

REVIEWS

Jean-Pierre Lefebvre's

Au rythme de mon coeur / To The Rhythm Of My Heart

In 1981, as part of a nation-wide retrospective of his work organized by the Canadian Film Institute, Jean-Pierre Lefebvre travelled across the country, visiting the various film co-operatives which in turn frequently hosted at least a part of this retrospective. While the purpose of these visits was to allow Lefebvre to talk about his films, he was also concerned to discuss with the co-ops the problems of independent film production in Canada at the present time. At a certain stage of this journey, Lefebvre began to keep a film record of his visits – partly just as a diary, a filmed "postcard" (as Lefebvre explains it) that, upon his return, he would be able to send to all his new friends scattered across the country; partly (I assume) as an example for these young filmmakers of a film that can be made simply and inexpensively out of the materials of one's day-to-day life.

To the Rhythm of My Heart is, then, a very private film – a discussion on film by Jean-Pierre Lefebvre for his friends, a discussion about the relationship of images to reality, of light to shadows, of summer to winter, and of life to death. It is the achievement of this "little" film that it can carry such a strong philosophical charge without appearing to be ponderous or pretentious.

To the Rhythm of My Heart incorporates three different modes. First of all, there are the visits to the co-ops, from Vancouver to St. John's, and the sense of "playing about" with a camera that these sequences convey. It is "fun" to make movies. People like to reproduce images of themselves. Photography and filmmaking enable us to preserve traces of experiences that we have collectively enjoyed. Secondly, there is the Eastern Townships footage – the Santa Claus sequence near the beginning of the film, the barbecue sequence near the end. These scenes celebrate the shared community values of that region in Quebec in which Lefebvre lives. But finally, most pervasively, there are the philosophical sections, the disquisitions on light and shadow and life and death which frame the film, which give it its seriousness and, perhaps as well, its more lasting value.

To the Rhythm of My Heart contains a crisis within it, a loss not anticipated when the filming was begun. Accompanying Jean-Pierre Lefebvre on some of his visits was Marguerite Duparc – Lefebvre's wife and long-time collaborator on all of his films. During the course of these visits, however, Marguerite Duparc fell ill and died. Like the rocks eroded by the weather off the Gaspé coast, Marguerite Duparc herself becomes a victim of the ravages of time.

While the naturalization of this death may be ethically troubling to a number of viewers, these moments in the film



● Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, airborne: "We have an innate need of images of ourselves"

are most delicately handled. Played first over a shot of water eroding rocks and then over an image of Marguerite sitting by the shore, a simple octave melody (itself devised by Lefebvre) comes to represent most tentatively the anguish of change, both in nature and in life. And constantly, through the commentary, Lefebvre questions the value of the images he is creating, searching (as he explains) for the means to make a choice "between the world of spectacle and the spectacle of the world."

Marguerite Duparc was producer, editor, and wife for Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, and her loss at least partly explains the absence of editing in this film. While individual sequences have been selected and assembled, all the editing has been done in the camera, including the opticals – the fades and dissolves. Repeatedly, the film plays upon the alternations of presence and loss. A quizzical cat opens the film, but that cat has died. There is a beaver pond in the film, but the beavers have disappeared.

Dazzling images of a winter landscape fade out to black and fade in to white again. "All is light, or the absence of light," the commentary declares. "All is transition, transformation, change, rhythm – a journey." Indeed, it is this theme of the journey that unifies the film.

After the loss of Marguerite and another seasonal change, another woman appears. While these images too will be troubling to some viewers, in terms of cinema they are magically presented. The new woman first appears at a distance in the snow, as we had first seen Marguerite. It could be Marguerite. But it isn't. It is Barbara. Death has occurred and new life is on the way, for Barbara is pregnant. Loss has been suffered but, as if part of a natural process, presence is restored. Summer gives way to winter which becomes summer again – and with it fresh possibilities and new forms of life.

