

Taking Chances

p.c. Mobius Productions p./research Marilyn A. Belec d. Robert Lang sc. scenes Robert Lang, David McIlwraith set design Christophe Bonniere d. ph. Victor Sarin light. Ian Challis still ph. Douglas Webb sd. Steve Joles re-rec. Joe Grimaldi mus. Andrew Thompson ed. Stephen Best l.p. Kathryn Aitken, Leigh Sarty, John Lougheed, Anne Marie-Stephenson, Shirley Wheatley col. 16 mm length 22 min. year 1979 dist. Marilyn A. Belec

Taking Chances is a twenty-two minute docu-drama dealing with teenage sex and pregnancy. The film is divided between the enactments of various situations which occur in the relationship of two teenagers, Leigh and Kathy, and scenes from a discussion group in which several other young people offer their views on the issue.

Leigh and Kathy try to cope with the emotional and practical conflicts and commitments that are part and parcel of bringing sex into a serious relationship. Kathy confides in a friend her worry about pregnancy and her inability to communicate this sense of urgency to Leigh. Leigh tries to convince Kathy that there is nothing to worry about. Kathy and her friend go to a clinic for advice on the different methods of contraception. Leigh and his friend go to the drug store to buy condoms, but lose their nerve and leave with a bag of potatoe chips instead. Kathy gives Leigh an ultimatum. Leigh forces himself to become more responsible, more communicative — and ultimately, more loving.

It sounds a little like *As the World Turns*, but still, the film clearly emphasizes the points that are most crucial. The comments from the discussion group range from one girl's declaration that she does not want anything "unnatural inside me" when she has sex, to one boy's realization that "It's a pleasure, but it's also an added responsibility."

Interestingly, Leigh is depicted as the irresponsible one in the enactment, but in the rap session it is the boys who come across as the more articulate and mature. Still, it would have been a major step if the film had provided a few clues — apart from the obvious one, that it is not *their* bodies which have to deal with the consequences of carelessness — as to *why* boys are traditionally considered the irresponsible ones.

Taking Chances does not provide answers on a psychological level, but it does provoke questions. To anyone with an open mind the film makes the issue



Sex is the subject of this serious tête-à-tête between Ann Marie Stephenson and Kathryn Aitken in **Taking Chances**.

accessible. The screening at the Science Centre was attended by the producer, Marilyn Belec, and a panel of professionals in the field of behaviour. Afterwards, there was a powerful catalyst for dialogue, on a topic that needs to generate as much talk and understanding as possible.

The perspectives and opinions offered ran the gamut. Concerning the film's content the two most telling comments were about values. An eleven-year-old asked plaintively, "Can anybody here tell me what I should do with my life?" There were wry chuckles all over the auditorium, but a concerned mother was soon up and talking about the need for a strong moral structure in every adolescent's life.

The young people in the film are depicted as existing in a social vacuum, exploring in the dark, piecing together their world as they go along. The only allusion to family or parents is one of fear: "My parents would kill me if they found out." The only adult presented in the film is the counsellor at the birth control centre. But her advice, as it should be, is practical, and not weighted down by tones of judgement, or a specific moral outlook.

Parents screening the film will probably be left confused or dismayed by the large generation gap, and the chaotic whirl of messages and directions that lie between. Young people requiring definite precepts

of what is right and wrong won't find answers either. In this regard, **Taking Chances** does just that — by leaving adolescents on their own to figure out their own values in a modern world. This may, in fact, be a realistic stance, considering that teenagers demand time and space to work things out by themselves anyway.

In sum, the film is optimistic and topical enough to remain relevant for a long time.

John Brooke

Letter to Vietnam

p./d./sc. Eugene Buia m. Joan Baez (Heaven Help Us All) sd./ed. Joe Solway lp. Garry Sun Hoan col. 16mm running time 47 min.

Eugene Buia's **Letter to Vietnam** is precisely what its title implies.

The film is an open letter — albeit using the medium of film, instead of paper and an envelope — from nine-year-old Garry Sun Hoan, a refugee from Vietnam now living in Canada, to his parents who are still in Vietnam.

The young letter-writer, a Chinese national, fled Vietnam two years ago in a small fishing boat. He subsequently found himself on a Hong Kong-based



photo: Trikat Media Prod.

