

is impossible."

Her proposal to do a film on Jacob Maydanyk, a Ukrainian-Canadian cartoonist and satirist, was well-received. She was given a \$60,000 budget to make the film, and Roman Kroitor became her mentor. This marked the beginning of her involvement with the NFB. "I found the NFB to be tremendously supportive in every way. Nobody was trying to push anything down my throat. They were just helping me to realize my dream in the film. I was very lucky. They gave me my break and believed in me."

Halya simultaneously received a Canada Council grant to write a feature script and began her second film, **The Strongest Man in the World** — a half-hour documentary on Michael Swystun, a 78-year-old Ukrainian-Canadian from Olha, Manitoba, who was the strong man with Barnum & Bailey Circus in 1923, and who has since led an extraordinarily eccentric life. Forming her own production company she had the film certified and managed to raise \$30,000 through private investors. (She hopes to distribute both films in Canada and the States.)

In September of '78 all Halya's work in Canada was temporarily halted when The American Film Institute (A.F.I.) in Los Angeles accepted her into their fellowship directing program; a privileged position considering she was the third person and the first woman to be accepted from Canada.

The AFI was an unforgettable experience both in terms of her personal and professional life; the environment was foreign and competition grueling. "I went to Hollywood right out of Winnipeg. I didn't know anybody. It was like diving into cold deep water. I was coming from a documentary background at that point, I had no training in dramatic filmmaking and had never worked with professional actors. I was thrown into a milieu that was very commercial, very Hollywood. The AFI is Hollywood's baby; the people accepted are the crème de la crème."

The AFI environment was high-pressured with only three to five days to shoot and three days to edit the videotape, — videotape was used instead of film because it is inexpensive and expedient. Actors were easily obtained through an agreement between the AFI and the Screen Actors Guild. "You get to work with professional actors because the tapes are non-commercial. Since there are 35,000 unemployed actors in L.A. all of them are desperate and eager," Halya comments.

Her first tape was disastrous, the second, **Forever**, was a great improvement. "My first tape had a lot of soul but no frame; the second had the frame but no soul. It tried to compensate and fit into

their taste. You should never do that. **Forever** just didn't have a heart." **Women in the Room**, her third and final tape, dealing with euthanasia (about a woman who is dying of cancer and her son, who helps her to die with dignity), was a huge success, winning her the respect of her colleagues and staff. "I'm a Taurus, very strong-willed, and there is no way anyone is going to drive me out. I don't give up easily. That's what did it. I couldn't leave and face failure. I felt I had to stay and

combat my fears, because I would never be able to return to Hollywood otherwise: my pride wouldn't allow me to." The success of **Women in the Room**, has opened up many future possibilities.

After hopefully completing **The Strongest Man In The World** by December, and **Jacob Maydanyk** by June Halya's future plan is to apprentice as a director on a Hollywood feature, and finally, direct her own feature film.

Wendy Vincent

Filmography: Halya Kushmij

1979

The Woman In The Room (video/ B & W / 37 min. / Canada), director, writer, editor.

Forever (video / B & W / 35 min. / USA), director, writer, editor.

Jacob Maydanyk (16mm/colour/30 min./N.F.B./Canada), director, writer, editor.

1978

The Strongest Man In The World (16mm / colour / 30 min. / Canada), producer, director, writer, editor.

1977

Streetcar (16mm / colour / 17 min. / Canada), producer, director, writer.

Snow-Maiden (16mm/B&W/10 min. / Canada), producer, director, writer, editor.

1976

The Pavlychenko Dancers (video/ B&W/26 min./Canada), producer, director, writer, editor.

1975

Tim Settimi: Mime (video/B&W/25 min./Canada), producer, director, writer, editor.

ricky friedman

the road to repertory

As a kid, Ricky Friedman used to see serial films on Friday nights. A relative of his was connected with Columbia Pictures of Canada, therefore first-run 16mm films were available, and screenings took place at one house or another.

Ricky saw men who fell off a cliff only to be saved by a branch. But his memories of

these films are vague. The first film he really remembers is **The Graduate**, which he saw four times.

