

# 8th student film fest

# technique up: imagination down

by Wojtek Gwiazda

It's become obvious to even the most casual observer of the Canadian Student Film Festival that the actual technical ability to put on the screen a well exposed, focused image synced with sound – one which could appear in any movie theatre – has been achieved.

It's been achieved by eliminating the troublesome 8 and super 8 mm films from competition and leaving the festival to the moneyed 16 and 35 mm filmmaker. This has greatly reduced the badly exposed unsynced home movies festival audiences were previously forced to suffer through. As the festival has become more and more streamlined, the professional amateurs with school and Canada Council support have moved in and the festival has begun fulfilling the role its director Serge Losique has longed for – that of a "Canadian Cannes".

But in this mad rush for professionalism, the festival, which ironically enough was, according to Losique, an attempt to get away from the "filmmaker-technician" of the NFB, has ended up with just that – a lot of technically capable film technicians with, for the most part, nothing to say.

This is not only unfortunate, but considering the importance of the communications media, extremely worrisome. Because undeniably the media industry is taking an increasingly important role in our society. When unions write open letters to the public in newspapers and employers answer back in the same way; when governments use television to justify their policies and presidential candidates stake elections on TV debates, the power of the communications media becomes more and more evident. It therefore becomes important to understand not only the reasoning behind making a film but also its effect on the audience. For instance, what kind of a reality is the filmmaker presenting? Are we all affluent upper-middle-class Canadians?

Unfortunately, these questions have not been considered by the vast majority of entrants in the festival.

Caught up in their attempts to create "artistic" films, they make vague introspective personal voyages into the mind in superficial examinations of artists, homosexuals and anything else that seems filmworthy.

It seems that after years of dedicating themselves to their chosen profession, that's all they're interested in. The films are made for their own sake, in a vacuum that is left

only for the necessary period of time it takes to leave some images on the celluloid. Then it is back to the world of the "filmmaker", where time and space mean nothing and films have no beginning or end because the filmmaker is concerned with the f stop and the sound sync and switching in mid-sentence from black and white footage to color.

Of course, student filmmakers work under certain obvious disadvantages that do not beset the professional. The student is at the mercy of whatever actors he can find. The same goes for the crew, the music composition and a hundred other more or less important details.

Even so, or perhaps because of these disadvantages, the student filmmakers try to ape the Hollywood masters by using every cliché travel shot, fade-in, camera angle and special effect they can remember. Instead of aiming for simple themes that are all around them in a society showing signs of decay, they retreat into horror-adventure thrillers or "deep" introspectives.

As if denying the existence of the real world, they build their own fantasy land. Here they have a free hand. Cutesy shots through tree branches of a child "discovering" the world (*Mon âme*) make one wonder if a filmmaker has to go through some honest suffering to make decent films. Documentaries like *Rick Taylor/The Frozen Moment* – on a suburban artist who paints sad paintings that don't sell because he makes people think too much, yet personally thinks life is great – leave one with a distrust of all "artists".

Undeniably, trying to break new frontiers of film technique has its positive side. But the obsession with gimmickry, trick photography, with studio-style cinematography, which is obviously being encouraged by the festival, is also destroying the youthful creativity that used to make even badly edited films worthwhile.

Instead professionalism reigns supreme with all its negative aspects. Instead of new exciting insights from young minds we have gimmicky rehashes of old themes. In the tradition that whatever is popular is fodder for the camera, this year's enlightened "artists" exploited sex and homosexuality to the limit. Hung up by not being hung up by sex, they've built their own prison of the mind.

Professionalism also puts the filmmakers in a strait-jacket of technical considerations that hamper their ability to see the entire film. For instance, in one escapist film this year, *Daughter of the Vampire*, the filmmaker produced some beautifully filmed and lighted interiors that recalled those of Bergman's *Cries and Whispers*. However, he not only wasted his effort on a cheap thriller, which is per-

haps excusable, but insults the intelligence of his audience and puts his own into question by leaving in the plot some totally impossible occurrences.

Over and over one is amazed by these filmmakers' total disregard of the real world around them. As "artists", are they not bound to have a consciousness even more developed than that of the public? Is theirs not the duty to prod, push, analyze, question?

Documentaries, the Canadian tradition built upon the work of Grierson and others of the early years, have been long buried. The "stars" of those films used to be miners, mailmen, soldiers. Today the Canadian "avant garde" that these students supposedly represent finds its truth in homosexuals, failed suburban painters and chess players. Instead of reaching for new insights, the documentaries blatantly emphasize the stereotypes.

