

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 **Videoscope**. 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**

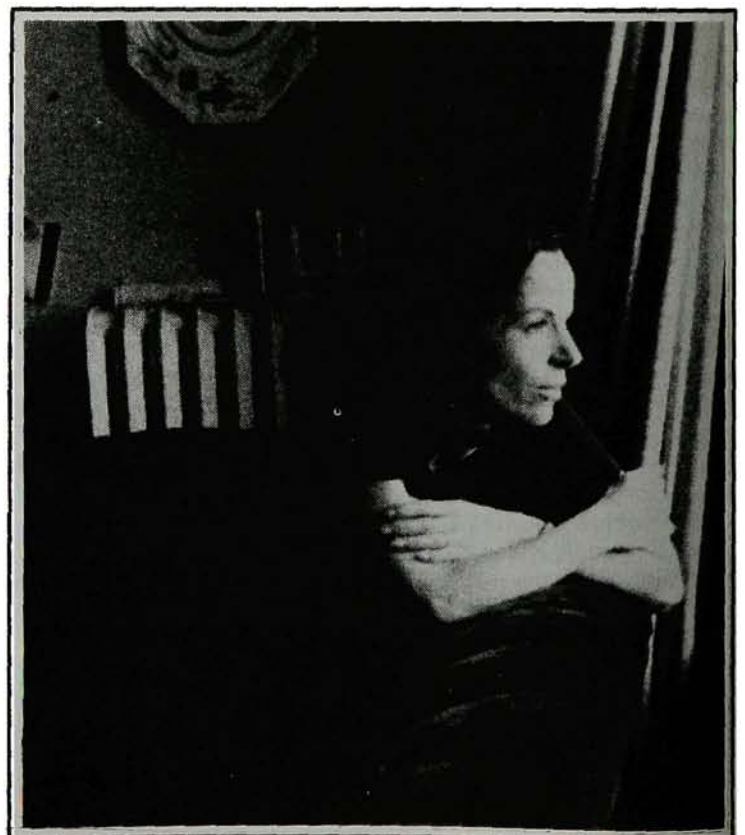
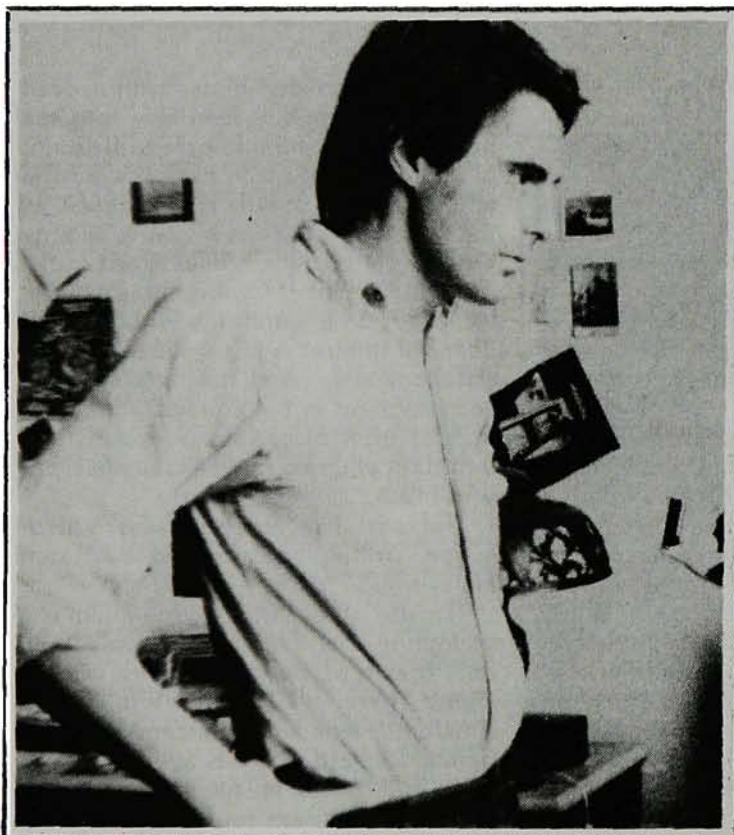
Derek May has made a film which he does not term 'documentary,' but which nevertheless documents his family life with Patricia Nolin and their two children. It is an attractive film: May and Nolin have lovely faces and lulling voices, and the film style is lyrical and absorbing. However, there is an 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

well-defined boundaries. It's a question of style, a question of how you're going to allow yourself to be seen." Yet this is not consistent with his subsequent comments in connection with the film: "To celebrate your own life is important... It's as important as presuming to know the rest of the world." To "celebrate" one's life on film, one must first acknowledge just what sort of life is involved, then commit oneself to getting the dynamics of that life onto the screen, "emotional goods" and all. Many filmmakers make no claims to anything other than entertaining their audience; attempting nothing but fantasy. May, however, is raising up audience expectation, then selling us short in **Mother Tongue**.

