

REVIEWS OF SHORT FILMS

Step by Step

d: Terry Burke, **ph:** Mark Irwin, **ed:** Terry Burke, **sd:** Bryan Day, **sd. re-rec:** Tony Van Den Anker, **p. asst:** Carol Street, **p.c.:** Film Arts, **col:** color, 16mm, **running time:** 13 minutes, 50 seconds, **dist:** Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre.

Although I don't know the circumstances behind this production, it seems to me that **Step by Step** might have benefitted from being a longer film. Its subject is certainly a fascinating one – mime – but in its present form, **Step by Step** seems slightly hampered by a large conception trying to fit into a short time-frame. Very specifically, the filmmakers are here exploring the work of Paul Gaulin and the National Mime Theatre Performers. The film attempts to combine footage of the group in rehearsal, shot in a kind of ciné-maté style, with more formally photographed sequences of the group's performances, shot largely with an immobile camera from a fixed distance. In my view, the combination of styles is somewhat ineffective here because the sequences in combination seem arbitrary. For example, the rehearsal scenes of the troupe working on a rowing routine do not lead into a later, more formally shot presentation of that specific performance. Rather, there is a stark division between what we see rehearsed (and its style of shooting) and what we see performed. The selection of material does not seem based on a clear organizing principle or structure. The result, for me, was a rather disjointed experience in which questions and interests raised in certain portions of the film were not answered or echoed in others.

However, one very effective part of the film belies my generality. We are shown the manner in which the troupe's "neutral masks" are pre-



Striking a pose in **Step by Step**

pared, and then we see the extremely powerful performance in which they are used, with troupe members wearing them in various ways, some on the backs of their heads, some on both front and back, so that the human figure takes on surprising and sometimes grotesque distortions.

All of the performance sequences serve admirably to convey the exquisite work of the National Mime Theatre Performers, and the film certainly deserves to be seen if just for these portions alone. The publicity leaflet for the film explains that Paul

Gaulin has studied at the rival Parisian mime schools of both Etienne Decroux and Marcel Marceau, returning to Canada in 1973 to establish his own company. The selection of routines for the camera suggests the wide range of material which this company has developed, from the simply costumed and familiar conception of "The Windowwashers" to the Japanese Kabuki-influenced "The Forger of Swords". Although **Step by Step** doesn't inform us as clearly as it seems intended to about the process by which a mime troupe or a given routine develops, it does provide us with some of the incredibly beautiful results.

Joyce Nelson

Portrait of Christine

d: Elizabeth MacCallum, **ph:** Mark Irwin, **sd:** Bryan Day, **p.c.:** Film Arts, **col:** color 16mm, **running time:** 25 minutes, **dist:** Canadian Filmmakers' Distribution Centre.

This film, like its subject Christine, is full of pleasant surprises. Starting with a sequence of Christine riding on horseback, we learn through voice-over interview that she has been handicapped from infancy because of a spinal disease. Clearly, Christine has not allowed her disability to prevent her from living fully, and the film reflects her energy through its quickly paced action sequences and its vivid color. Though her doctors had predicted that Christine would never walk, she has accomplished this and so much more that she is an inspiring subject. And yet the film does not attempt to mask the pain and frustrations of being handicapped. Christine speaks openly about her own problems and feelings, at times relating them directly to the attitudes towards the handicapped which are prevalent in our society. However, her tone is never bitter or accusatory. Rather, she explains in a warm, gentle way just what needs the handicapped have: the importance of exercise, the real necessity for "the opportunity of risk".



Christina at work

Director Elizabeth MacCallum has made good use of Christine's role as a community development worker for the March of Dimes. By filming her at work, MacCallum is able to include scenes in which Christine talks very openly with other handicapped women. Since she herself is not bound to a wheelchair, Christine asks one woman, "How would you cook a meal from a wheelchair?" and to another woman she says quite frankly, "I'm surprised you even had children," which prompts her disabled friend to describe the kind of family cooperation involved. There is a natural ease in these conversations, due largely to the sincere sensitivity of Christine.

Portrait of Christine is both great sense of joy. The filmmakers have selected situations involving warm and close human interaction, and settings alive with vibrant colors. There are several memorable sequences: Christine reading a story to four lovely little neighborhood children, who then help her to walk to the table for a snack; a happy, unself-conscious dance in a gym, which is so delightful for its participants' prowess that it must be seen.

The film is intended for all age levels. It might be a particularly useful choice for a primary-school audience, that is, for children who often have fears and curiosity about the handicapped they see on the street, but who too frequently get no direct answers from their embarrassed parents. **Portrait of Christine** is both life-affirming and gently instructive, a fine combination.

Joyce Nelson

Waubashene

d. John Gould, ph. John Griffin, ed. Roger Pyke, m. Andrew Duesdury, p. John Griffin and John Gould, p.c., Gesture Productions, 1977. Running time for **Waubashene Faces**, 6 minutes. Running time for **Waubashene**, 25 minutes.

We have known, since Lumière, that the image on a screen can reveal the unexpected poetry of the quotidian; that film artistry can effectively suggest some movement of the inner life that casts a radiance on the experience of ordinary things. Just so, does the work of John Gould and John Griffin in two fine short films, **Waubashene** and **Waubashene Faces**, illustrate the validity of this peculiar potential of the cinema to make everyday objects bear witness to the texture and fabric of the human generations whose creations they are!

Both films depend greatly for their success on Gould's unique application of drawing to film. Central to his drawing is the expressiveness of the human face and the films achieve both mood and cadence through the employment of dissolves which superimpose facial image upon receding facial image in simulation of a descending arc of time and motion that suggests the evanescence of all human life. What remains when the delicacy of Gould's brush stroke is absent are the filmed, homely accoutrements of the lives of those pencilled faces, the relics of a lifetime lived in the agrarian backwater of a small mid-Ontario town.

All the images and the sounds are evocative in particular, of the flatness of the rural Ontario idiom. There is no mistaking this distinctly Canadian village for **Our Town's** "Grover's Corners". The sounds give it away. Pride in heritage is simply and unabashedly announced in big round numbers by a female **Waubashene** booster as she cites the town's lineage in terms of the Iroquois wars it survived. Indeed, memory is the mainstay of most of the citizenry and a sharp sense of recall points to a remembrance of vanished charm with which the films deal in a series of yellowed snapshots that fix, forever in still frame, a series of ancient bakery wagons, an even earlier Model-T Ford, and dray horses in tandem hitch, posed with their owners in front of the town hostelry.

Yesteryear is clearly the focus, not only of the "faces" of **Waubau-**

shene but of the sensibility, of her cinematic chronologers as well. A muted saxophone evokes a 40s swing-band era with Friday-night dances down at the open-air pavilion on the water; for the rest - a musical accompaniment appropriately nostalgic to match a prevailing mood of reverie (annoyingly unchanging, one notices after a time).

The films are nicely crafted mood pieces, successful in their intercutting of artwork, still-photograph and live-action sequences. Though slender in terms of ambiance, these short films achieve most in the realization of texture and tone, which is what they are crafted to do.

Waubashene Face (6 minutes) was one of six Canadian shorts recently shown in Montreal during the Olympic Games as part of COJO's Cultural Olympics. Its companion piece, **Waubashene** (25 minutes) is to be seen on the CBC Network.

Alice Smith

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