

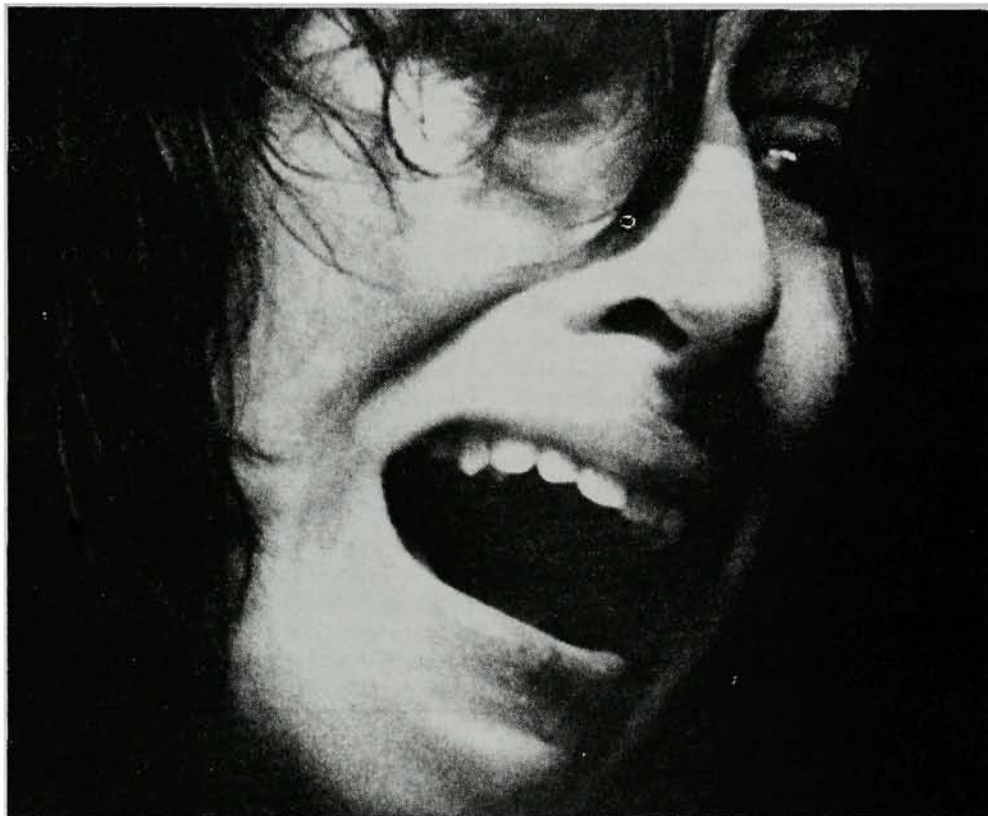
# FILM REVIEWS

## Anne Claire Poirier's *Mourir à tue-tête*

p.c. National Film Board of Canada exec. p. Laurence Paré p. Jacques Gagné, Anne Claire Poirier d. Anne Claire Poirier sc. Marthe Blackburn, Anne Claire Poirier art. d. Denis Boucher d.o.p. Michel Brault sd. Joseph Champagne, Roger Lamoureux, Jacques Drouin aud. ed. Claude Langlois m. & sd. effects Maurice Blackburn ed. André Corriveau l.p. Julie Vincent, Germain Houde, Paul Savoie, Monique Miller, Micheline Lanctôt col. 16 mm length 95 min. 55 sec. French with English sub-titles year 1978 dist. New World Mutual (English Canada) Films Mutuel (Quebec).

Going to see *Mourir à tue-tête* is not like going to see any other feature film. As a woman, one approaches it reluctantly, more as a potential ordeal rather than a pleasurable experience; for most women harbour deep-seated and primitive emotions of fear and anger towards rapists and the violation of rape. It is a subject about which everyone, male or female, has an emotional reaction. I did not look forward to having my anger and fear reawakened. (And I was not alone — the audience before the film was very quiet, and no-one was eating popcorn.) It is a testament to Anne Claire Poirier's lucid, understated and sympathetic approach to the subject, that when I left the theatre an hour-and-a-half later, it was more in sadness and pity than in anger.

