

# Moving Art

Take two successful ideas and combine them and you get four packages of short Canadian films. These, distributed by the Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre (cfdc) for the National Gallery of Ottawa's Extension Program, will be viewed in cooperating galleries and institutions all across Canada this year, from May to December.

Idea One is simply that art films, experimental films, or what is called Underground Films, find their hottest, happiest audience among those people who already like art, visual experiments and challenges. The Art Gallery of Ontario's runaway success last year with their evenings of Underground Films confirms that there is the fascinated, faithful audience that explorative filmmakers always knew existed.

Idea Two is simply that Packages sell. The success of the POCA Package, an arrangement of 13 films on four reels put together by the cfdc from films sponsored by POCA (the Province of Ontario Council for the Arts) has shown that the most satisfactory way to popularize Canadian shorts, experimental and art films is in a carefully selected program arrangement.

And Idea One plus Idea Two simply means that the cfdc has once again organized shorts by Canadian independent filmmakers into packages, but that this time the films were selected by the National Gallery of Ottawa and will be promoted by them along with the other art exhibitions offered almost 100 galleries and art centres in Canada through the National Program of extension services.

The National Gallery has purchased the use of these twenty films for the May to December period of this year for distribution in their extension program only; afterwards the films will be retired to the National's archives where they will rest in peace until future doctoral dissertations disturb their dreams. The films in fact cannot be considered in the same category of permanent National Gallery "purchase" as art objects and paintings; the Gallery has actually paid for only distribution rights and a somewhat dubious archival investment. Dubious because, as Frederik Manter of the cfdc explains, a 16mm print has only about 40 good showings in it, and the National Program has already almost guaranteed twenty of these.

However you look at it though, everybody benefits. Some independent Canadian filmmakers will get a little money, publicity and audience reaction; the National Gallery will further its interest in film-as-art; the cfdc will get a lot of work, contacts, promotional aid and their expenses, and the Canadian public across the country will finally get a chance to see some of the work of our most adventuresome filmmakers.

None of these films fall into the feeble, the amateurish or the super-self-indulgent category. According to the National Gallery's press release the films represent "... the Canadian filmmaker at his best over the last four years ..." and are "... of a very experimental nature, exploring the diversity of the film medium ... a combination of narrative films, collage films, optical-effect films, animated films, films processed to achieve vivid colour effects, films made from video tape, from 8mm footage or from slides (and) films utilizing unusual sound tracks, or having no sound at all."

For the kind of person who is trained to look and to perceive, who is aware of film as a medium and excited by the possibilities of its use to express ideas, emotions, fields of color, shifts of light and concepts of time, the packages are full of delights and may inspire many heavy discussions and arguments on the uses of film. They range from crowd-pleasers to demanding, antagonizing manipulations of the viewer, and in each package there's at least one that challenges former ideas or astonishes with the strength of its personal penetration.

The programs are as follows:

**ONE:** *Eurynome* (1970) by John Straiton; *Steam Ballet* (1967-68) by John Straiton; *Migration* (1969) by David Rimmer; *Solidarity* (1973) by Joyce Wieland; *Le loup Blanc* by Brigitte Sauriol; *Fountain* (1972) by Leon Marr; *Les Etoiles et Autres Corps* by Gillies Gagné.

**TWO:** *Mirror, Mirror* (1972) by Michael Asti-Rose; *Next to Me* (1971) by Rick Hancox; *A House Movie* (1972) by Rick Hancox; *Rhapsody on a Theme from a House Movie* (1972) by Lorne Marin; *How the Hell Are You?* (1972) by Veronika Soul; *Software* by Al Razutis; *The Rocco Bros.* (1973) by Peter Bryant.

**THREE:** *Vortex* (1973) by Al Razutis; *Factories* (1973) by Kim Ondaatje; *Blue Movie* (1970) by David Rimmer; *Animals in Motion* (1968) by John Straiton; *Thanksgiving* (1972) by Ken Wallace; *Rat Life and Diet in North America* (1968) by Joyce Wieland; *Watercolours* (1973) by Mike Collier; *Earth Song* (1969) by Bob Cowan.