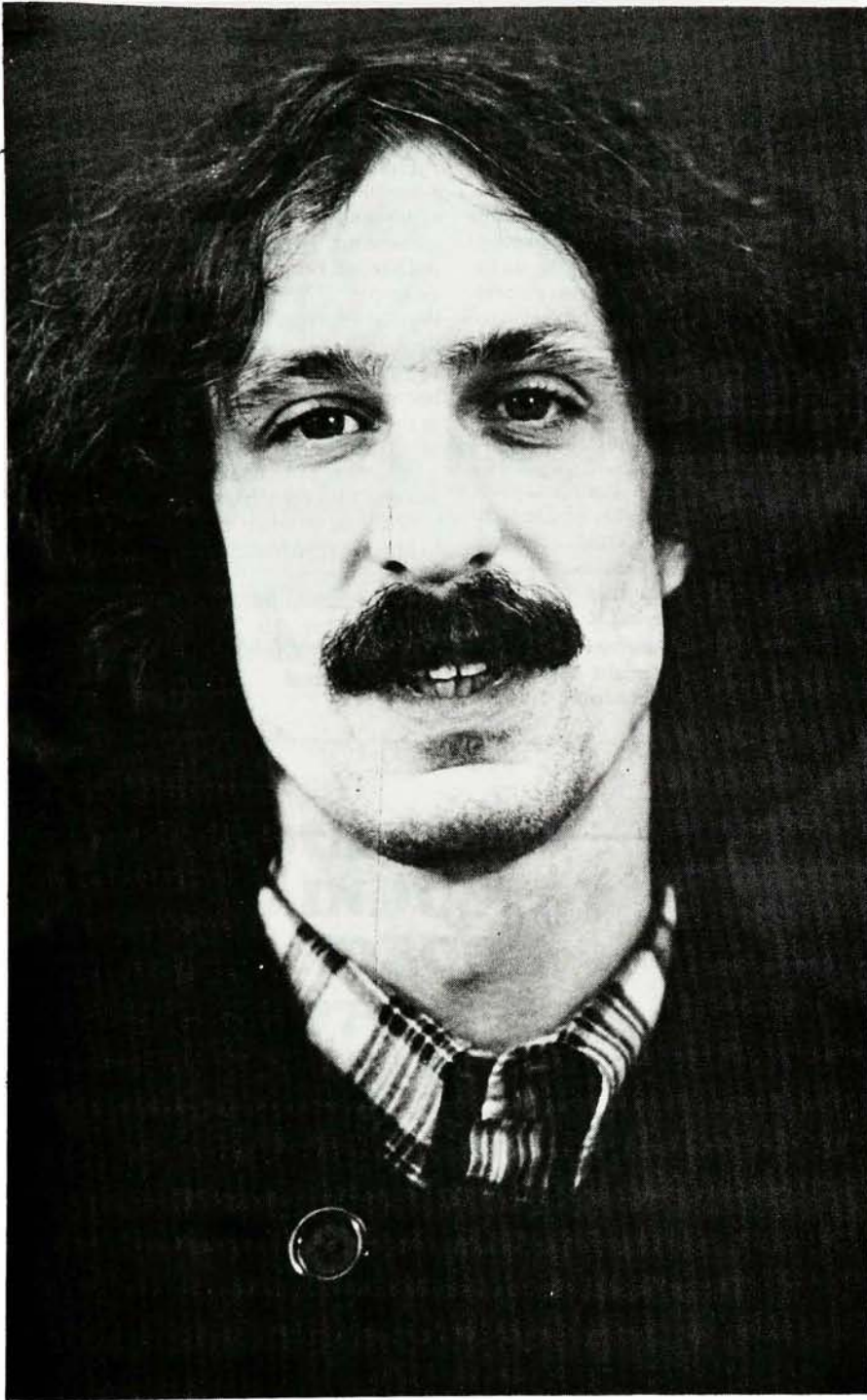
He was in school then, at McGill studying psychology, biochemistry — all sciences. They didn't have film courses. As Ricky had nothing to do during the day, he started to go to movies. "I wasn't

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For Ricky Friedman, it all started with *The Graduate*

(photo: Lois Siegel)

really interested in school. I just remember going to movies all the time."

In the investment business he met Steve Miller, now of The Seville Theatre. Together they discussed why there wasn't an English-language Outremont Theatre in Montreal, and consequently went off to the Outremont for a couple of weeks to count the people with hand clickers. The

managers wondered why they were there. But Ricky and Steve thought, "look at all those people," and they decided to look for a theatre. At that time, Famous Players wanted to sell The Kent Theatre. Ricky and Steve were shown the books and costs. But they didn't have any money to buy The Kent. Then they discovered Cinema 5, a first-run theatre owned by an

independent chain (Michael Costom of Grimco, who owned 14 theatres in the province).

Costom bought Japanese films, Wertmuller films and the first Fellini films in Canada. But he was ready to get rid of the Cinema 5 just when Ricky Friedman and Steve Miller appeared.

