

comedies like *Hangin' In* or *Snow Job* or movies like *Porky's* indicate, at best puerile. What Canada has never had is mature humor — humor for adults — and that's the most distinctive aspect of *90 Days*: it speaks directly to, and affectionately from, the bewilderment of contemporary adult experience.

Walker clearly loves his characters but the original fumbling foursome of today's male muddle who first surfaced in *Masculine Mystique* have here been cut to the two strongest: the endearingly blue-eyed Blue (played by Stefan Wodoslawsky with all the disarming confidence of knowing he's a heartthrob) and the wonderfully, painfully dead-pan Alex (Sam Grana). The inability to make cuts is probably the single, most over-riding problem of Canadian cinema. Yet *90 Days*' ability to do just that and its visible improvement as a result confidently testifies to this film's belief in itself. And the comedic power displayed by both leading men that results from exactly the right combination of acting talent, strong direction, and a well-written story is simply something to behold.

The counterpoints to Blue and Alex are two antinomial women — the brilliantly all-business Laura (Fernanda Tavares) and the delicately dependent Hyang-Sook (Christine Pak). Between these four poles of the human condition — Alex thrown out of his home by a wife who'll no longer stand his infidelities; Blue having decided he wants to marry a mail-order bride from Korea; Hyang-Sook who, despite the pre-

cariousness of her position, manages to maintain an impressive dignity; and Laura, as the attractive businesswoman with the proposition that just can't be refused — the plot unravels with flawless naturalism. There's little point giving away the story here: suffice it to say it all revolves around everybody's favorite topic — sex and its discontents.

As in *Masculine Mystique*, various NFBers get in for the cameo-roles: Daisy de Bellefeuille as Blue's mother is so good you can just smell the clouds of perfume she gives off, and executive producer Andy Thomson has a nice, brief part as a male nurse. Diane Le Floch's music editing highlights a concern with sound which is another of the unsung glories of Canadian film tradition. But unlike *The Masculine Mystique*, *90 Days* has entirely stepped aside the problem of the docudrama. This film is clearly fiction and in a landscape as parched as ours for Canadian fiction that isn't didactic (or stupid or flawed), it's a wondrous sight indeed.

For *90 Days*' Canadianisms are there (as they should be), but they're unassuming, just part of a particular landscape. For one, it's Anglo-Montreal, a small corner of the Canadian film universe that doesn't appear enough onscreen; it's winter (of course!); and it's the omnipresent state, with its police and its bureaucrats, as always prying its unwelcome nose into the citizenry's private business.

But, above all, *90 Days* is simply a very fine piece of work. Festival-goers can

catch the film at the Montreal and Toronto fests, and since there's more turnout for those two events than Canadian film in this country gets in a decade, this is a film you don't want to miss. So move over all the Petes, Joeys, Duddys, and other losers of Canadian cinema, 'cause here comes a winner. *90 Days* is a film you emerge from with just one question: when's the sequel?

Michael Dorland •



• *90 Days*' brilliant foursome: Stefan Wodoslawsky, Christine Pak, Sam Grana and Fernanda Tavares

MINI - REVIEWS

by Pat Thompson

Rhombus Media Inc. is Niv Fichman, Barbara Willis Sweete, Larry Weinstein, and its main output is sponsored films. With a leaning towards music, this group produces what Canada is internationally known for — the polished, civilized documentary. Rhombus films are crisp in execution, good to look at, and have a great feeling for people. The following trio premiered individually on TV during the past year.

A SENSE OF MUSIC

A visual demonstration of the value of a good music program in schools. No blatant preaching, just a number of very involved and sincere people getting the point across in an entertaining but emphatic manner.

The various ways and methods of music teaching and appreciation are well demonstrated. A visiting music teacher works with the classroom teacher to continue a co-operative project, while another painlessly imparts both music and movement to a gaggle of young kids, busily singing soft and loud with lots of flailing action. The joy of creating musical instruments from familiar articles ranges from students organizing a steel drum band, to a bunch of tiny tots banging and clanging anything they can get their little paws on.

The upper end of the scale is the school show band, and a choir for which there are no auditions and anyone can get in and sing away. These two elements combine in an on-camera performance given with great verve, and to which the audience responds with a standing ovation.

This is a film designed for a specific purpose, but the message is easily and persuasively presented. A student compares music to sports — in both, a

commitment is made to practice and to improve. A teacher says simply, "I go out there — having fun and making music."