**FOUR:** *Essai a la Mille* (1970) by Jean-Claude Labrecque; *Le Premier Auto Accident de Auto* (1971) by Jean-Michel Labrosse; *Standard Time* (1967) by Michael Snow; *Real Italian Pizza* (1971-73) by David Rimmer; *Yonge St.* (1972) by Jim Anderson; *Blow Job* (1973) by Psychomedia; *R.O.M.* (1972) by Jim Anderson; *Sons of Captain Poetry* (1970) by Michael Ondaatje.

Rather than attempt a film by film review of these twenty works, a look at the content of one of the total programs will give a better idea of the scope and originality of the project. Individual reviews will appear periodically in the Review section of this magazine anyway.

Program Two is my favourite, containing three films I love, two I find interesting, and two I don't know.

*Mirror, Mirror* by Michael Asti-Rose was reviewed enthusiastically by Attila Magor in *Cinema Canada* No. 4, the October-November 1972 issue.

To me the film is like 11 minutes inside a Gothic, Freud-and-Jung-infested head, poking about among cultural memories, the subconscious, literary and Christian symbolism and pubescent fears and fancies. It has everything but the Primal Scream. The circling camera observes a boy who has descended to a basement where he investigates an old trunk, boxes, a desk, jewelry, photographs and a dressmakers' dummy, liberating or inspiring some unusual scenes and occurrences. Such a deliberate effort to evoke ponderous thoughts, sinister memories, and enchanting mysteries leaves me as satisfied as reading a gourmet menu. I feel the talented Asti-Rose may have watched too much Bergman at an early age, or perhaps too much Roger Corman. At any rate he's an energetic and inventive person who himself bears watching.

The second film is *Next to Me*, by Rick Hancox (1971) described by him as "About my life in New York City, and the people in my life, using sounds and images in brief fragments. A kind of poem."

The film is cued as an emotional autobiography by a streetcorner sign commanding DON'T WALK, which stops the protagonist practically mid-stride and effectively creates an arrested moment in which he recapitulates and reassesses parts of his life. A moment in time may be long with crammed thoughts or emotional impact, but a moment in film time may be theoretically endless and still acceptable aesthetically.

Resnais-like, Hancox discovers the plastic qualities of time, the involving power of fragmentation, the strength of repetition, in which an act is forced to comment on itself, and the bedeviling fascination of the space in time, and of the time that creates space. The work is inventive and fresh with a spontaneous approach neatly manicured and made meaningful by some remarkably fine-edged cutting. He uses visual images

like words and sounds in poetry. A few seconds' example may explain this: a naked woman is falling face-down onto a bed. He cuts the fall before its completion, forcing the viewer to mentally complete the fall, at the same time a voice-over in slightly delayed time speaks of the woman falling toward the bed, but the voice is also cut before completing the comment. The result is not frustration, since the viewer can easily complete the uncomplicated act, but a lyrical sense of timelessness; the action is begun visually, repeated verbally and finally, completed mentally. At the same time this moment adds to the emotional creation of the male character in the film, and as autobiography, makes a personal statement that remains suspended and only imperfectly understood by the audience, yet encourages further involvement. I really like this film a lot.

I'm looking forward to seeing the third film, *A House Movie*, made by Rick Hancox in 1972, about which Joseph L. Anderson (Ohio University Film Dept. Head) writes, "... one of those rare, legitimate romantic films, so unashamedly personal it defies the pastoral and maudlin misinterpretations with which the Cinema has so often sabotaged the great romantic composers ... Hancox achieves no less than perfect, inseparable union of sound and image."

The fourth film, Lorne Marin's *Rhapsody on a Theme from a House Movie*, provides an appropriate change of pace. It is an intellectual, technical experiment, emotionless and reflective in nature and deliberately uninvolved.

Marin describes his film: "Images move through a fixed frame, movement being created by lines of images. The film maintains a constant visual pattern with the establishing line being drawn along MacPherson Avenue in Toronto; everything that occurs in the film is contained in that basic line. The film reflects the pace, the people and the physical appearance of my street and shows the power of the film to create movement."