Without histrionics and lamentations, the film gives us a thorough examination of every aspect of a problem that is not only social and personal, but political. It opens with the face of a man, the same man, in many guises — as husband, lover, employer, teacher, labourer, professional, boss. The freeze frame of each face is marked by the voices of women identifying each man as the one who raped her; so that when the film cuts to the start of the dramatic action we recognize, with foreboding, the ordinary-looking face of the guy driving the van. The script does not waste time introducing us to the victim before she is attacked. We see her first as the rapist does, an anonymous young woman in a white nurse's uniform and coat, leaving a hospital late at night and walking along a deserted street. The recreation of the rape is taken from a real



The rape victim's silent scream in *Mourir à tue-tête*: Julie Vincent plays Suzanne

case history. It is both terrifying and rivetting, and brilliantly done. (Even the often, artistically dense Ontario Censor Board was moved to leave it intact, despite explicit nudity and violence.) The rapist, played with frightening authenticity by Quebec actor Germain Houde, is almost entirely seen through the eyes of his victim, Suzanne. She is the camera. We never see them together in the same shot — as a character points out later, "rape forms no couple," since it is the very antithesis of loving sexuality. The sudden viciousness of his attack, as he drags her at knife-point into the back of a parked van, cuts off her clothes, ties her arms and legs and beats her, reduces his victim to such helpless terror that she can say or do nothing except whimper. This is a common fear reaction described by many rape victims; a reaction that the authorities she later encounters — the policemen, doctors and lawyers — find hard to comprehend. "You mean you did nothing to defend yourself?" a police interrogator insultingly

asks her in the film. It is important that we must sit through these painful scenes in order to feel in our gut some of the victim's terror when confronted with an armed, obscenity-spouting, violent psychotic, who may kill her if driven to it.

What little dialogue we hear from the man as he circles his victim, sits and drinks beer while she is tied up, and works himself up to the rape, cleverly reveals his motivations and psychological history. He alternates wildly between self-pity, contempt for all women, and macho bravado. The scene goes on and on until we are squirming in our seats. The final act of penetration itself is almost anticlimactic after the brutality that precedes it.

The scene ably accomplishes what it set out to do, which is to plunge us as strongly as possible into the pain and horror. What immediately follows also accomplishes its purpose, as the film dissolves to an editing room where the 'Director' (Monique Miller) and the 'Editor' (Micheline Lanctôt) coolly

and rationally discuss what we have just witnessed, as they stare at a freeze frame of the rapist's face during the actual act. Now, distanced from the emotion, we are brought abruptly into an analysis of the questions that must be asked.

We then follow the victim Suzanne, played with superb understatement and vulnerability by newcomer Julie Vincent, through the next few weeks of her life: the night of the rape as she is helped by her gentle and loving friend Philippe (Paul Savoie), the further humiliations of the medical examination and police questioning, and then her almost catatonic depression in the weeks to follow. Although these scenes are to be expected, they are intercut with unexpected sequences which place rape in its global, political and historic context. Black-and-white news footage shows us the female victims of war: bombed-out women and children in Vietnam, "sexual traitors" of World War II having their heads shaved in public, smiling women greeting soldier "liberators" in a European city. One horrifying film clip documents "ritual rape" in Africa — the clitoridectomy (removal of the clitoris) of a young girl child. The director and editor provide an overview as they screen their film and raise crucial questions. Do men find the rape scene erotic? Are women simply biological victims and always will

be? Why do women feel such overwhelming shame, as if they were responsible? How does our society deal with rape? All the female victims of the various men we see at the beginning of the film are assembled in a courtroom to state their cases as if they were on trial, before a faceless male judge who in his heavy voice raises the traditional objections and misunderstandings of legal society. Their case, which is after all only a plea for understanding and justice, seems eloquently won when they fill the courtroom with young children who have been raped, many by their fathers and uncles. Cutting back to Suzanne and Philippe in their apartment, we witness his ineffectual attempts to deal with her depression, and the moving scene in which he tries to make love to her only to be rejected. (Suzanne: "It's like something's broken inside me — as if I've lost love inside.") He leaves, hurt and angry, yet another innocent victim of the same rapist. The transitions between each of these sequences, from drama to documentary and back again, work well in this relatively new format of docu-drama, which in the past has often proved to be very unsatisfactory. It works best in the scene when we dissolve from the director looking at Suzanne's face on the editing machine screen into the actual interview between the two,

which is at the heart of the film.