"Costom is one of the smartest businessmen I've run across," Friedman explains. "He started working at thirteen or fourteen years-old and made a lot of money. He had the Ouimetoscope, Cinema 5, The Festival and The Cinema de Paris. But he's out of the theatre business now and only rents the buildings which he owns."

Ricky and Steve made arrangements to work for Michael Costom. They were given a percentage of the business and a salary. Cinema 5 became a repertory theatre. Eventually Steve Miller left to open The Seville Theatre, and Ricky bought Cinema 5.

Cult Films:

The Rocky Horror Picture Show: "The distributor of the film wanted to raise the percentage we paid if we played it at midnight," Friedman states. "In Toronto they stopped showing the film altogether at the repertory cinema because it became too expensive. We still

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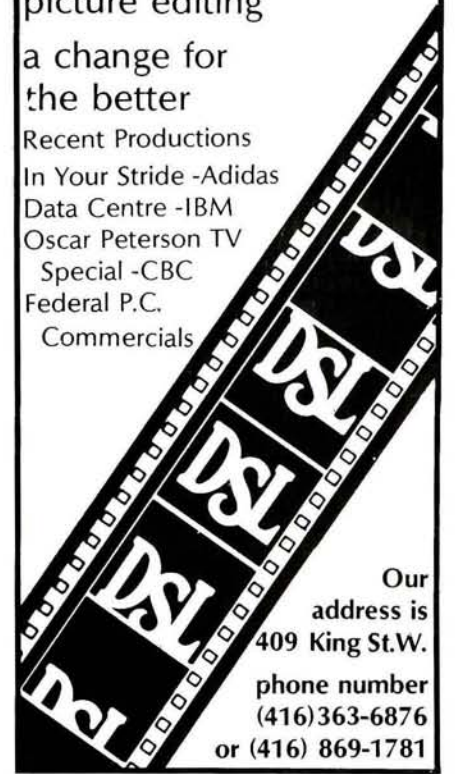
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show it. They let us off the hook without paying the higher percentage for awhile, but now they charge us, so we play it at earlier times.

"Because **The Rocky Horror Picture Show** has become a cult film that stimulates the atmosphere of a 'happening,' several accidents have occurred in the theatre. One person's hair caught on fire. The kids light candles or matchbooks and then drop them. At *The Seville* they threw firecrackers into the crowd. It's a pain in the ass, but they're calmer than a lot of other people who come to the theatre. It's a ritual, it's not done wantonly — almost as if they have a script, and in the summer a lot of them come dressed up as characters in the movie.

"The other problems a repertory theatre such as Cinema 5 has is with punk kids who hang out at the neighborhood theatre and cause trouble because they have nothing better to do. They will break seats or come in drunk. The only retaliation is not to let certain faces in.

"When the kids get bored and do some damage, I tell them to go to other theatres — 'go up the street, they have a nice

theatre there.'"

Movies:

"Each schedule includes 120 to 130 different movies. I try to program all kinds of movies. People who wouldn't be caught dead at the skin flics on St. Lawrence Street will come to see similar movies at Cinema 5. They drive their Mercedes up from Hampstead. Some ten-year-old kid will come to these films. It's not for us to judge whether they guy's eighteen as long as he has an I.D. That's all we have to make sure. I don't understand classification of movies anyway. Who determines that violence is O.K. for fourteen-year-olds and sex for eighteen-year-olds?"

Special programs:

The National Film Board rented Cinema 5 to show a series of Donald Brittain documentaries. They installed 16mm equipment and paid for the ads. People couldn't believe that the films were free. They kept trying to pay.

"We rent the short films. They don't cost much. Nine films might cost \$100. We are also open to screening student films.

"We once showed Hitchcock's earlier films from England: five silent and five sound films. No one came except the people who worked at the cinema."

Censor Boards:

The Quebec Censor Board will never cut a film. They either classify it or they won't pass it. In Ontario they will cut scenes out. There are some strange rules in Quebec, concerning language rules for example. If we submit three shorts by Werner Herzog, the first one narrated in English with titles, (produced by, music by) in German, the censor won't pass it because they feel that the main language in the film is English, and that all the titles should be in English. I could make titles for the film, but the distributors won't loan me the film for three weeks."

"I'd love to open more theatres — not in Montreal, in Manitoba, Ontario, B.C. or Alberta.

I'd run them from here."

As of Nov. 16, 1979, Ricky opened Cinema Repertoire, 896 St. Catherine W. in Montreal.

Lois Siegel

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