Awards: National Educational Film Festival, Oakland, CA (1st place, Teacher Education) and 1984 American Film Festival (Red Ribbon, Teacher Education cat.)

d./ed. Niv Fichman, **p.** Barbara Sweete, **Babs Church, cam.** John Walker, **sd.** Brian Avery, **p.man.** Larry Weinstein; **Running time:** 28 mins., Col. 16mm, **Availability:** McNabb Films (416) 226-3060. Produced in association with TVOntario and Ontario Music Educators Assn

COWBOYS DON'T CRY

A portrait of the filmmaker's grandfather, Gurney Willis. Barbara Sweete hasn't seen her childhood "western movie hero" for 20 years. She comes from the city to his ranch in Alberta to recapture her memories and to update them.

She interviews him, and follows him with a camera — he's 85 years old, semi-retired, and "a stranger to me." There's a charming collage of Gurney Willis's life — snapshots at youthful rodeos and with his cowboy cronies; memories of the Fraser Valley flood of '94; and he even met Bill Miner, the first Canadian train robber (shades of *The Grey Fox*...). Friends reminisce — "the toughest guy I ever seen," "full of jokes," "a real old true horseman."

At the time of filming, Gurney Willis had been asked to lead the annual cowboy parade through his town of Keremeos. So he bought a new and frisky horse which threw him, right on-camera. Four months later he'd reco-

vered from a punctured lung and broken ribs and was out of hospital and telling stories again. At the end of the film Sweete asks, "Did we miss anything about you?" and her grandfather replies, "An awful lot, but I can't explain it."

This very personal tribute started with a shoot in the late '70s, with another after a two-year interval, and was finally edited and finished in 1984. It's a sturdily sentimental look at a real live pioneer who, by no stretch of the imagination, fits the 'senior citizen' mould. And Gurney is still here — 92 years old now.

d. Barbara Willis Sweete, **Nov Fichman, Larry Weinstein, sd.ed.** Tony Sloan, **orig. mus.** Bill Skolnik; **Running time:** 28 mins., Col. 16mm, **Availability:** Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (416) 593-1808 and West (Vancouver) (604) 684-3014. Produced with assistance from the Canada Council/The National Film Board of Canada

MAKING OVERTURES

The story of a community orchestra, the Northumberland Symphony Orchestra (together with the Northumberland Philharmonic Choir), and all the elements that go into its enduring popularity and survival.

From auditions for musicians and singers, to rehearsals, to fund-raising projects, including a "Bach-Yard Sale" and "An Evening in London," a black-tie affair with roast-beef dinner and a Gilbert & Sullivan sing-along — the drive and enthusiasm of everyone involved is evident.

The orchestra members and a legion of supporters are firmly convinced that it is absolutely essential for a communi-

90 DAYS **l.p.** Stefan Wodoslawsky, Christine Pak, Sam Grana, Fernanda Tavares **d.** Giles Walker **p.** David Wilson, Giles Walker **sc.** Walker, Wilson **d.o.p.** Andrew Kitkanuk **ed.** David Wilson **orig. mus.** Richard Gresko **sd. ed.** Bill Graziadei **mus. ed.** Diane Le Floch **mus. record.** Louis Hone **re-rec.** Jean-Pierre Joutel **exec. p.** Andy Thompson **p.c. and dist.** National Film Board of Canada **Color.,** 16mm, 3/4", **VHS, Beta running time:** 99 mins.

ty to have an orchestra, just as it should also have a swimming pool or a hockey arena.

The mixture of young and old within the orchestra works well, and they talk with much feeling of the pleasure and relaxation, the exposure to experience, and of "coming home refreshed" after playing. "It's something I can do on my own without my husband or kids," adds a young housewife.

There's a particular charming visual touch while the orchestra plays. The camera roams over its members and dissolves to their everyday occupations — feeding the pigs, woodworking, the housewife tuning her piano with the kids around.

The enormous rapport within the orchestra and choir is nurtured and encouraged by conductor Philip Schaus, an ebullient, lively and expressive man who obviously loves what he is doing. Whether meeting guest soloist (violinist Barry Shiffman) at the train-station and giving him a swift and funny background of the orchestra members on the drive to his home; urging choir and orchestra to greater heights during rehearsal; or scuttering through a Gilbert & Sullivan patter song in white tie and tails, his effervescent enthusiasm bubbles from the screen.

(An interesting aside: Seagrams, one of the patrons of *Making Overtures*, made a contribution to the Ontario Federation of Symphony Orchestras, and paid for fifteen prints of the film which were distributed free to public libraries in Ontario.)

d. Larry Weinstein, **p.** Barbara Willis Sweete, **Babs Church, cam.** John Walker, **esc.** Douglas Kiefer, **esc. sd.** Brian Avery, **ed.** Anthony Sloan, **Running time:** 28 mins., Col., 16mm **Availability:** McNabb Films (416) 226-3060. Produced in association with TVOntario, with support from The Samuel and Sadye Bronfman Family Foundation, Floyd S. Chalmers, Woodlawn Arts Foundation, Joseph E. Seagram and Sons, Ltd