Vietnamese refugee Garry Sun Hoan with director Eugene Buia and his son — putting on a brave face in a new world.

freighter which took him to a Malaysian refugee camp. From there he came to Canada.

It would have been impossible for Garry to actually send an ordinary letter to his parents. He did not, after all, know his parents' whereabouts back in Vietnam. In fact, at the time the film was made, he did not even know whether or not his parents were alive.

For those of us who have never experienced refugee status, the plight of those from Vietnam — or any other war zone — is exceedingly difficult to comprehend. Yet, in *Letter to Vietnam*, director Eugene Buia — who is himself a political refugee, a native of Romania, where he gained extensive experience as a director and producer of feature films — manages to communicate, forcefully and clearly, the enormity of the refugee's struggle.

Buia achieves this through a voice-over narration of Garry's comments to his parents on life in Canada, newsreel and documentary footage from Vietnam, and silent footage of Garry exploring his new Canadian environment.

Buia's 'letter' format encourages viewers to make that leap in imagination of placing themselves in Garry Sun Hoan's position: of witnessing a Santa Claus parade for the first time, of visiting a typical Canadian supermarket, of en-

countering a newborn Vietnamese baby in the alien setting of a Canadian hospital, of sitting in a Canadian classroom, of reminiscing about a childhood spent in the streets of Saigon.

Technically, the film's stock newsreel footage, and the Toronto sequences, both exhibit, at times, a somewhat disorienting camera jitter and a very frequent use of the zoom lens, which some viewers may find disconcerting. On the other hand, for many, the powerful content of *Letter to Vietnam*, and the confident, burgeoning quality of the editing (many of the newsreel sequences are repeated several times, to good effect, will make up for any of the film's minor, technical shortcomings.

Jaen Pill

Star Ways

p.c. Mekanique Productions (1979) p./d. Larry Moore p. asst. Ontario Arts Council cam. op. Fred Guthe, Nicholas Kendall cam. asst. Janek Corydon, Stewart Miller, Keet Neville ed. Bruce Annis m.comp./pref. David Grimes spec. effects/rigs Janek Corydon, Mark MacCammon l.p. Robin Hayle, Marc Kyriacou, Mr. Bink, Andrew Kilgour col. 16mm run. time 5 min. dist. Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre.

In Larry Moore's first film, a young boy with his *Star Wars* comic book runs to the front window of a subway train and pretends to pilot a spaceship out of the station and into the black of space. The lights of the tunnel zip by, transformed into red, green, and yellow galaxies, as the boy hits the controls like a pinball machine. Abruptly, Darth Vader looms up and the boy fires at him. When the boy steps out of the ship, Vader chases and catches the boy on the platform — and turns into his mother.

It's a five-minute miniature with a \$700 million set built by the Toronto Transit Commission. Moore co-opts the architects' 'modern' effect for his film, and does so successfully; since, for most of us, a house may be fact, but a subway is still science-fiction-becoming-fact.

With similar economy, Moore creates galaxies using another fiction already established by others in the big league — notably by Trumbull and the million-dollar special effects people of cinema-sci-fi. Abstract filmmakers diddled colors and patterns with sound, but were long out-of-work, until movies like *2001* created jobs. Deep space is mysterious, and so are abstract films: ergo, spaceships in deep space travel through colors and patterns with sound. It's a fine convention, and for the first little while, *Star Ways* creates the right, headlong rush with its simple running lights.

But the convention is well enough established that viewers are wanting something more to happen, while Moore himself is still just speeding along.

In a small and precious miniature, there's precious little room for confusion. The mother who switches places with Vader at the end is the same woman seen in an opening shot, where she appears to be waiting to the board the same train at the same time. So the audience faces some logical discomfort when Vader/mother appears on the platform ahead of the boy as he enters the last station. The problem is small, but so is the film, and the interference it causes seems large.

On the platform, the boy runs as though the fantasy has become too solid, and one momentarily remembers the rush and flash of a kid's mind and the strength of its healthy psychosis. When, after all, the boy recognizes his mother, Moore is alert enough to show us the warmth between them, so we won't go home wondering what villainy the woman actually represented.

As the boy runs from Vader, the camera swings in line with the accelerating train.