

Peter Rowe & Corinne Farago's

Micronesia : The Winds of Change

A few seconds into this film and you know you're in for an hour not quite like anything you've seen before. That's because Micronesia is not quite like any place you can imagine. Picture thatched native huts and a giant replica of Ronald McDonald. Or the traditional bare-breasted woman of the tropical islands, carrying a ghetto-blaster. Or inhabitants of a seemingly paradisiacal locale who suffer radiation burns and sickness from fall-out. You begin to get the feel of this documentary of a most unusual place.

Micronesia is a collection of 2000 islands centered in the Pacific Ocean between Australia, Japan and Hawaii. Its history is one of colonization: by Spain, Germany, Japan, and most recently, by the United States. Because of its strategic location, Micronesia was the site of many of World War II's most ferocious battles. In Operation Hailstone, the Japanese navy was ravaged just off the island of Truk, with more than 60 Imperial ships sunk by the Allied forces. Today Truk Lagoon is an eerie underwater graveyard for this fleet, a place where divers come to witness the untouched remains.

Soon after the war, the United States began pouring hundreds of millions of American dollars into the Micronesian islands, contractual and moral retribution for its military and nuclear presence. The result has been that today Micronesia is largely a welfare society, dependent on the American presence for food stamps, alcohol, and all the trappings of a southern California life-style.

While some Micronesians still squat on dirt floors, the men wearing loin cloths, the women in grass skirts, many others now watch "Laverne & Shirley" and "Charlie's Angels" on colour TV sets in their huts. The filmmakers have captured the visual extremes of this society, where the process of cultural colonization mixes space-age technology with shell-age tradition. While the inhabitants seem to hunger for, or at least accept, much of Yankee culture and the economic effects of the American presence, they are subject to the gross underside of that presence: nuclear radiation. Since 1946, 66 atomic and hydrogen bombs have been detonated in the Marshall atolls of Micronesia. As well, the lagoons are target sites for ICBMs fired from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. The effects of the atomic blasts which began on the Bikini atoll have proven far more serious than was ever imagined: brain tumors, radiation burns, fall-out sickness.

"There are hundreds of stories to tell about Micronesia," says director Peter Rowe, "but we had only an hour." *Micronesia: The Winds of Change* focusses on those aspects of the locale which best give us a feel for its incredible diversity and the ironies of its situation. World War II footage from the National Archives in Washington and the De-

partment of Defence in Canada is visually fascinating in its own right, and shows us the pounding these islands took because of their strategic location. In a way, this material is an appropriate metaphor for everything else we see in the film: a society ravaged by colonization.

We also see some resistance to the U.S. invasion, especially on the island of Yap where inhabitants foster their traditional ways and continue growing their own excellent food crops, staving off welfare, food stamps and the supermarket. As well, there is some growing resistance to the nuclear operations on the islands.

Given the incredible social-political problems of Micronesia, it's understandable that the filmmakers provide us with some moments of visual/emotional relief. This usually takes the form of underwater sequences; for example, we see celebrated cinematographer Al Giddings at work filming the sunken fleet in Truk Lagoon. At another point in the documentary, there are shots of traditional fishermen spearing their prey. The languid feel of such scenes is somehow soothing in the midst of the challenging and ironic visuals shot on land.

Micronesia: The Winds of Change was filmed on the islands of Yap, Palau, Guam, Truk and Saipan. The filmmakers convey the sense that there is much more to be learned about, and from, Micronesia—and that this documentary, though generally fast-paced and filled with information, is merely the beginning of discovery. What I perhaps admire most about the film is its sensitivity to the people and their situation. Even though the film is filled with the ironic, there is never a sense that the filmmakers are ridiculing or being patronizing to their subject. Rather, it is as though they sympathize with and can understand the plight of Micronesians, having come from a country that also experiences, to

a lesser degree, the effects of U.S. imperialism. The film has won the Special Jury Prize at the Houston International Film Festival. It deserves widespread viewing and praise.