It might seem that *To the Rhythm of*

My Heart is too personal to be discussed in this way or that at least there are two levels within this film – the public and the private. I believe, however, that this assumption would be an error. The film presents to us with a disarming intimacy the "in-between" world in which Lefebvre himself lives. If through its sense of season, its feeling of loss, and the presence of two women (one of whom is an Anglophone), *To the Rhythm of My Heart* (which is "reality") bears an eerie resemblance to a film that Lefebvre made over fifteen years ago, *Il ne faut pas mourir pour ça* (which is "a fiction"), these correspondences register the inseparability of Lefebvre's work from his life. "I live somewhere between the images of reality and the reality of images," as the commentary explains at the beginning of this film. The rest of the film establishes the truth of this statement.

Because *To the Rhythm of My Heart* was made for Lefebvre's young friends in the co-ops across Canada, understandably Jean-Pierre Lefebvre has prepared an English version of this film; but since the French language can carry a higher rhetorical charge than English and since in French Lefebvre's voice is capable of greater subtlety and nuance, the French version is marginally more effective than the copy in English. In whichever language, however, *To the Rhythm of My Heart* is a remarkably simple achievement. This little "home movie" depicts, finally, a double journey – a journey outwards towards the activities of others and a journey inwards towards the rhythms of the soul.

Peter Harcourt ●

AU RYTHME DE MON COEUR/TO THE RHYTHM OF MY HEART d. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre anim. cam. Yves Rivard p. Jim Kelly p.c. Cinak Ltée, with the assistance of the Canada Council dist. J.A. Lapointe Films Inc., Montreal, (514) 331-7832 16mm black & white running time 80 mins.

Bill MacGillivray's

Stations

In its conceptual scope, *Stations* is one of the most ambitious feature length films to have emerged from the Maritimes. Its selection as the headliner of the third annual Atlantic Film & Video Festival, held recently in Halifax, was significant, considering the many ways in which the film probes the wilderness that exists outside the cultural dictates of central Canada and in the heart (or "personal art") of the independent filmmaker.

Directed by Halifax filmmaker Bill MacGillivray, *Stations* follows the journey of Tom Murphy, a TV journalist living in Vancouver with his wife and kids. Tom is assigned to a cross-country grass roots story by his national TV boss who has just dismissed a "personal" project of Tom's. The project involved a close friend named Harry whose sudden death has profoundly affected Tom. Harry grew up with Tom in Newfoundland. They went to the same seminary. His death has raised doubts in Tom about the manipulative, dehumanizing aspects of the media. It has also brought back bad memories of Tom's father who rejected Tom when he and Harry decided to quit the seminary.

Crossing the country by train, Tom and his cameraman interview passengers, but Tom remains haunted by his friend's death. Gradually, the value of his media assignment diminishes and a more meaningful journey into the Self takes over. The exterior landscape slips into a stream of images, past and present, connected by an almost metaphysical soundtrack. "How far north can you go?" asks American artist and filmmaker Robert Frank in the middle of a cryptic rap with Tom. Frank plays a bit role as an anonymous passenger on the journey, but his appearance is not lost on Atlantic filmmakers who remember Frank as the big inspiration behind the formation of the Atlantic Filmmaker's Cooperative. The train finally reaches Halifax and Tom decides to quit his job and take the ferry to St. John's, Newfoundland. As Frank says earlier: "Home is when you get on the boat."

The film's final homecoming scenes include a warm party in St. John's where there is a hint that the breach between Tom and his staunchly Catholic father will be resolved. But there is a simplicity about this ending which undermines many of the film's strengths. It's as if returning to one's roots (the film's transparent "regional" argument) automatically restores unity to a troubled soul and resolves the conflict between regional folk culture and the centralizing forces of an artificial media culture. The ending also brings us straight back to the problem of the film's ambiguous title. "Stations" suggests Tom's journey – the journey of a penitent but are we supposed to equate Newfoundland with Tom's redemption?