Mother Tongue, called "an honest portrait," is a film in the category of offshoots from, and reactions to *The Documentary Tradition*, which might be termed the genre of 'realism reconsidered.' Through a juxtaposition of events, May forces narrative elements in the editing to impose the idea of 'theme' and 'continuity.' He inserts material, foreign to the time and place of the situation portrayed — for example, the stock studio footage used, which May's voiceover leads us to believe is of his father, is simply an actor performing a stunt. He uses voiceover for informative expediency, but also to ensure a dimension of subjectivity, a dream sense, that kind of poetic condensation of experience portrayed by Duras in her films. May uses these manipulations of reality to create a representative, rather than a formally 'realistic,' whole. When properly used, this sort of film style can often impart more of the feeling and substance of a situation, than a style which is rigidly bound to the stylistic conventions of the documentary genre — as Duras and others have shown. However, in **Mother Tongue**, the technique merely sloughs over the reality. Pretty images and poetics can obscure, instead of enhance reality if the filmmaker is not determined, above all else, to inform.

Patricia Nolin is May's main subject. According to him, it was extremely difficult to film her "naturally," so aware is she of the camera, due to her experience as an actress. This problem is not apparent in the film, since her manner is consistent with the stylized film technique. It is not that Nolin is difficult to film, but that May has difficulty seeing and listening to her — he can't film her as she *really* is for this reason. There is much evidence of this in **Mother Tongue**, in their daily activities, where Nolin is shown in a multitude of

settings; in the studio, in the home, in the makeup chair in the morning, on the kitchen floor scrubbing at night. May waits with wine. There is an argument between them, where we see how she keeps her thoughts inside: in this case concerning the use of language in their home. She says to herself, "My tongue is tired of speaking English." This is heard in voiceover, an indication that May does in fact understand the nature of their relationship and its weak areas. Yet, in spite of any understanding we might have, we see in the next sequence that his actions are unaffected. May and Nolin have picked up the argument again. She asks him why he is not able to speak French yet, so that she may sometimes use the language with which she feels most comfortable. He says he is putting it off until the referendum. As though sensing the selfish implications of this answer, Nolin asks him what he will do if the referendum is won: will he leave her? May says he will

go where there is work for him. Characterizing this scene, and their relationship as shown throughout the film, is his self-absorption, and her passivity. The passivity appears at times as a kind of sacrificing fortitude, but is, in almost every case, a concession made to her husband's unfair emotional terms and her own emotional insecurity.

The most glaring point to be made in **Mother Tongue** is that there is a politic in the state, the home, and the person: what is imposed upon the individual, and what is chosen by that individual, for the good of each, or for all, is the omnipotence of politics — there is no avoiding it; there is only an avoidance of pointing it up for what it is. May has shirked the tradition of 'documentary' and the 'realism reconsidered' genres in **Mother Tongue**. Both genres aim to tell the truth; May seems to be avoiding it.

Katherine Dolgy

Destiny's Angel

p.c. Destiny Films (1980) exec.p. J. Francis Brinckman p./d. Craig Cottle sc. Richard Zelniker, Craig Cottle d.o.p. Bill Casey asst.cam. Dave Kerr ed. Patrick Vallyly asst.ed. Danielle A. Malka sd.ed. Roger Lemoyne art d. Pierre Gregoire mus. from the Nutcracker Suite by P. Tchaikovsky mus.arrange./perf./rec. André Vincelli choreog. Gabriel Orbach pre.p.coord. Bruce Paulauskis key grip Walter Klymkiw p.asst. Tiggie Black p.sec. Madge Owens l.p. Saba Sluyter, Roy Witham, Oxanna Zanft, Rosa Squicciarini, Sascha Patera, Penelope Maki col. 16 mm running time 25 min.

Destiny's Angel is an independently-produced, Canadian film for juveniles, whose exuberant music and magnificent colour almost counterbalance the film's deadly seriousness. The story revolves around nine-year-old Melissa whose entire world has been shattered by her parents' recent divorce; school and ballet lessons become dreary chores to be avoided.

Shortly before the Christmas ballet recital, precisely when Melissa is supposed to be rehearsing for the holiday performance, she is seen wandering about a neighbourhood park. There she meets Capp, the park's elderly custodian, who not only befriends her but becomes her "angel," i.e. her source of encouragement to confront life's difficulties and conquer them. (The friendship between the child and the grandfather type is reminiscent of **Lies My Father Told Me**, but is unfortunately marred by the very sentimentalism

which **Lies** avoided.) Capp dies before the film's end, but not before he succeeds in raising Melissa's spirits. Her "angel" has shown her her destiny, and his friendship has allowed her to embrace it.

Montrealers will find an added attraction in **Destiny's Angel** because its setting is Westmount's botanical garden and the adjoining grounds — a cinematographer's delight. The contrast of the snow-covered grounds to the multicoloured floral interior of the greenhouse lends a jungle-like fertility to the latter, one which is capable of nourishing the story's depressed heroine.

Destiny's Angel is already in distribution in Toronto, New York, and London, England. It has been bought by the CBC, and the French version — which is being produced by Les Productions de la Chouette — has been sold to Radio-Canada. Despite this apparently fine reception of the film, there is one major reservation about it, concerning the producer's judgment of what constitutes "juvenile" cinematic fare.

In the good old days, right and wrong were so clearly perceived that the agonizing dilemmas of life, the inevitable paradoxes of human existence, the issues that were neither black nor white, were all decidedly absent from children's films. Instead, a God-like narrator or a saintly child 'preached' to the captive audience.

But in a year when eleven-year-olds are queued up to see **Kramer vs. Kramer**, **Destiny's Angel** is anachronistic.