

# Vancouver independent filmmaking:

## PETER BRYANT

West Coast independent filmmaking has witnessed an optimistic upsurge within the last several months. Due mainly to the CFDC short-films grant competition, but also to the NFB's enlarging of operations in Vancouver, British Columbia's young filmmakers are active and prolific.

Completed works include 747 by Sandy Wilson, a documentary on the life of a young paraplegic; **Killer Wales**, a fiction-short directed by Tom Shandel and edited by Werner Aellen; **Seven Steps**, by Joanna Moss; and **Master of Images** by Byron Black, the first title offered by Rudi Moder's recently form-

ed distribution company, J.R. Moder Releasing Corporation. It had its premiere at the Hollywood Theatre in Vancouver. Al Razutis is still working on a feature film called **The Beast**, Jack Darcus has completed the screenplay for his third feature, and Image Flow Centre is planning two full-length films, tentatively entitled **Things** and **Flute**.

Some 16mm shorts financed by the CFDC have finished shooting and are now being edited. **Old Man in a Dream**, written and directed by Richard Patton. Cinematography: Ron Orioux, sound: Larry Sutton, and production manager: Peter Bryant. "The film follows a young man who moves up country, where he meets an old timer, who tells him: "Well, your ideas might be different, but you're settling just the same." Cast: Celine La Fermier, Alexander Diakun (also in **Rocco Brothers**) and Tom Wiley. Edited by Richard Patton and Mike Haughton.

**Funeral Ship**, by writer, director, editor Bix Milanich, photography by Tony Westman, sound recorded by Richard Patton. The film is "a surrealistic science fiction about a computer prison," and stars Robbie the Robot. Production manager was Doug White.

**Gandy Dancer**, script, direction, and editing by Zale Dalen, production manager, Laura Dalen; cinematography by Ron Orioux, sound: Richard Patton. Synopsis: "Two young men from Saskatchewan come East to work on the railroad, and they end up killing a man. A period film, a mood piece, on the turn of the century Canadian Pacific Railroad. Gandy dancer is an old railroad term, and is *not* a stripper or a racing horse. The film stars Howard Baker. These projects should be finished by mid-April.

Three new grants were just given out to West Coast filmmakers by the Canadian Film Development Corporation (see Film News).

Another important Vancouver short

now completed and making the rounds of film-buying people and agencies is one called **Rocco Brothers**, by Peter Bryant. He was in Toronto recently, and provided us with all this valuable information on the filmmaking scene out on the Coast, in addition to talking about his own film work.

**Rocco Brothers**, directed by Peter Bryant, financed by a \$7,500 CFDC grant. Photographed by Tony Westman, and featuring Alex Diakun, Bill Hawk, and Don Granberry. Richard Patton did the sound, music by Wildroot. Production manager was B.J. Clayden, and the film was edited by George Johnson.\* Like many of the others, it's a distinctly West Coast film in mood and story. Distribution is being handled by the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (341 Bloor Street West, Room 204, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1W8 - (416) 921-2259).

Peter Bryant has created three typically West Coast characters in the **Rocco Brothers**. Jake (Alex Diakun) establishes the low-key mood of the colour 'reality' part of the film, with his long walk across a bridge into Vancouver - the very first scene, during which he explains that he's just blown into town and is now 40,000 miles from New York, on the edge of the 'Great Canadian Wilderness' to pick up his welfare cheque. He's a drifter/filmmaker and is just doing some laying back in lay-back city." Next to the welfare office he runs into an old buddy, Rudy, who's equally down and out but is also strung out on junk.

Roop, another friend of Jake's, is into fantasizing about potential movies. They

\* "All films processed at Alpha Cine Services Ltd., a lab very co-operative and attentive to the needs of the filmmaker. Lighting and camera equipment for the four CFDC shorts provided by John Bartley at William F. White, whose assistance was invaluable."

- Peter Bryant



(All photographs of Deal and Rocco Brothers taken off-screen.)



say 'let's make a film,' and the movie within a movie comes on: we're back in the fifties and those hilarious greasers Roop and Rudy Rocco are out to steal hubcaps, have chain fights, steal old ladies' purses, or just to cruise around and pick up some 'tomatoes,' take 'em to a drive-in movie, and try to make 'em. What's playing at the drive-in? **Rebel Without a Cause**, what else.

