, the protein diet... even the philosophy. "To be in shape makes you live longer."

It's a credit to Lon Appleby, the film's producer/director - something of a wonder himself at age 19 - that *Body By Garret* stays clear of too many puerilities. You see, Garret is one hell of an infectious kid, and too much of a good thing would end up being just that. Appleby shows he has some keen sensibilities when it comes to pacing. He keeps the momentum going by way of timely intercuts between Garret training for a guest spot on the Mr. Olympia contest and the big guys themselves going through their routines to the driving thump of rock music.

A word of caution. Appleby is not out to make the definitive statement on body building. His primary subject is Garret and the 12-year-old comes through with flying colours. He's as genuine as any kid can be. Garret very quickly convinces us that what he's doing to his body may seem a little odd or fanatical to some people but it's a lot better than if he just hung out on the streets. The boy's father, however, is another matter. There's more than a little hint of vicarious living on his part. Having been forced to give up body building due to a



● The body Garret built

pulled heart muscle, the father is literally Garret's shadow. There's no doubt that the father is motivated by love for his son but the way he has coached and molded the boy's life touches the only sad note in the film.

Garret's shining moment comes when he poses for 20 fleeting seconds on the Mr. Olympia stage. As we see him strain and contort his young but sizeable frame, the worth of all that extraordinary effort comes into question. The answer depends largely upon the aesthetic: no, I

promised. The answer is in Garret's kid-in-a-candy-store smile.

S. Paul Zola ●

BODY BY GARRET p. d. Lon Appleby d.o.p. John Westheuser sd. Aeryn Weissman add. cam. Paul Dunlop ed. Bruce Annis neg. cutting Wendy Loten titles Patricia Morley mix Marvin Bernstein stills Chris Lund p.c. HAP Productions in association with the CBC running time: 28.50 min., colour, 16mm, dist. International Tele-Film Ent.

OF THE FOUR CONSIDERATIONS



VINCENT TANGREDI

November 20 - December 16, 1982

Carmen Lamanna Gallery 840 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario M4W 2H1 Tel. (416) 922-0410

Pierre Falardeau and Julien Poulin's **Elvis Gratton**

Elvis Gratton is an exceptionally tricky bit of work. To succeed at what it's doing - let alone succeed as well as it does - it has to be.

For me, the tricks began before the movie, with the Festival of Festivals capsule description that made it sound like a very dreary documentary. Two minutes on TV news is all I've ever needed to see to be convinced of the total shoddiness of the Elvis cult and the banality of its followers. The thought of 20 minutes of watching a "prosperous Quebec couple... devote their spare time to preparations for the husband to enter a televised Elvis Presley look-alike contest," with the Elvis cult details "lovingly fetishized" was enough to bring on nausea.

The first few minutes did bring on nausea. The lighting sound and camera techniques are all thoroughly documentary, and there's Elvis Gratton himself, eating like a pig, with the TV on the kitchen table providing the only light, addressing the camera directly and getting into a stupid argument with his wife. Only the thought that one cannot write paying reviews from unseen movies kept me in my chair.

By the third sequence, I was laughing out loud. With his wife in the bath, yelling for him to turn the music down, Elvis Gratton begins rehearsing his act. He loses the timing, blows the gestures, sings off key and sets his fat belly to wobbling when he tries out the patented Elvis leg-shake.

He's awful and he's hilarious and he doesn't care a bit. He's having a grand time, which makes it okay to laugh and go on laughing as he works his frizzy hair into a not-very-Elvisoid pompadour and grins at it in utter satisfaction, as he bitches like a spoiled bride over the details of his wife-sewn costume and lectures the camera on the superiority of Americans, especially Elvis, over the Québécois while he gives his airbrushed van a very loving washing.

Dreary documentary has turned into cheerfully berserk comedy and Elvis Gratton seems like a comic, likable guy who's using the contest and the movie to let loose his natural hamminess.

Then Elvis Gratton turns mean. He gets grabby hands and a dirty mouth for a teenage girl who won't put out for him. And just as I realized Elvis Gratton was not a very likable man, it also dawned on me that this was not a documentary and Elvis G. was an actor.

His name is Julien Poulin and he's also listed as co-director. He is very good, with a brisk sense of timing and a remarkable ability to make physical comedy look natural and spontaneous.

The pick-up scene doesn't sacrifice any laughs, despite what it does to the character and the nature of the movie. The laughs keep rolling along right up to the end, when the point to all this trickery becomes clear.

Elvis Gratton is satire. Classically, satire gets defined as something like, "comically telling home truths about people," or, "laughing at people's foibles," or, "a comedy that gets people to laugh at their own foibles."

By the final sequence, I was laughing so hard my face hurt. Elvis G., in skin-tight suit, pompadour and guitar, is posing for publicity shots. His conversation with the photographer escalates into shouted slogans that give us his honest view of the world he lives in, his credo.