"That's like the Zen of being part of Confederation," says actor Andy Jones in the midst of a comic skit in a St. John's bar. In this homecoming scene, Jones is describing the economic woes of his province in a clever satire about the

REVIEWS



● Cross-Canada post-existentialism: Michael Jones and Joel Sapp in *Stations*

plight of a *Ben Hur* movie extra. Comic relief aside, *Stations* seems just as profoundly mixed up in its religion and politics as Jones' Zen humour suggests. The film's radical visual technique and thinly veiled attack against the CBC's national bias is at odds with the film's symbolic structure. In fact, the editing, acting and camerawork systematically alienate the viewer, but unlike a Jean-Luc Godard film, there's no consistent point of view left on screen that audiences can feel sympathetic towards. Actor Mike Jones' portrayal of Tom Murphy is stiff. We never really see him as an effective TV journalist. He wavers between lines, as if he's unsure himself whether the character he's portraying is a Christ figure, or post-existentialist dropout. The use of non-professional actors, recruited from among the train's passengers during the shoot, works against the casual neo-realist encounters the script and cinema verite camerawork try so hard to create.

The most striking footage in *Stations* is taken from a "home movie" which Mike Jones' father shot when his son was attending a Newfoundland seminary. (The autobiographical element of the film is made very clear.) The footage offers us an eerie glimpse into a collective heritage, a "great code" as Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye would call it, but *Stations* fails to illuminate the landscape it traverses. If the soul (i.e. Tom's personal relationship with God, embodied in his relationship to Harry) is the movie's subject, its subject appears dead.

If, in a more general sense, *Stations'* theme is man's alienation from man, the film's medium shots and 'alienation' techniques distance it from audiences, defeating its own manipulative interests in communication. Ingmar Bergman's films are perhaps the best evidence of how a protagonist, intimately shot, can communicate the depth of his or her personal crisis, beyond any spoken words. But the lack of closeups of Tom in *Stations* forces a viewer's emotions

STATIONS d. William MacGillivray sc. Lionel Simmons, MacGillivray d.o.p. Simmons asst. cam. Charles Clark sd. Jim Rillie boom Alex Salter ed. MacGillivray, Simmons p. Gordon Parsons, Chris Majka p. assts. Andrew McLean, Elaine Pain l.p. Michael Jones, Joel Sapp, Beth McTavish, Maisie Rillie, Mary Walsh, Bernard Cloutier, Richard Boland p.c. Picture Plant, with the assistance of the CFDC, Canada Council, CBC, NFB, and private investors. color, 16mm, running time: 95 mins.

and sympathy to be subordinate to reason. Positioned in such a way, it is probably not surprising that at least one viewer at the Atlantic Film Festival identified more with the film's multi-layered sound, than with its story-line. At times, the location sound on the train had all the makings of a great Canadian sound poem.

William Dodge ●

HOUDAILLE: DAYS OF COURAGE, DAYS OF RAGE

*"Don't wait up for me my love,
I'm sitting in tonight"*

So goes the background song to this useful and permanent reminder of the 1980 occupation by the workers of the Houdaille auto plant in Oshawa, Ont.

Made a year after the actual event, the use of archive material, historical photos, and interviews with the workers, gives a clear rundown of the reasons for the drastic action.

Pre-war conditions weren't so hot at Houdaille, and after World War II they didn't get any better. The workers talk about the company's humiliating attitude towards them, and how the spirit of rebellion grew. When the Oshawa plant was to close in 1980, the severance pay and benefits were totally unrealistic. One week's salary for every eight years in the plant – a man with 25 years' service was offered \$800.

The occupation of the plant by the men was paralleled by the occupation of the offices by the women. The warmth of the workers' comradeship comes across well, together with the demonstrations of support from wives and children. The fighting message is clearly and explicitly conveyed.

p./d. Laura Sky, colour, 16 mm. running time: 23 mins., 1981

CIMARRONES

A rough, uneven, yet absorbing first film from Montreal filmmaker Carlos

Serge Bergon's Joy

What little, what very little, of joy there is in *Joy* comes from its star, Toronto-based Claudia Udy in her film debut. She seems likeable and talented and never gives up trying to pump life into both her flatter-than-cardboard character and the movie as a whole. And she's doomed from the start; not even Jehovah could animate this particular lump of clay.

The basic problem seems to be that the producers, RSL in Canada and ATC 3000 in France, wanted to make a hot movie to appeal to the genteel, "erotica" rather than "porn", and took the worst routes to achieve their somewhat dubious end. Courting respectability, they've larded the movie with heavy significance: *Joy* is, supposedly, a Freudian character study. The heroine is neurotic, doing as she does because she's unconsciously seeking her lost daddy. We learn this at the end. You could never guess it from watching, because, courting acceptance, determinedly weeding out anything dark and dangerous that might, just possibly might, turn off an audience of nice young marrieds, they have made her, and everyone else, relentlessly normal. This, logically enough, makes the ending hopelessly limp and reveals the "significance" for what it is: sheep-dip drizzled on the meatloaf.