The Rocco Brothers are played to perfection by Bill Hawk and Don Granberry. Granberry has elevated hood-cum-cigarette lip-twitching to the level of art, and his protruding schnoz and kisser are complemented by a pair of exceptionally dopey-looking eyes. Forever combing his greased back duck tail, Roop Rocco is the heavy of the pair, who even kicks his own mum in the tummy, faking it for the film, of course. In the drive-in he executes the neatest trick to make his pick-up helpless: he gets her to lean out the car window for an extra speaker and then does nasty things to her from behind. But she loves every minute of it.

Not to be outdone by his brother, Rudy Rocco is wrestling with his 'hep kitten' in the front seat. Bill Hawk looks like a guy we all know, short-cropped curly hair greased back with grooming oil and the sweat from too many beers. His dual role in the film — he plays the junkie as well — calls for sensitivity coupled with the talent to strike tough-looking poses at will.

By the time the half-hour film is over, we get to know these three guys on a lot deeper level than this hastily written synopsis suggests. Roop might have gone through the fifties trip way back when, but now he's into living off the land and 'diggin' holes. Rudy is trying to quit junk, but it makes him feel good, and he knows he'll fix again. Jake is Peter Bryant's alter ego, having paid his dues but still buoyant and together enough to create some films. Alex Diakun has a classic profile and a memorable screen presence.

**Rocco Brothers** is an exciting new film from the Pacific coast, explicit in its locale, though its theme is universal enough for instant recognition in a North American context. It is at once funny and sad, striking and low-key, black and white and colourful, depicting the greyness of city existence and the hope that lies in tripping back to the country. It brings together long hairs

and greasers and manages to reflect both traits in every one of us.

Bryant's direction is smooth, sensitive, and polished, the acting is exceptional throughout, the camerawork is technically outstanding and artistically impressive, and the editing is tight and to the point. **Rocco Brothers** is the kind of film that *should* be shown on television in Canada, but chances are the networks won't show it because of its frankness in language and the honesty with which it portrays contemporary youth.

— by George Csaba Koller

#### Lone Gun Lonesome

*got black leather pants  
got a ruby in my hands  
got a fire in my eye  
I'm feeling greasy*

*no need to explain  
I felt a lot of pain  
and I'm ready to die  
It would be easy*

*We are children of the dark  
and we're gonna light the spark  
that's gonna set the night on fire  
We've found out it's just a fraud  
And there ain't no fucking god  
and if you say there is  
Then you're a fuckin liar*

*Feelin lone gun lonesome  
just as good as dead and then some*

*Feelin Lone Gun Lonesome.  
— lyrics and song by Howie Vickers,  
from the film.*

*Peter Bryant rapped with Cinema Canada recently:*

**Rocco Brothers** is based on two characters from the 50's. It's not just nostalgia. It's about the end of being a greaser. Greasy goes beyond nostalgia. It's not just a comedy, it's a heavy film. I wanted to do the Rocco Brothers number in 16mm and black and white. I had written something and I wanted to get it down. But it's more serious than the Rocco brothers. More like the story of Rudy. It's about the trip of living on welfare — junk — contemporary themes.

*Are you going into the hills as the end of the film implies?*

That's a fantasy realized, and I like to see that. It's positive. What is negative is not the fighting, but the smack trip of suffering in silence. The guns are also a metaphor for a lot of hope. Everyone admires the guerilla. Also, the image of defiance goes back to the James Dean movie.

*How do you see hope?*

Hope is limited to visions and dreams. Not to reality. I'm very pessimistic — the world won't change. No matter what is around you, you can be free. It's really difficult to explain. I used a voice-over to explain it, but I threw it away. That song at the end is very heavy — 'I'm already dead and then some . . . I'm ready to die easy . . .' Bare lyrics. It's like a joke on the dawn of man, but he doesn't believe it . . . But the dream is possible.

*What was the intent of showing the purse-snatching scene?*

It's a send up on violence. In the next scene, you see that she is alright after having been 'beaten up'. It makes you realize that it's just a film, almost a caricature. I like how people make their films with their mother and sons and friends, like John Cassavetes or Bob Downey and his dogs. I admire that.