There is, however, one real danger in all this, which ironically springs from the very intelligence that makes the film such a valuable statement. In showing us all the far-reaching, historical and political ramifications of the violent male domination of women, a feeling of resigned helplessness in the face of such global dehumanization is engendered in the female audience. Suzanne's ultimate fate is a profound shock because it seems to deny all hope. We can and must push for changes in our legal system that will remove the burden of shame and humiliation from rape victims who prosecute. We can insist that convicted rapists be punished according to the enormity of their crime, and not released in one or two years to victimize other women. But can this ever be enough? How can we really change basic, ancient, primitive attitudes? Something of this helplessness is reflected by the bitterly ironic ending to the film, which ridicules one of society's feeble answers to the problem — a police whistle for women to "shrill out their distress" when attacked.

**Mourir à tue-tête** was one of three Canadian features invited to the Cannes Film Festival in 1979. It has also been selected as the official Canadian entry for possible nomination in the upcoming American Academy Awards. And actress

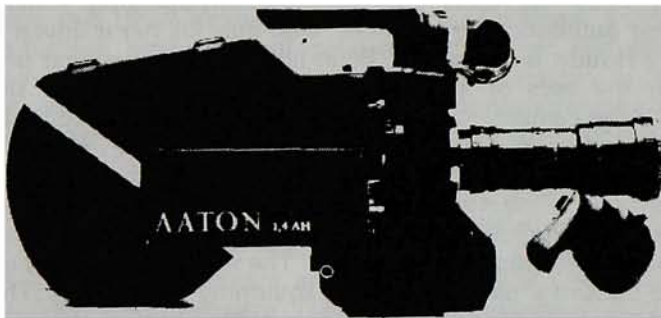
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Julie Vincent was a co-winner of the best actress award at the Chicago Film Festival. One can't help but agree with the words of a Toronto educator quoted in a press release: "I wish the film were compulsory for all policemen, all lawyers, all judges. Mandatory, before they could pick up their first pay cheque."

Penelope Hynam

## Harvey Frost's Something's Rotten

d. F. Harvey Frost asst. d. Bill Corcoran, Libby Bowden sc. Norman Fox cont. Nancy Eagles ph. Brian R.R. Hebb asst. cam. Dennis Rindsem boom op. Michael Morningstar clapper/loader John Hobson gaffer Frank Singers best boy Frieder Hochheim grips Jim Craig, Carlo Campana, Bill Heintz electrician Ken Smale gen. ops. Richard Allen, Greg Daniels, Peter Dawes stunt co-ord. Dwayne McLean ed. Brian Ravok asst. ed. Jeremy MacLavery sd. rec. Peter Shewchuk re. rec. Joe Grimaldi p. designer Edwin Watkins p. asst. Lee Knippelberg a.d. asst. Daniel Bradette set dec. Jack Bradette m. John Kuipers make-up Shonagh Jabour ward. Julie Ganton hair James Brown l.p. Charlotte Blunt, Geoffrey Bowes, Trudy Weiss, Christopher Barry, Cec Linder, Irene Hogan, Harvey Sokolov, William Osler, Charles Joliffe, Adam McCoy, John-Peter Linton p. David F. Eustace assoc. p. Nancy E. Stewart p. sec./account. Dorothy Precious p. manager Barbara Laffey.

If justice were to be done and Sweet Reason (to whose light all good reviewers aspire) were to be served, this review would be a full book — a primer on filmmaking filled with examples, most of them bad, all from **Something's Rotten**. Nothing less could hope to bring order and understanding to so chaotic a mess. But, as there isn't space, justice and Sweet Reason down the tube: instead, this series of assertions, more or less unsupported and unconnected, but pardonable, if only because I refrain from making jokes about the title; though, if ever a title begged and film deserved...

