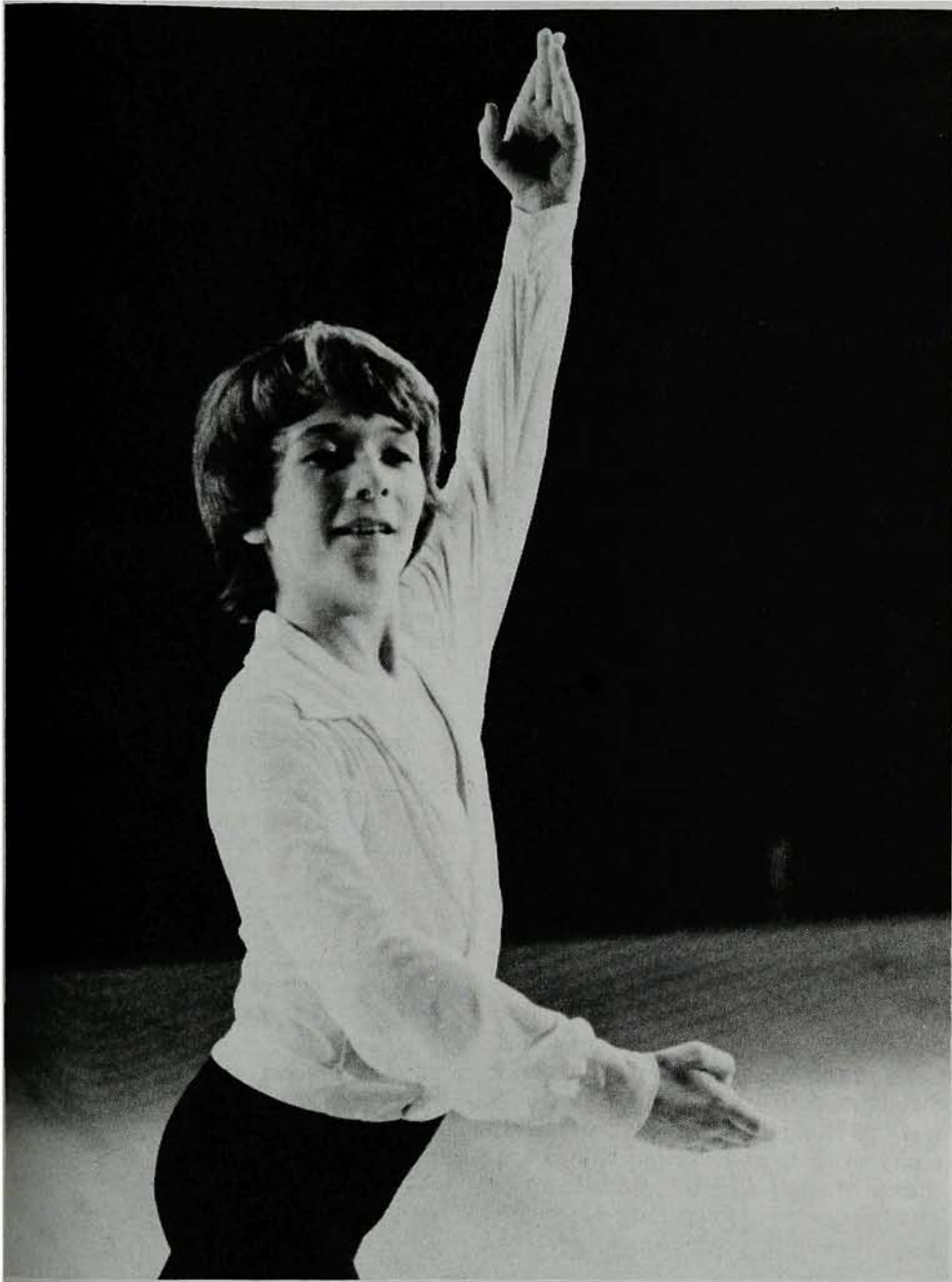


The Kickboxers

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.

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