*I was intrigued by how peripheral the three women were in the film. You showed mostly the three guys, yet women must be important in their lives. You're leaving yourself wide-open for criticism about that. Was it intentional on your part?*

No. It developed as I was shooting. The story became Rudy's, so you go with the action. I cut the scene with the blonde — Louise — because it was structurally impossible to keep it in. There were some nice scenes with the girls that were all cut out. That's the tragedy of working in a feature format in thirty minutes. It's hard to develop the characters — there is nowhere to go.

But I don't mind it being caricaturized — the 50's trip. It's a personal film — it comes out of my experiences. I was bummed out over a woman at the same time, and if I were to make a film, I would try to do her justice. But it takes a great deal of skill to get her character. With the junkie — well, I had a friend from High School shooting junk. It was heavy. One step down.

*But both your films were very heavy . . .*

Deal was an experimental film. One





little deal with Deal. One little thing about an incident, other incidents could happen dramatically.

Rocco Brothers was heavy. I made it when I came back to Vancouver from Los Angeles. That's how I feel about movie making. I went to the American Film Institute for a year, after four years at Simon Fraser University. But I was sick and tired of the course at AFI, and I'm glad I quit.

*What is the Simon Fraser film course like?*

It's not a major film course — more like a workshop. It's geared to production, just making films. No lectures. Some of my friends are making films there now. Some of the guys who worked on the film are from the same school.

*Has the NDP victory helped at all?*

It's very important. Very fine. Nobody knows where it will lead to — the change of the party dynasty. The So-Creds wanted Hollywood to come to Vancouver, they sent pamphlets with encouragements. With the NDP, there is the hope of greater grass-roots films.

*Do you ever work in the 'straight' industry?*

No. I don't. Some of the other filmmakers do. I was teaching for a while, and I have had Canada Council grants and one CFDC grant . . . I do a few jobs once in a while for a few months. I would get more if I worked in Audio-Visuals, but it's a different direction. It's another goal. I want to work as a filmmaker.

*Do you think you might make some money on "Rocco Brothers"?*

There's no way to make money with it. But I'll make another film — I've written a script called **The Supreme Kid**. I learned a lot from this particular film. I'll make money and that's fine — I need some money to work. But somebody might pick it up . . . I don't know much about distribution, but I will show it to the CFDC.

*What do you think of Darcus — who made Proxyhawks?*

I liked the first one, **Great Coups of History**. I saw it four years ago . . .

*Do you think the pace of life is slower in Vancouver than Toronto or Montréal?*

Darcus is a perfect example of that, and Judith Eglington is slow. But my films are quick. **Rocco Brothers** is fairly quick. A forty-two minute film can't be slow.

Vancouver is more personal. In Vancouver, there's nowhere to go. Like in **Rocco Brothers**, they're all working but they can't make a career there, like the monologue on the *Great Canadian Wilderness* in the film. I will do it there even if it's ten times harder. Canada Council and the CFDC need people making films all over Canada — not just in Ontario, but in B.C. or Saskatchewan. There's a lot to be said about those places and spaces. People with roots and a feel for the space where things come from . . . People believe that theirs is a distinct culture, as legitimate as Quebec's. I think they have something more than tempo — a particular style . . . A West-Coast feel. That's what all the films have. Yet there's only one sequence by the ocean in **Rocco Brothers**.

Rick Patton is making an up country film. Ideals of the land and how nice it is. One is a railway film — coming west from Saskatchewan. But I have my own tempo, style. I can ever see it in things I did a long time ago.

*Is there a lot of communal working on films? Like a co-op?*

There are quite a few groups, loose groups of five to eight people, who all know each other and work together off and on. Some are more pulled together and have a lot of collaboration. Notice how many people worked on more than one production. Rick Patton and Bix Milanich and George Johnson and I have a communal trip already. We have some equipment between us — an Eclair and a Nagra. We have our own studio, we rent a Moviola and have two benches and a splicer. We all help pay the rent and can use the equipment. No money is being made off of it. But the productions resulted in positive work experience for large numbers of people. Photographers Tony Westman and Ron Orioux, actors, continuity, camera and sound assistants, gaffers . . . Vancouver people don't get many opportunities to work in the dramatic context which the grants provided. George Johnson, who was the editor, is doing his own film for the CFDC, and the cameraman is getting a few things together. There's a lot of optimism because people are working. There's been a tremendous growth in the last five or six years! A lot more people are making films now in Vancouver. ●

