

Les 5 jours du cinéma indépendant canadien

A showcase / distribution forum for independents

BY PATRICIA KEARNS

Attempts to establish an independent film production and exhibition movement distinct from the mainstream of commercial cinema date back to at least 1929 when the first International Cinematography Congress met at La Sarraz, in France. One of the hopes of organizers was to establish an international filmmaking co-operative, to be based in Paris. This did not materialize, as such, but the congress spurred great debate about the role of independent cinema.

Sixty years later the discussion continues, as was evident, during "Les 5 jours du cinéma indépendant canadien", held in Montreal, from Nov. 16 to Nov. 20. The very successful "5 jours" provided both the opportunity for a Montreal audience to see a different film fare and for independent filmmakers and distributors from across the country to meet one another. The event was coordinated and organized by an energetic team of Main Film members, a Montreal production co-op. Peter Sandmark, one of the two principal organizers (the other was Guylaine Roy), spoke of the event's success in terms of its original goals. That several of the screenings were sold out and the others extremely well-attended means that exposure to the 37 films was high. That was a primary goal. The second aim was to work towards better distribution of Canadian independent films by establishing a stronger network of those involved. For this, a two-day distribution forum was set up, to which several speakers involved with distribution at different levels were invited. Their presentations were heard by participants who belonged to film production co-ops and distribution networks across the country. Most were members of the Independent Film and Video Alliance, an umbrella organization of 45 separate groups. The Alliance has acted as a pressure group to large institutions such as Telefilm, the NFB, Canada Council, and the Ministry of Culture, for the last eight years to assure that the needs of independent film and video makers are being recognized.

Representatives of the different groups introduced themselves and explained the history and specific concerns of their organizations. The level of information shared and the nature of that exchange point to the participants' desire to create the necessary links in better communication. Problems now faced by the



Jacob Tierney as the young Ben; Vicki Barkoff as Ma Waxman

Rick Raxlen's and Patrick Valley's **Horses in Winter**

For some, the greatest fear is death by drowning. Not for Ben Waxman (Rick Raxlen) who remembers coming back from a watery grave. Now he fears the water, also the dark, and howling wolves, but not death. Ben was saved from drowning at eight years old; he is now 41 and puzzled. Where does the child's state of grace go? And why suddenly, he wonders, is there this longing to remember his happy past. Waxman's adult ponderings provide one level of narration in Rick Raxlen's first feature film *Horses in Winter*.

As he leaves the city on a bus headed for his trailer in the country, Ben's memory travels to that summer when he was eight. He questions and comments on his childhood in a voice-over; fine solo piano music (Michel Utyerbrock from his piano suite *Innocence*) co-introduces, along with Ben's voice, which is somewhat but not

totally given to melancholy, a pensive and casual mood. We see, in flashback, the little Ben (Jacob Tierney) and his family during the last summer spent at their cottage, north of some city.

The film moves along slowly. Like Ben's summer it unfolds without great conflict or action. The film's characters do not motivate changes, they have little explicit effect on the story. There really is a single protagonist - Ben, seen in two stages of his life; even *he* is not outwardly moving towards something. The movement is inward in this film and represents the reflective experience of the filmmaker. Raxlen himself plays out a drama of psychological revelation in *Horses in Winter*.

This extremely personal style of filmmaking belongs to a tradition that film theorist P. Adams Sitney called the trance film. *Horses in Winter* describes an interior quest; a certain transparency of the protagonist exists; we are aware of the filmmaker's journey.

Young Ben's days are filled with simple things, examining painted turtles in the Book of Knowledge and in the grass, walking down the dirt road with his sister, lying on the raft - a place that big Ben describes as straddling the earth and water. The film brings us to a place like the raft,

a neither here nor there place, a place of contemplation, a place strangely familiar.

Art direction by Kathy Horner and Deborah Creamer helps create the simple world of the child Ben. The early '50s, a period easy to represent with embellishment, is treated here with restraint; costumes and sets are unobtrusive, adding to a *mise-en-scène* which in its modesty signifies capably and subtly.

Patricia Kearns •

HORSES IN WINTER *p/s/c*. Rick Raxlen *co-d./co-ed.* Rick Raxlen and Patrick Valley *d. o. p.* Stephen Reizes *asst. cam.* Achraf Chbib *add. cam.* Michel Lamothe *loc. sl.* Glen Hodgins *art d./cost./set dressing* Kathy Horner, Deborah Creamer *1st. a. d.* Alejandro Escobar *p. a. s.* Ed Fuller, Alison McGillivray *p. man.* Ray Roth *loc. man.* Suzanne Bouchard *craft* Barry Simpson *For Main Film: del. p.* Denis Langlois, Guylaine Roy *project coord.* Eric Gregor-Pearse, Sylvain l'Esperance *asst. ed.* Dilek Aral *sl. ed.* Richard Comeau *mix* Andre-Gilles Gagné *mus.* Edgar Bridwell, Peter Sandmark, Clive Jackson, Craig Morrison *mus. rec.* Fred Torak *add. mus.* Michel Utyerbroek from *Innocence*. *l. p.* Jacob Tierney, Rick Raxlen, Vicki Barkoff, Jacques Mizne, Colin Kish, Erin Whitaker, Lucie Dorion, Alejandro Escobar, Edward Fuller, Alexandra Innes, Neil Kroetsch, Roxanne Ryder, Lemi Parker, Lou Israel, Jancy Wallace, Ann Page, George K., Elizabeth Bellm, Steven Lepage, Mathew Niloff, Chloe Rose Raxlen. A Main Film, Raxlen coproduction with the assistance of the Canada Council, Telefilm Canada and the NFB PAFPPS program. 90 minutes, colour 16mm.