While progressive filmmakers the world over complain of the stereotyping and constraints of the film industry, young student "artists" eagerly embrace the Hollywood mold and continue the myths that are maintained by the big industries like Dupont (United Artists) and General Motors (MGM) that financially control the film industry.

## **La nouvelle vendeuse** **by Mario Bolduc**

**La nouvelle vendeuse** is a film of another genre. This is a story of a Levis, Quebec, salesgirl who decides the only way she can escape her work and stay home, while all her neighbors are working, is to get pregnant.

The film is a success, such a success that it had absolutely no competition from any other film at the festival, because of its simplicity, reality and attention to details.

In a semi-documentary style using the girl's voice to explain a lot of the detail and inner thoughts that would have otherwise taken too long to get across, the film builds a reality that is reinforced by the documentary feeling. Over and over when we hear the girl explain what she does and feels, one forgets that this is fiction. On the other hand we aren't treated to the cluttered sound or unsteady camera-work of a documentary.

As the longest film of the festival (40 minutes) and one with a seemingly simple theme, it is surprising that the film, with rare exceptions, did not drag. That it did not is thanks to both the actress who plays a most sympathetic and likeable salesgirl and the filmmaker, Mario Bolduc, who very judiciously attempted to create atmosphere and understanding from the shortest amount of footage he could.

Particularly on second viewing, one sees how little footage is used to convey a ferry boat trip, a visit to a doctor, or the fact that the husband's shipbuilding plant is on strike.

Furthermore Bolduc has found a very natural way of juxtaposing humorous incidents and more serious material where neither suffer and in fact both are enhanced. By giving his characters real emotions and motivations against this backdrop, he creates very real situations.

There is, for instance, one scene where two friends at work stick a birthday present in the girl's locker. She arrives, finds the present and unwraps it; everything is very nice and natural. As soon as it's opened, one after the other the two friends rush off to work, because work is work and you're paid by the clock. It's a minor detail, but that's what makes the film believable.

This care for detail is everywhere evident. When the girl talks about the birthday dinner she's prepared, she wonders if her husband will notice the new sweater she's bought for

the occasion. Here again, it's not the actual fact of the sweater but all that the thought of it implies that creates this fully developed character.

The girl's acceptance that there is a hierarchy among the employees – as she puts it, secretaries are considered superior to salesgirls because they went to college and do much more interesting work – emphasizes better than any other means could the social awareness of the girl and her relation to her work.

The naturalness of the film, particularly in the relations between the girl and her husband, again underline the capabilities of Bolduc and the actors who worked for him.

For all the down-to-earth feeling of the film, it still remains a light airy tale with pleasant memories of a happy relationship rather than a dogmatic attempt to understand the position of "a worker" or "a woman". □

## **The Winners**

### **Norman McLaren Award**

**La nouvelle vendeuse** by Mario Bolduc  
Scenario, B/W, 40 m., York University

### **Scenario**

#### **First Prize**

**Blanc de mémoire – souvenir rouge** by  
Yvan Girouard  
14 m., Color, Concordia

#### **Second Prize**

**Small Real Estate Deal** by Melvin Stone Kennedy  
B/W, 10 m., SFU Film Workshop

### **Documentary**

#### **First Prize**

**Le monument** by Daniel Louis and  
Hélène Couture  
Color, 22 m., Ryerson Polytechnical Institute

#### **Second Prize**

**See How the Cat Walks** by Rick Benwick  
Color, 9 m. 30 s., Ryerson Polytechnical Institute

### **Animation**

#### **First Prize**

**Thought** by Darcia Labrosse  
Color, 4 m. 48 s., Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal

#### **Second Prize**

**Hallelujah Darwin!** by Robert William Gibbs  
Color, 12 m., University of B.C.

### **Experimental**

#### **No prize**

### **Special Jury's Prize "Entertainment"**

#### **First Prize**

**Ceux venus d'ailleurs** by Franco Battista  
Color, 20 m., Concordia, documentary

#### **Second Prize**

**For Your Enjoyment... Bag Brown & His Orchestra** by Jim Chohanik  
Animation, Color, 3 m., Vancouver School of Art

### **Honorable Mention**

**Lady From Montreal** by Andrew Adams,  
for its cinematography  
Scenario, B/W, 24 m., Conestoga College  
**November 3** by George Mihalka - Rodney Gibbons,  
for direction of actors  
Scenario, Color, 24 m., Concordia