First, the plot summary: in a castle in a modern-day, unnamed European country lives the Queen (also unnamed, despite her central position) and her two sons, George, who will be king, and Calvin, who limps and practises ventriloquism to cure his stutter. There is also a Midnight Skulker who kills some bees. George's tutor lectures him on the likelihood of assas-



Charlotte Blunt and company in **Something's Rotten** — left-hand corner on the floor!

sination by members of his immediate family. The Prime Minister asks the Queen to step down, saying the people will be happier if a man is on the throne, to deal with the Americans and Arabs. The Queen refuses. The Prime Minister threatens her with budget cutbacks. The Skulker kills the castle cat. The Queen dreams that the sun is falling on her. The Skulker kills George's tutor. Calvin practises ventriloquism: when the dummy talks, his stutter disappears. The Skulker digs up the tutor and places him under the Queen's bed. The Queen begins to suspect her sons and has them examined by a psychiatrist who declares Calvin to be sound and George to be deeply disturbed. The Queen confronts George and tells him that he isn't in line for the throne, after all. Calvin is really the elder brother and will take George's place. George attacks the Queen, but Calvin kills him. The Queen goes to address Parliament, confident that, without a ready prince, she will face neither forced abdication nor cutbacks. Calvin retires to his study to gloat over the death of George, his successes as a Skulker and to plot the Queen's future doom. He leaves the room and the dummy's mouth drops open. The End.

The astute reader will already have noticed a lack of the connectives 'because' and 'but.' This is only because precious little happens 'because' of, or in spite of, anything else. As those words are the essence of tight plotting (try summarizing **The Maltese Falcon** without them), and since this is, according to the press release and most of the dialogue, a story about power, one might think a tight plot would be appropriate.

But the 'power' theme is largely unrelated to the plot (substitute 'heir to millions' for 'prince') and is handled with a degree of naïveté that far surpasses Joe Clark's bid to move our embassy in Israel.

The characters are even thinner than the plot. We learn nothing of their recreational habits, save that George likes falcons. The Queen's interaction with George consists of nagging him to do his studies and, while we do learn that she likes Calvin better, we never learn why. We see the Queen playing chess, too distracted to think. Suddenly, she pulls a last-minute victory. Is she a good chess player, or did her aide let her win?

When the Prime Minister asks the Queen to step down, she's more like a bitchy

## FILM REVIEWS

steno with her supervisor than the ruler of her country.

The dialogue is wooden and repetitious. The Queen to George: "Your studies are so important, especially those about when you'll be king." In two separate and distinct scenes, George's tutor tells him (with appropriate slides) that he's a candidate for assassination. The Queen tells us, at least five times, that she's worried about the skulking, the killing.

The acting is atrocious. Charlotte Blunt, as the Queen, clearly lacks aristocratic charisma. Christopher Barry, as George, does nothing but scowl. Cec Linder, playing the Prime Minister, is too much the professional to look or sound bad, but for a man asking his queen to resign, he seems curiously uninterested.

Geoffrey Bowes, as Calvin, is the high point of the movie. In engaging scenes with the dummy, his speech and gestures are delivered with skilled timing. And Trudy Weiss, as the Queen's aide/lady-in-waiting, exudes a critical, almost sinister intelligence behind her banal lines.

Unfortunately, the suspense sequences

are not suspenseful. The Queen enters the cellar to look for the cat. The music rises. She turns on a light and comes face to face with a mirror. Shock! The music peaks and drops. She comes back down the hall, looking in rooms. Behind a door we see, lying on the floor, a glove belonging to the Skulker. The Queen peeks in, looks around, the music climaxes, but she does not see the glove and leaves. In no way could that glove have given her any useful information or threatened her. Where then is the suspense? Or consider the idiocy of a Skulker who wears luminous-green editing gloves that have no psychological or practical significance for him. They are there only for the audience.

In some scenes, over-exposed shots cause cheeks to disappear in glaring hot spots. But despite lighting continuity problems, there are several fine compositions. However, one can't escape the dreadful blocking, that results in scenes played out with characters standing in the middle of rooms as if they'd been warned

not to touch the furniture. (Considering that the film was shot in Casa Loma on, reportedly, \$200,000, that may be the case.) On occasion, the soundtrack distorts to the point of incoherence.