The movie has already told us there are thousands just like him. The movie's tricks and the intercutting of live-action with black and white publicity stills make him their spokesman - Elvis Everyman. The effect is hilarious, though the sequence may not be: after laughing steadily for 18 minutes, it's hard to stop cold for the last two.

His world view is greedy, selfish, sexist, reactionary, vicious and stupid. The truth behind the Elvis mask is not a pleasant one, but I can't say if it's a true truth. I don't know the Québécois that well. But the movie makes it seem true and I've run across Elvis cultists elsewhere and caught similar echoes and I know that people like Elvis Gratton exist and are plentiful.

Outside the theatre, I overheard a stranger say, "I was married to a Quebec man once and, you know, it's true, that movie. I could see that in him and his friends."

In Quebec, I hear, it's raising a lot of controversy, which is my idea of a good argument for its being true and, if it's as true as it is funny, *Elvis Gratton* may be the best hard-core satire ever put on film.

Andrew Dowler ●

ELVIS GRATTON d. sc. ed. Pierre Falardeau Julien Poulin cam. Alain Dostie ed. Serge Beauchemin boom. Michel Charron gaff. Jacques Paquet grip. Emmanuel Lepine cont. Joanne Prgent asst. cam. Daniel Gervais a.d. Rene Poirier dec. Jean-Baptiste Tard access. Daniel Huysmans make-up. Micheline Foissy unit man. Claude Cartier p. Bernadette Payeur p.c. ACPAV 16mm. colour running time 30 min.

Alex Hamilton-Brown's **Life Another Way**

In the year of the handicapped, the media was inundated with stories about sightless, armless, generally less fortunate people, who, with ingenuity and courage, overcame obstacles to the "good life." Hamilton-Brown's documentary *Life Another Way* looks beyond the handicapped's 'difference' to what makes that 'difference' good.

With framed head and shoulders, the grandmotherly Beryl Potter in her Scottish lilt tells us her life story. Her beginnings are ordinary enough, portrayed through a montage of black and white photographs. And when we think we know her, Hamilton-Brown shows her in the harsh reality of life: a woman who has suffered an unusual destiny brought on by simply slipping on a package wrapper. The shocking result: a blood clot in the knee developed into phlebitis, requiring the amputation of a leg. Soon after, she loses two other limbs and the sight in an eye.

With conviction, Hamilton-Brown takes us into the heart of this woman's life. She confides that she contemplated suicide. Then her perspective suddenly changed and she realized a new purpose: "When the able-bodied become disabled they need a bridge to handle the shock." Potter founded the Scarborough Recreation Club for the disabled: a lively social centre that never refuses anybody, one for people who are different, not because they are fat or exceedingly beautiful, but because they are disabled.

Hamilton-Brown's portrait of this club doesn't miss a detail. A direct cinema camera shows the regulars in their struggles and joys: a young man with a paralyzed tongue learning to speak through a machine; a swimmer paralyzed from the waist down winning a medal at the Canada Games; Eddy Rice,

a stand-up comic with crutches, getting his audience convulsing with laughter as he jokes about his physical condition. Hamilton-Brown lets these people shape their world authentically, knowing that if he doesn't talk for these people, they will speak for themselves.

We feel awe as the little masteries of life most of us take for granted appear in novel ways. In the quiet of her home, Beryl is at the sewing machine and her single hand works on a dress pleat. Later in the kitchen she pares a potato lodged on a bed of nails. It is a down-to-earth, nitty gritty aspect of life that most of us are incapable of conceiving. Yet in some odd way it all seems so ordinary - so complete in itself.

The wide-eyed school kids are speechless as they meet Beryl Potter for the first time. She raises her stump arm and emphatically says, "You're not afraid of this?" The children giggle and ask, "How do you get your clothes on?" "... your watch...?" She tells them she dresses just like them on the bed. ... And that she's actually a grandmother.

If there is a criticism of the film, it is that the film has some difficulty in integrating a very personal portrait of the handicapped with their political and somewhat militant objectives for a full life. However, through Potter's own radical lifestyle and its strong political motivation, the film discovers a meaningful linkage point.

Hamilton-Brown's honesty and warmth bring us a full community of life. It is as if he works within this incredible woman's vision, telling her story as her eye, her witness - given her a bridge so that her purpose be realized.

It is a satisfying film that makes you think twice about what you have.

Kalli Paakspuu ●

LIFE ANOTHER WAY p./d. Alex Hamilton Brown ph. Robert Rouveroy, CSC add. cam. Lance Carlson ed. Tom Hilderley re-rec. The Mixing House sd. mix. George Novotny ed. Yan Moore orig. music Pat McKee sc. Dean Taylor assoc. p. Fern Crawford p.c. Hamilton Brown Film Prod./Avcomm Ltd. running time: 52 min., colour. 16mm.



● Reaching for satirical heights, Julien Poulin as Elvis Gratton



● Beryl Potter takes an admirer for a ride