MINI REVIEWS

Ferrand. It opens in a rather static and boring way, with a man in a "tropical room" setting relating a forgotten part of Peruvian history. The Inca population, decimated by Spanish conquerors, was reduced from ten million to two million in 70 years, so black slaves were brought from Africa to work.

These African slaves who escaped and lived free in hidden communities were called Cimarrones. Then comes a dramatised event taken from old documents in the National Archives of Peru.

A band of Cimarrones free two black slaves from a Spanish caravan. The senor is abandoned in the desert, without food and half-naked, so that he may know what it is like to be a slave.

This small drama, in spite of over-exposed and primitive footage, has great power in the editing and, indeed, some images conjure up Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico*. The film also has a judicious mix of pipe and string melodies, with some drums and a xylophone-type of instrument.

Ferrand has raw filmmaking talent, and one looks forward to more of his work.

d./sc./p. Carlos Ferrand narr.: Burt Henry colour, 16 mm. running time: 24 mins., 1982

TALES OF TOMORROW: OUR ELDERS

A truly affecting look at the realities of being old in today's North American society. Two very different ways of life are examined – an 80-year old wheelchair activist in her apartment,

Of course, it wouldn't matter if *Joy* were exciting. The thrill of sensuality, like the thrill of laughter or suspense, is its own justification. But *Joy* is not sensual. It is flat, slow, wooden and cliché-ridden. It is hideously inept: near the end, *Joy* is raped. The rape breaks up her big love affair, which in turn precipitates her mini-breakdown, the film's climax. So the rape is fairly important to the story. But, you can't tell it's a rape until you see her later reactions. While it's happening, it's distinguishable from the other sex (in which she is an eager participant) only by the slight sheen of sweat on her body and the extra hoarseness in her cries. As I said – inept.

The night *Joy* opened in Toronto, samples of *Joy* perfume were given out to the first, I think, 100 women to enter the theatre. As a love note to the genteel, it was a good try. As an attempt to cover up the stench emanating from the screen, it was an abysmal failure.

Andrew Dowler ●

JOY d. Serge Bergon p. Benjamin Simon l.p. Claudia Udy, Kenneth Welsh p.c. ATC 3000 (France)

Note: The producers of *Joy* applied for official status as a Canada/France co-production. The application was refused by the Canadian authorities because of the substance of the film. Subsequently Canadian producers Stephen J. Roth and Robert Lantos had their names removed from the credits. Of the 35 Canadian crew-members (see *Cinema Canada* No. 96) only d.o.p. Richard Ciupka's name remains – misspelled.

and a retired businessman, 74, living in the Toronto Baycrest Jewish Home for the Aged.

Alex Kielish is still active in mind and body, but his beloved wife suffers from Alzheimer's Disease. He finds it excruciatingly difficult to accept the facts – his wife doesn't know his name, who he is, or that they have been married for 54 years.

Other residents of Baycrest do their best to liven things up. They've organized a "road show", The Great Memory Machine, and take it to nursing homes, schools and other institutions. To keep alive their culture and heritage they have devised a recreation of the sweat shop – sewing invisible garments, waiting for the bagel woman (2¢ each!), talking about organizing against the boss, and ending by singing Solidarity For Ever.

Sarah Binns has suffered from rheumatoid arthritis since her twenties. At 72 her doctor asked her to have an experimental operation on her knees. It was successful, and she now manages to stand after many years. Alone in her little apartment, using a wheelchair a good deal of the time, she manages very well with a small amount of home help. Sarah Binns talks eloquently of her outside interests and her younger friends, and of the need to keep the mind active.

A compassionate film which gives a voice to elderly men and women, and shows them going forward with courage and lots of humour.

d./sc./p. Barbara Halpern Martineau Colour, 16mm running time: 22 mins., 1983

Pat Thompson ●