The list goes on, but space runs out. If you believe all this, you may be wondering how such a monumental piece of dreck ever made it to the screen. Some of the blame must go to producer and president of Hazelton Motion Picture, Inc., David F. Eustace. Eustace, I've heard, is an insurance man who sold his business and bought the Canadian rights to *It's Alive!* — and with the profits from that, made *Something's Rotten*. This makes him a beginner so, he should not be judged too harshly. Certainly not as harshly as Norman Fox, the writer, or F. Harvey Frost, director.

If you don't believe what you've read, go and see for yourself. Then come back and apologize; maybe next time you'll listen!

Andrew Dowler

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## SHORT FILM REVIEWS

### Young and Just Beginning — Pierre

p.c. Ruth Hope Assoc. p./d. Ruth Hope, Mark Irwin cam. Mark Irwin, Robin Miller sd. Bryan Day, John McGill mus. Gary Gegan, Clive Parks, Gord Paton, Mark Irwin ed. Ruth Hope assist. ed Gary Gegan dancers Pierre Quinn, Talitha Arndt, Kevin Pugh, Kim Glascock pas de deux John Alleyne, Kim Glascock choreog. Deborah Bowes, Barbara Forbes piano Ronald Raymond, Trevor McLain col. 16 mm length 25 min. year 1979 dist. Kenetic Film Distributors.

**Young and Just Beginning — Pierre**, the award-winning documentary produced by Ruth Hope and Mark Irwin is a beautiful tour through the National Ballet School of Canada, and an insightful look at the rigorous life of children aspiring to be artists. It is not however, what its title implies it will be: a specific, in depth study of Pierre.

The title of a work is an indication of its purpose. The film does indeed focus on eleven-year-old Pierre Quinn — a young Quebecer who has left his family and friends behind, to train at the Toronto school — but not strongly enough. Granted, an eleven-year-old who is "just beginning" to learn the technique and feel the spirit

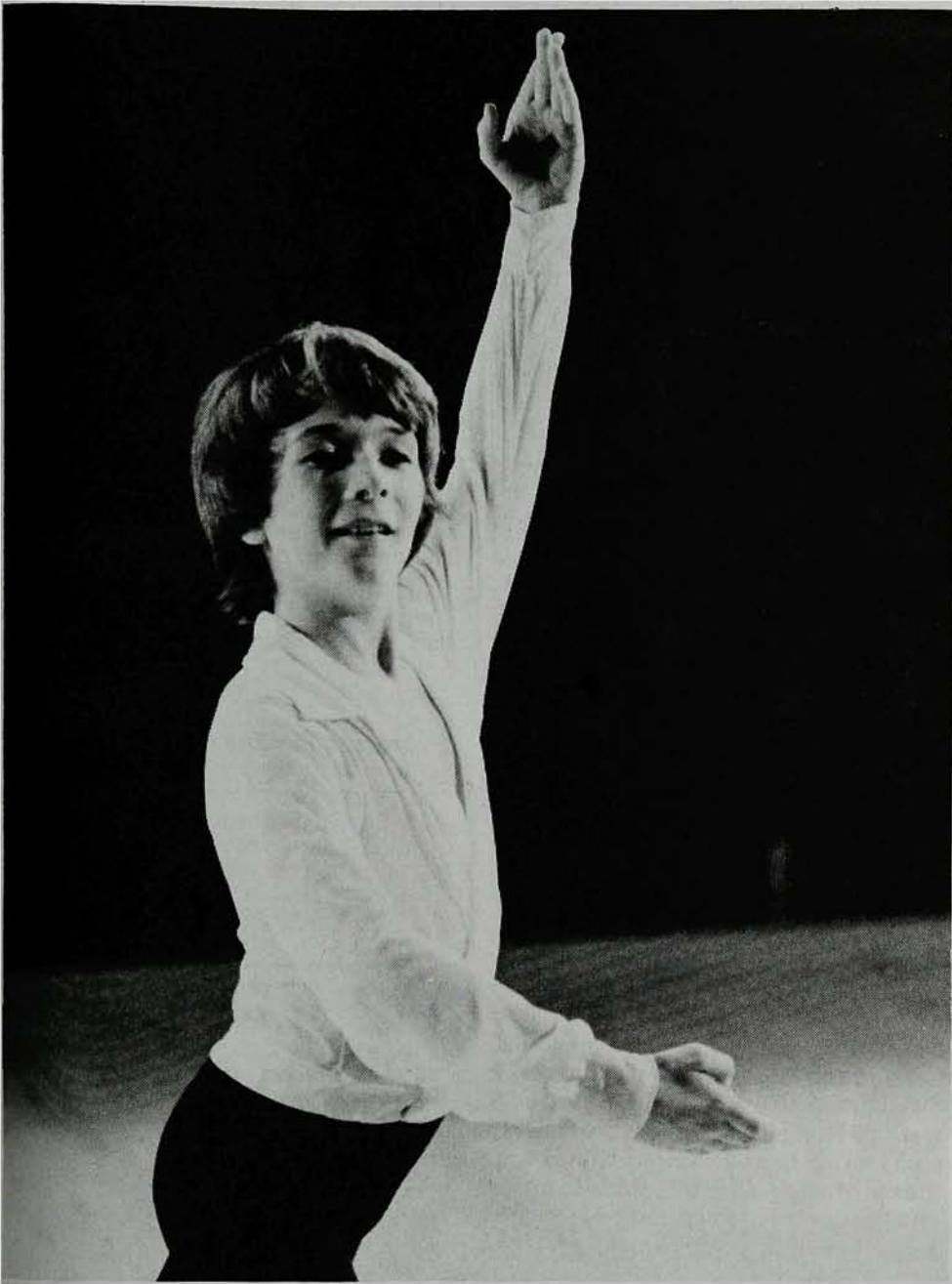
of his chosen art is obviously not going to be the most articulate and sophisticated of subjects; but, if you put the film beside any of the episodes in the CBC's *Spread Your Wings* series (films about children which are trying to do exactly the same thing as *Pierre*), you realize that Pierre himself borders on being an excuse to study dancers in general, instead of being the film's *raison d'être*.