I liked the fascination of the travelling fade gimmick, if that's what it was, the sense of time-shifts Marin establishes, the literal temporariness of passing life that inevitably results from the vanishing and appearing images of people on the street, the inadvertent humor. Though it is an interesting experiment and a quite perfect use of film (it could not be created in any other medium) it is like robot art to me. Could a computer set the problem and command the camera and regulate the results one day?

The fifth film is a fine, funny, sharp and satiric work by Veronika Soul called *How the Hell Are You?* which showed to enthusiastic response at the Women's Film Festival in Toronto last year. Kirwan Cox wrote of it in *Cinema Canada* "... the film is a tremendously funny collage inspired by the cynical comments of a homosexual writing back to the filmmaker over the course of years ..."

Made at the Educational Media Centre of McGill University in 1972, it illustrates competence with a half dozen techniques and indicates a fully-developed filmmaker resides in Soul. The collage does not fall into chaos, and certain images, the youthful boyish smiling face of Brando for instance, or the sudden red lips and cheeks on newspaper celebrities or postcard subjects, creates a visual continuity among the melange of cartoons, photographs, paintings, faces, views and clutter that illustrate the unsettled physical and psychological life of the narrating letter-reader. Each "Dear Jane" to "Love, Mick" is given a separate and suggestive reading by Robert Vallée that colors with a genuine depth the visual variety of the film in its carefully selected superficiality.

It is a remarkably revealing and perceptive 12 minute study made in terms of the subject's escapes and through his wry and carefully casual comments.

Sixth is the film *Software* by Al Razutis. This one I'm

anxious to see because it is such a mystery; no information provided, not even the length. Good title too. Curiosity aroused.

The final film in Package Two is *The Rocco Bros.* by Peter Bryant, made in 1973 in Vancouver. It's a fascinating expanding 42 minute color-sepia-black-and-white contemporary movie in which the sad things are shown humorously, the desperate things loosely, the sardonic with a shrug, the preposterous seriously, and the hopeful, hidden and hard to find. Bryant cuts in and out of past and present with fictitious and semi-real characters and situations in a very loose, informal home-movie style, prodding current ideas and past fads — Che Guevara, biking, hair, heroin, country escape, fifties-sixties nostalgia, contemporary non-art and of course, movie making, as though prodding for signs of life, or significance.

Alexander Diakun plays Jake, a drifting filmmaker returned to Vancouver who rediscovers an old friend, Rudy (played by Bill Hawk) from whom he abruptly parted five years earlier (seen in nostalgia-hued flashbacks) and with whom, and another friend, Roop (Don Granberry), he casually makes a movie called *The Rocco Bros.* which is seen both being filmed and sectionally inserted as a film. His two friends not only play Roop and Rudy, the Rocco Brothers, in their movie, but add revealing side scenes. When Rudy goes up on junk, we only watch from the outside, but when Roop fantasizes a film, he takes the idea of his digging holes to an ultimate end in a tiny insert movie that's a joyful send-up to those who dig conceptual art.

George Csaba Koller has written extensively and well of the film and Bryant's work in *Cinema Canada* No. 7, the April-May 1973 issue.

With programs such as this, how can these four packages of Canadian shorts fail to impress and please the selective audiences who will see them across Canada between May and December, courtesy of the National Gallery's extension program? Congratulations to the Canadian Filmmaker's Distribution Centre and the National Program (as the National's Gallery's extension program is now called), for their imaginative and practical plan which so sensibly acknowledges that true success in distributing films depends entirely on getting the right films before the right audiences.

## A lot can happen before you get it in the can

Your casting is perfect, your cameraman the best around, all is ready to shoot . . . then your lead breaks his leg *or* your film stock is faulty *or* the weather turns bad *or* the lab messes up *and* you're in trouble . . . But that's the film game, isn't it? It is, unless you play it smart and protect yourself

in a professional manner with insurance. It's not expensive but it is important and it gives you peace of mind because you can insure against the bad things that can happen before (or after) you get it in the can.

Let's discuss it.

### Arthur Winkler, CLU

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