

SHORT FILM REVIEWS

Instead of a glimpse into Ashland's personality by way of a few lines of personal philosophy, which might explain the alignment, all we hear from him are insipid exclamations like, "My ship needs blood to survive!"

Lines such as these make it impossible for Kennedy, who is a good actor, to take the character anywhere. But any character who becomes possessed by the spirit of Nazism should be given some depth. Even fascism gone berserk has a purpose and a structure. If it's going to be used as the defining concept of a story or a film, these have to be explored and articulated. Nazism is too complex and horrifying a subject to be presented simply as a metaphor for gross terror.

Or is all of this reading too much into a "suspense-thriller" called *Death Ship*? No; it's just demanding some integrity on the part of the filmmakers.

There is no point in criticizing the talent in such a production. With the exception of Richard Crenna, who manages to hold his own as Trevor Marshall, the hero, they are all very bad. But they never really get a chance to be good. George Kennedy comes across the worst of all.

Behind the camera, Rakoff is hot and cold. He misses in his attempts to create an atmosphere of entrapment on the decks of the old freighter — he is never in tight enough, and he has all that surrounding open air and sea working against him. So, when the lifeboats suddenly free themselves and splash into the ocean, or when Jackie the comedian is grabbed from behind by a sneaky crane, hoisted aloft and then dunked, it is funny rather than frightening.

Below decks, in the more confined settings of engine rooms and cabins, Rakoff does succeed in making us hold our breath. As Trevor Marshall and Nick close in on the source of the mystery, and as they are battered by the ship's most powerful weapon, a screeching Nazi propaganda film, Rakoff combines with special effects man Mike Albrechtsen and D.O.P. René Verzier to create a mesmerizing climax.

Despite this, nothing can save *Death Ship*. The only thing that endures is the question of the script. Did John Roberts write it badly on purpose? Was he coerced and beaten by producers Gibson and Greenberg? And doesn't anybody who participated in the financing of this disaster have any sense of what's good and what's bad?

John Brooke



photo: John Dawson

'Team Spirit' could be the motto for York University's 1980 Film Class — together, they put on a good show

York University Class of '80

On Saturday afternoon, May 3, the Film Department of York University presented five films produced by fourth-year students. The showcase was billed as "The Class of '80." The screening at Toronto's Fine Arts Cinema was attended by a capacity audience.

The five films — *Videoscope*, *Knives and Forks*, *The Silent Laugh*, *Performances* and *The Man From Zodiac* — represented an amazing diversity of young talent in all aspects of film production. Each film was a drama, approximately twenty-five minutes in length. Themes ranged from the sensitive examination of values in *Knives and Forks*, to the demonic send-up of *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* in *Zodiac*. Technically, all the films were as professional as one could want; the most impressive being, *The Silent Laugh*. Written and directed by Richard Zywockiewicz, the mystery story concerns the plight of a group of people

stuck in an isolated house with a dead body. By attempting to delve into the heart of the upper middle class, the script gets carried away with itself toward the end. But this is of little consequence, as the sound and the visuals say it all anyway. In the opening scene, filmed in the Toronto-Dominion Centre, the sound effects provide a wondrous sense of high financial hubbub and personal isolation simultaneously. And the details of the accoutrement in the cottage, where the murder took place, are poetic in their depiction of upper middle class style and sensibility.

The best film, over-all, was *Videoscope*, written and directed by Karen Hall.

The use of television within a film is a metaphor that has obvious relevancy and, therefore, power. It works; witness *Being There* and *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. *Videoscope* concerns a man named Richard who has a video project to do for his boss. He hires a cameraman with a porta-pak and tours around the city picking up bits and pieces of "reality." The team repeats a pattern of shooting, view-

ing the footage, and then going out to shoot some more. No reason for the project is ever explained, and through it all the cameraman complains that the project is useless and that he wants a better deal. Caught between this disconsolate technician and the mixture of emotional reactions projected by the subjects, is Richard, doing his interviewing in a constant state of bemused equanimity.

Can the "project" go on like this forever? The tide finally turns when the cameraman takes Richard to a video "party," where there are a few strange people and a large number of TV sets. Richard stands among them like a guest in the rockery at a garden party. As the TVs beam away at him Richard begins to lose control. The "project" falls apart when he is interviewed by a woman on one of the televisions as he stands there looking for someone to talk to.

Television has done it to itself again. The film is often very funny, as well as profound.

Karen Hall wrote and directed **Video-scope**. She also appeared as an actress in **Performances**. Tony Sloan was a production assistant on **The Man From Zodiac** and director of photography on **Performances**. Doug Munro was D.O.P. on **The Silent Laugh** and a production assistant on **Video-scope**. This cross-referencing of the credits booklet for "The Class of '80" shows that the students functioned as a co-operative, in the true sense of the word in their final year. The result was that a large group of people gained lots of experience in the production of five excellent films.

The organizers of the film program at York are to be commended.

John Brooke

"People might judge this as a terribly patriarchal family where English is enforced as the spoken language, but it's not that way."

- Derek May, about his film, **Mother Tongue**

"I want to escape this movie just like I want to escape definition, history... not being the master of what happens to me."