Still, *Pierre*, and the young dancers as a group, present a powerful and definite point of view. Their faces, reflecting earnest concentration, or the sudden fun of a mistake, are irresistible. Their gangly arms and skinny ankles working toward grace and strength give us a clear sense of where the technique of art comes from. The editor adeptly portions out these elements with a rhythm that is both elegant and truly evocative of the studios atmosphere.

The dance-class setting, with the bars, the mirrors, the patch of light on the middle of the bare floor from a window, and of course the dancers, is a photographer's delight. Fortunately, Irwin doesn't get carried away, but uses his camera with commendable restraint to create apt images of a place where something difficult, with a beautiful reward at its end, is being learned.

## The Kickboxers

p./d./ed. Gary Bush ph. Dave Geddes asst. ph. Jan-Marie Martell gaf. Ron Williams ed. Gary Bush sd. Richard Patton sd.ed. Shelly Hamer sd. re.rec. John Bennest p. asst. Scott Bickham m. Paul Grant, Craig Thomlinson m. engineer Steve Hunter l.p. Tony Morelli, Dennis Crawford, Rob Webb p.c. Gary Bush Productions col. 16mm 3/4" video cassette running time 17 min. 35 sec.



Pierre Quinn aspiring to be a Baryshnikov in *Young and Just Beginning* — Pierre

Most importantly, the film keeps us aware that the National Ballet School is a school . . . with children in it. The sequences of the kids in class, or rushing around with blazers and kilts flying, are exuberant and vital elements of the whole. The teachers enhance this feeling, in the studio and the classroom, where they are clearly enjoying themselves teaching dance to happy youngsters, not heavy-headed eleven-year-old artists.

Gary Gegan's music maintains the juxtaposition of art and childhood in all parts of the film. But the serious, adult aspects of ballet study must also be dealt with.

The film winds down by focusing on the older students, in control of their talent, aware of its possibilities. A lovely pas de deux is presented at the climax, and then a series of action stills of the great dancers.

