

John Harrison's Thanks for the Ride

Thanks for the Ride, a half-hour dramatic adaptation of Alice Munro's well-known short story, is the National Film Board's latest, and one of its best, ventures in producing dramas. This Ontario Region production may even make a lot of people at least temporarily forget their hostility towards the Board's dabbling in drama.

The Board has long enjoyed an international reputation for producing excellent documentaries and animated shorts, and a national reputation for dismal dramas. But in the last few years, the much-spurned "beached whale" has produced or helped produce some excellent dramas: *Bravery in the Field* and *First Winter* won Oscar nominations; *Les beaux souvenirs* carried on the grand tradition of *Mon Oncle Antoine*; the recent regional productions – *The Pedlar* from Manitoba and *The Gossips* from francophone New Brunswick – are competent dramatic pieces; and, of course, the Board played a seminal role in that national showstopper, *Empire, Inc.*

Maybe it is because writer/director John Harrison has followed the NFB's mandate of showing a real slice of Canada to Canadians and the world that his quiet but intensely moving drama works so well. Harrison has lavished attention on capturing the flavor of the cottage country around Georgian Bay which forms a meaningful backdrop for the story. The rich, authentic soundtrack evokes a real sense of place; Rene Osashi's remarkable yet subtle cinematography captures its essence.

Unlike so many dramas which are beautiful to look at but whose story limps along or dies – *Two Solitudes* springs to mind – Harrison's finely struc-

tured script paces the action and the character development in a most believable way.

The major character, David Sullivan, sensitively portrayed by Carl Marotte, is a 19-year-old rich kid who isn't quite sure who he really is. One Saturday night at the end of the cottage season, David goes cruising with his hyper-horny friend, George, who wants to find "a few local tarts and poke them." They do just that. But this seemingly routine adventure into the dynamics of sexual power-playing with Vicky, a bitter survivor of summer quickie 'romances', has a deep and telling effect on the naive David.

The story itself is 14-carat Alice Munro. Characters struggle for some sense of self-knowledge via their relationships and are confronted by a world that changes very little and where even minor personal changes are paid for with major pain.

Harrison has wisely reshaped the story to fit the film medium and he placed it in a contemporary setting. To gain authenticity and get a flavor of the language and mentality, he discussed the story with several groups of teenagers from the region. The research shows. The banter is natural and real. (And painful: George doesn't want to go to the movies because a *Canadian* film is playing.) Harrison also utilizes parts of Munro's dialogue as when Vicky's down-trodden mother, played with disturbing realism by veteran actress, Clare Clouter, explains how "lovely it is for people to have things."

The real strength of the film, however, comes mainly from the stylish direction of Harrison, whose film *Way of the Willow* garnered First Prize at the 1982 New York Film Festival. His camera is constantly on the move, catching a nuance here, a subtle gesture there, always omni-present without being obtrusive.

To help get the over-all fine performances from his young actors and actresses, director Harrison rehearsed intensely for several days before going on location. This is not often done on

low-budget dramas, with sometimes disastrous results. Here the time, money and energy spent pays off. The actions seem natural, and the characters comfortable and spontaneous with one another.

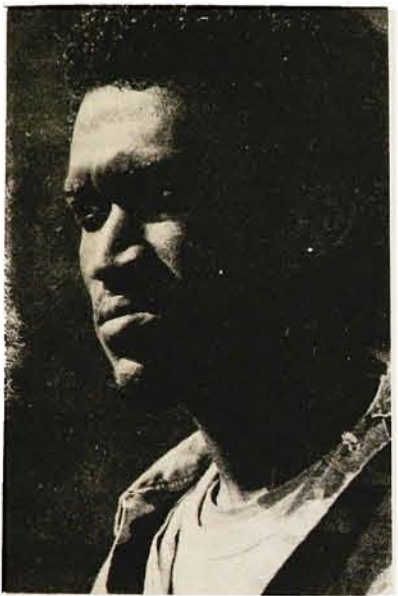
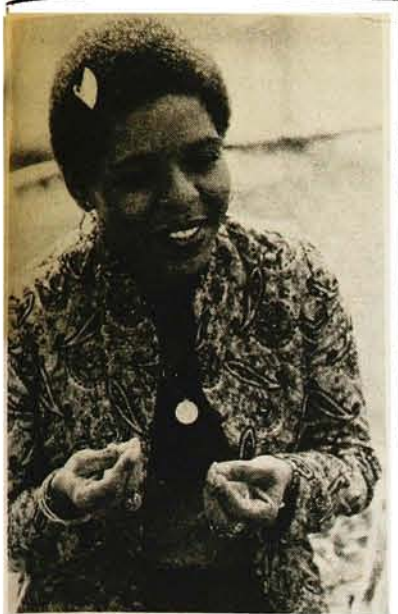
Perhaps the only flaw is a technical one; the night scenes produced in the lab do not meld with the real night-shot scenes. This is a small blemish on a film that has already impressed several CBC producers, and at least one independent, enough that they are considering hiring Harrison as a director.