Joyce Nelson ●

MICRONESIA : THE WINDS OF CHANGE

d. Peter Rowe, Corinne Farago p. Corinne Farago narr. Lorne Greene sc. Victor Paddy ed. Christopher Hutton d.o.p. Peter Rowe music Chris Hutton, Charlie Burton & Murray McLauchlan sd. Corinne Farago sd. ed. Christopher & Cathy Hutton sd. mix Tony Van Den Akker colour Chris Hinton, Medallion Film Labs exec. p. Gerald M. Soloway p.c./dist. Rosebud Films Ltd. running time 50 min. 16mm colour.

Paul Jay's

Here's To The Cowboy

Snapshots Motion Pictures has been making a name for itself in sports documentaries. The latest work by filmmaking team Joan Hutton and Paul Jay is *Here's to the Cowboy*, an intimate portrait of life on the Canadian professional rodeo circuit. It's a terrific film, very earthy and colourful, humorous and poignant, with undisguised affection for rodeo sports and the cowboys themselves.

Filmed at big and small rodeos in Alberta, including the Calgary and the Ponoka stampedes, *Here's to the Cowboy* shows us both the glittering hoopla and the gritty hard work involved in being a rodeo rider. Like the cowboys themselves, who are devoted to "keeping a real tradition alive," the style of this film is pleasantly instructive. We learn what's

involved in the judging and the participation in events like calf roping, steer wrestling, riding a bucking bronc, riding a mean bull. The finer points of technique are explained, along with plenty of examples. By taking us close in on the action and giving us an insider's perspective, the film conveys the attractiveness of the rodeo profession, which clearly lies not in the money but in the way of life.

In order to more personalize the subject, *Here's to the Cowboy* is loosely structured around the figure of Tom Eriekson, a young cowboy up-and-coming on the professional circuit. We see him compete in various events, truck around from one small town to another on the circuit (what the cowboys call "goin' down the road"), and in one interesting scene he meets with his hero, Tommy Bews. The two riders, one seasoned and the other youthful, sit in Bews' living room, sharing a bottle of whiskey and talking. There is a nice feel to this moment, and when we later see the older man riding a bucking bronc and tipping his hat to the appreciative crowd, the gesture has a subtle poignancy, as though the old order is making way for the new within the continuity of a tradition.

Everything about this film is geared to creating the textures and flavour of the rodeo milieu. *Here's to the Cowboy* does what documentaries do best: it immerses us in a way of life sensually. The physicality of this film is extraordinary. It is achieved partly through an exacting attention to visual detail, so that we see heightened colours and textures that appeal to our sense of touch—rainwater on the bright yellow slickers worn by the cowboys, the splashes in the mud of the arena as cowboys and animals struggle, the flash of silver belt buckles (prizes for events) in close-up in the sun. And the camerawork is always right in the thick of things, not at all distant or playing it safe. You get the sense that these filmmakers like to really be involved in what they're shooting. This makes all the difference in the resulting feel of the film, especially the slow-motion shots of various rodeo events. As a viewer, you will find yourself reacting physically, with a kind of sympathetic gut reaction to the strenuous manoeuvres involved in rodeo sports.

The original country & western music by Ivan Daines and Larry Barkemeyer is perfect for underscoring moments of humour or pain and for creating atmosphere. The voice-over narration is written and delivered in a folksy "down-home" style that rings sincere.

Contrary to what might be expected, there are no clichés or sentimentalities in this film. *Here's to the Cowboy* is filled with delightful surprises, fresh angles on an interesting subject, and straight-forward respect for the life-style. The film is generating lots of interest. It has already been shown on CBC's sports anthology—"Sportsworld"—and been sold to London Weekend Television. This film is definitely a winner.

Joyce Nelson ●

HERE'S TO THE COWBOY p. Joan Hutton, Paul Jay d. Paul Jay ed. Paul Jay, Van Moore cam. Joan Hutton, Paul Jay sc. Paul Jay, Joan Hutton sd. Glen Gauthier narr. Jim Bearden mixer George Novotny cam. asst. Doug Craik mus. Ivan Daines, Larry Barkemeyer 16mm. colour 48 minutes. 1982 p.c. Snapshots Motion Pictures. 67 Strathcona Ave. Toronto (416) 461-3089

● Watching "Laverne & Shirley" in Micronesia's global village