Finally, we return to Pierre, who tells us that he wants to be like Baryshnikov. We believe him; we too want him to be like Baryshnikov after seeing this film. But we haven't been brought close enough to him to really feel the why and wherefore of his dream.

John Brooke

In the words of filmmaker Gary Bush, *The Kickboxers* is a "profile of three livewire fighters (actually two fighters and a coach) who make contact with life through the sport of full-contact kickboxing." Kickboxing, as a metaphor for life, may sound simplistic, but it makes perfect sense within the context of this lively documentary.

Incorporating elements from boxing and Kung Fu, this popular Oriental sport has recently gained adherents in North America. Like boxing, padded gloves are worn, and winning in competition is based on a point system or, frequently, knocking out one's opponent. But, according to Gary Bush, who practices the sport himself, kickboxing is the more brutal sport because kicking is part of the technique. The idea of coming into contact with life stems from Bush's belief that the importance of a martial art such as kickboxing lies in its ability to help people overcome fear — not the fear of injury or of losing a tournament, but the fear of oneself. Winning is not the ultimate goal: mastering the discipline of kickboxing and thereby receiving inner tranquility is. It is an interesting dichotomy — a rough sport emphasizing strength and speed, that leads one to the road of inner peace. Bush, who is calm and soft-spoken, says that this dual nature of the sport is what fascinates him.

*The Kickboxers* takes us into the glare and ruckus of Rob Webb's gym outside Vancouver. A former champion himself, Webb is training Tony Morelli (the Canadian Light Heavyweight Kickboxing champion), and Dennis Crawford (the Super Lightweight Western Canada Champion). We are told that some of the best kickboxers in British Columbia train at this gym.

Tony and Dennis, who work as a carpet layer and welder respectively, are preparing for a forthcoming competition. The film immediately takes us into the boxing ring with a direct overhead shot of the two fighters. Their movements are so grace-

## SHORT FILM REVIEWS



Alex Kwok in a scene from **Battle of Ego** — the foot is faster than the eye

ful, at first they appear to be dancing. Then, in a blur of red gloves, they begin to fight. This opening sequence radiates vitality. The fast action, and the predominance of the bright red and yellow of the boxing gloves and ropes, enhance the impression of vigor. Trainer, Webb, offers a panorama of facial contortions as he puts Tony and Dennis through their paces. When he pummels each in the stomach, Webb is obviously delighted that his protégés can withstand the beating. After a few quick jabs at the punching bags, and a stint at jumping rope, the boxers are removed to the comparative serenity of a very green, wooded park, through which they are running.

It is obvious after watching the training that kickboxing is a demanding discipline. But, because each movement is carefully orchestrated, it is also obvious that the sport, brutal as it may appear, is a civilized one.

Tony and Dennis are next shown at a competition. The contestants, wearing long, silken pants, display no emotion during the rounds, which are announced by a busty young girl carrying a placard: the same girl who bestows kisses on the winners. The fans, fairly evenly divided between males and females, are wide-eyed and exuberant to be sure, but not frenzied. Both Tony and Dennis are victorious in the competition, as we expect them to be. Because they enjoy the sport,

and because Webb is so confident in their ability, winning only seems natural.

**The Kickboxers** is the second in a series of films Gary Bush is doing on the martial arts. The first, a five-minute short called **Battle of Ego**, he calls an impressionistic account of his experience in the martial arts. It is a beautiful five minutes, filmed mostly in slow motion with, what sounds like, the breathing of a tiger in the background. **Ego**, which was shown at the World Film Festival — Montreal '79, features Kung Fu stylist, Alex Kwok. The next film will be shot in Hong Kong on the theme of survival. Bush plans to follow three young men from Vancouver as they encounter the complexities of Hong Kong society for the first time.

Gary Bush is interested in films on other cultures, especially those dealing with the disparity between East and West. He wants his films to help Canadians reach a deeper level of understanding of themselves and of the immigrant populations in their midst.

**The Kickboxers** has potential for wide appeal. It introduces, simply and completely, a sport practiced in this country that few Canadians are aware of. It entertains, while subtly presenting a sometimes forgotten, but important idea: it feels good to win, but there is tremendous satisfaction in making it through the training.

Laurie Freedman

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