Thanks for the Ride is a powerful story evocatively told (Alice Munro herself liked the film version). The film works on its audience in part because Harrison has dealt head-on with the 'truth' of the story's theme – dealing with one's sexuality – even in the sex scene where the characters are faced with powerful realities, and where the director might have backed away. Harrison's honest approach will, unfortunately, limit the film's academic use as it will most likely be banned in many schools, thereby depriving a very large high-school audience from seeing and discussing one of Canada's finest short dramatic films.

Still one can always hope the CBC will showcase *Thanks for the Ride* in prime time this fall so that a wide spectrum of Canadians can see a little more of themselves and their country as reflected in their art.

Tom Shoebridge ●

THANKS FOR THE RIDE d. sc. John Harrison p. John Kramer p. man. Louise Clark 1st a.d. Steve Wright 2nd a.d. Donato Baldassarra d.o.p. Rene Ohashi asst. cam. John Habson art d. David Moe asst. art d. Rudy Barrichello cont. Diane Parsons cast. Walker-Bowen wardrobe Julie Ganton wardrobe asst. Judy LeGros ed. rec. Bryan Day boom Marc Chiasson gaffer Marris Jansons best boy David Hynes grip Chris Dean hair Judy Cooper-Sealey make-up Suzanne Benoit gennie opt. Ira Cohen p. asst. Steve Chapman, Dan Dunlop flatbed Bill White 3rd a.d. Roman Buchok crafts serv./p. asst. Lydia Wazana p. sec. Sonya Munro p.c. N.F.B. running time 28 min. 16mm colour L.p. Carl Marotte, Peter Krantz, Lesleh Donaldson, Melissa Bell, Michael Tait, Nikki Deboer, Clare Coulter, Rita Tuckett.



● "The people's side of the story," as told by Toronto's Jane-Finch area residents Greg Bob (top) and Rosemary Brown

the film, the police convey a stiff uptightness, a stodgy and insensitive law 'n order defensiveness that is difficult to empathize with. The film would have been better, and less easy to label as biased, if it had included more discussion with members of the force. My suspicion is that this wider portrait would have been even more revealing.

But finally, the problems of Jane-Finch are much greater than police harassment. While this is a contributing factor to the difficulties outlined in the film, it seems unfortunate that Hodge has focused so much of the film's analysis here. The claim that Jane-Finch has the potential to be either a "multi-cultural mosaic" or a racial disaster area "like Miami or Brixton" is a serious one which deserved a deeper examination of the root causes. Much of that examination is implicit in the film, but its structure is weighted toward the one issue of police relations. Despite this, the film has served to motivate members of the community towards organized efforts, and to alert a much wider society to incredible problems in great need of solutions.

Joyce Nelson ●



● Lesleh Donaldson plays a bitter survivor of summer quickie romances in *Thanks for the Ride*

HOME FEELING: STRUGGLE FOR A COMMUNITY d./sc. Jennifer Hodge exec. p. John Spotton p. John Kramer assoc. p. Judy Legros a.d. Roger McTair cam. Henri Fiks ed. Steve Weslak sd. Doug Ganton mus. Leroy Sibblis narr. Charmaine Edmead re-rec. Terry Cooke 16mm, colour, running time: 70 minutes p.c.: National Film Board, 1983.