- Patricia Nolin, in the film, **Mother Tongue**

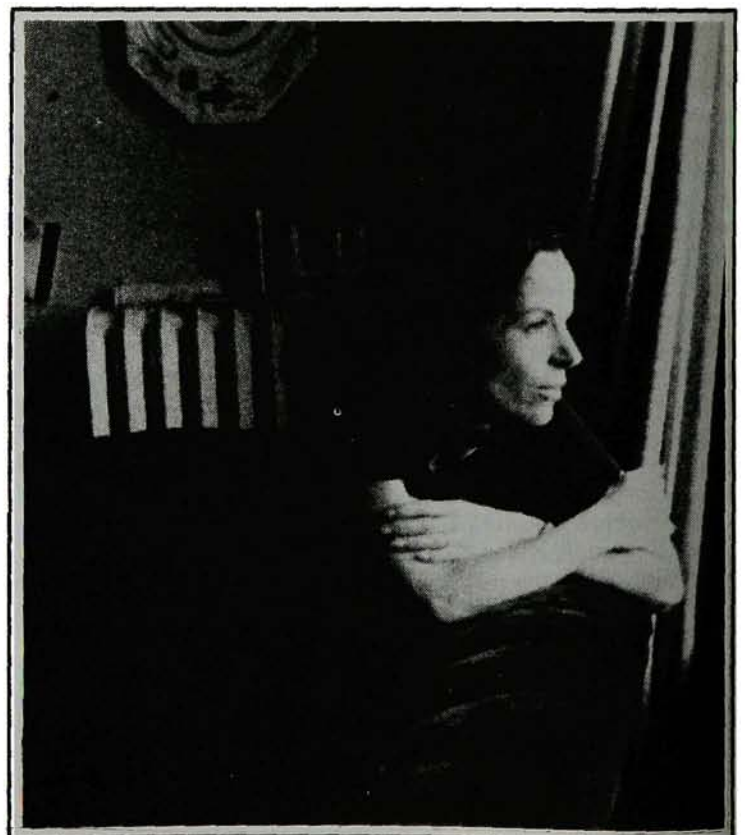
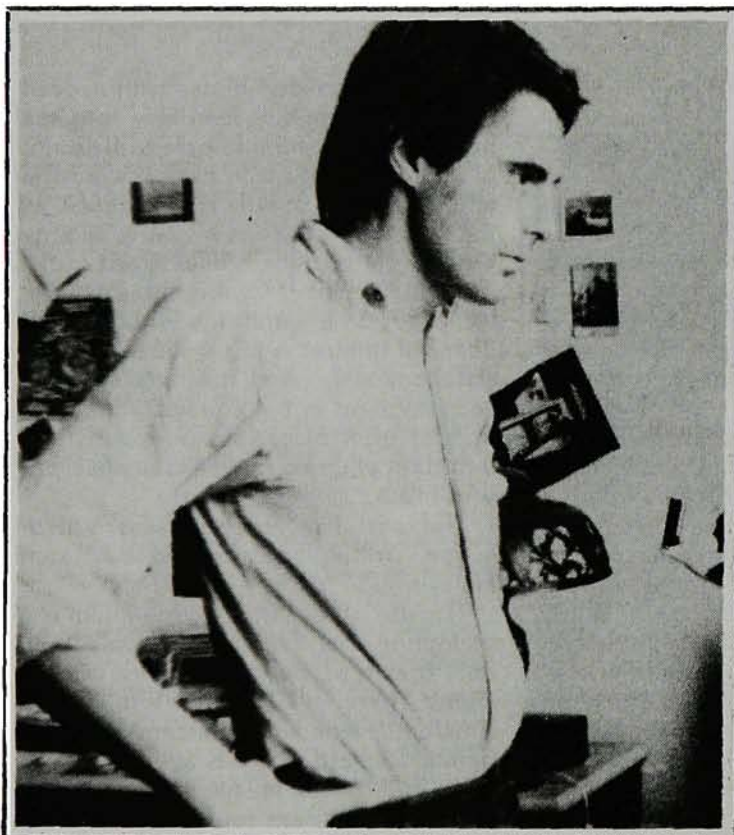
Derek May has made a film which he does not term 'documentary,' but which nevertheless documents his family life with Patricia Nolin and their two children. It is an attractive film: May and Nolin have lovely faces and lulling voices, and the film style is lyrical and absorbing. However, there is an undercurrent to this film which, in friction with the winning surface impression, imparts to the viewer a feeling that something is inadequate — a feeling which can only turn to audience frustration.

May has said, "The film is not presuming to give you the emotional goods. I am exposing myself, yes, but within very

Mother Tongue

p.c. National Film Board (1979) exec. p. Arthur Hammond p. Marrin Canell d. Derek May a.d. Jacques Benoit cam. André Dupont, Michel Bissonnette (assist.) additional ph.

Savas Kalageros loc. sd. Jean-Guy Normandin sd. ed. Michel Bordeleau sd. re-rec. Hans-Peter Strobl ed. Judith Merritt, Derek May titles Val Teodori subtitles David Gold (Duplexis excerpts courtesy of Radio-Canada) unit admin. Janet Preston col. 16mm length 47 min. 2 sec. dist. National Film Board of Canada.



Filmmaker Derek May and his wife, Patricia Nolin in *Mother Tongue* — where meeting halfway is still a long way to go